



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Winter Maintenance Arrangements.
Date:	19 August 2011
Reporting Officer:	Suzanne Wylie, Director of Health and Environmental Services
Contact Officer:	Ciaran Quigley, Town Solicitor & Assistant Chief Executive Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>The Committee received a report on 10 December 2010 regarding issues around winter maintenance in prolonged spells of extreme weather. Members will recall the considerable difficulties experienced by the citizens of Belfast during December 2010 and January 2011. At that time Members tasked officers to enter into further discussions with the Department of Regional Development, Roads Service, on a number of points, namely;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The potential of identifying 'hot spot' sites across the city which need to be gritted to allow access to essential public services. .• The potential of the gritting of some side streets to enable essential operational services, such as refuse collection, to be maintained.• The potential of making grit/salt available to members of the public to allow local communities to help themselves via local action.• Reviewing the list of city centre streets within the current agreement to assess if they are sufficient in periods of prolonged severe weather.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The Director of Health and Environmental Services and the Head of Cleansing Services met with the DRD Roads Service to discuss the above issues. The Head of Cleansing Services also liaised internally with other relevant Council services regarding any issues pertinent to them in relation to winter maintenance. The outcomes of discussions with the DRD Roads Service in relation to the specific issues are outlined below. In considering these outcomes it should be noted that in all cases:-</p> <p>the DRD Roads Service will be the arbiter regarding the supply of salt and/or grit, taking into account (1) salt/grit stock levels, (2) severity and duration of the conditions, (3) the rate of replenishment of salt stock and (4) an agreed schedule of roads.</p>

<p>2.2</p> <p>2.3</p>	<p>Outcome of Discussions with the DRD Road Service</p> <p><i>The potential of identifying 'hot spot' sites across the city which need to be gritted to allow access to essential public services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DRD Roads Service will not undertake gritting of footways and their gritting programme will continue to concentrate on maintaining passage and safety on the major roads network. Council officers have, however, put forward a proposal for Council staff (Cleansing Services and Parks) to undertake gritting of footways in "hot spot" locations across the city in severe and prolonged weather conditions. In essence, these locations consist of the immediate footway areas close to doctors' surgeries, post offices, schools and fold type locations; in addition, medium sized shopping areas will also be included. The DRD Roads Service is satisfied with this approach, but this is dependant upon the submission of an agreed schedule, detailing all locations proposed for treatment. The DRD Roads Service will provide salt/grit for this purpose within the criteria outlined above. <p><i>The potential of the gritting of some side streets to enable essential operational services such as refuse collection to be maintained.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is unlikely that the DRD Roads Service will be in a position to grit side streets and they have some reservation over how effective this would be in that there needs to be a reasonable amount of traffic flow over a gritted surface to enable the grit to work in breaking up snow/ice deposits. Side streets may not provide the necessary volume of traffic to allow this to happen. There therefore needs to be a stepped approach to this proposal. • Firstly, there needs to be an operational test done on some side streets to see if gritting would be effective in facilitating access by Council vehicles later in the day. The DRD Roads Service have agreed to undertake a test, next winter, whereby it will grit up to 6 side streets, where there are access difficulties, for the Council to assess the effectiveness of this method. • If it proves successful it would be up to the Council to facilitate such gritting of some side streets to allow access for its vehicles. The Council would therefore have to buy suitable four wheel drive vehicles with gritting attachments, on trailers, and undertake the gritting itself. The DRD Roads Service will provide salt/grit for this purpose within the criteria outlined above. <p><i>The potential of making grit/salt available to members of the public to allow local communities to help themselves via local action (severe and prolonged conditions).</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DRD Roads Service will provide salt/grit for this purpose within the criteria outlined above. The Council would have to collect the salt/grit and arrange for its distribution to communities <p><i>Reviewing the list of city centre streets.</i></p> <p>As part of the wider exercise to grit footways the Central Cleansing Area snow/ice clearance plan has been expanded to take into account the "hot spot" areas as per the criteria identified previously.</p> <p>Members are reminded that the current agreement with the DRD Road Service can only be activated at the request of the Roads Service. During the discussions the DRD Road Service emphasised that they will only call upon the Council in cases of <u>prolonged and extreme</u> weather conditions.</p> <p>In addition to assisting in the clearance of some public footways, staff from the Parks Service would also undertake the clearance of priority pathways in some parks.</p>
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3	Resource Implications																								
3.1	<p>The financial, human resources and asset implications of expanding the operations in relation to public and parks footway clearance and salting/gritting to the categories of “hot spots“ as indicated in the report are summarised below.</p>																								
	<p><u>Assets</u></p>																								
3.2	<p>New equipment would be required to allow for this extensive additional commitment by the Council, to be carried out efficiently and effectively. Potential equipment requirements would be as follows;</p> <p>2 - 4 X 4 vehicles (proposal is to replace 2 existing Supervision vans with 4 X 4 vehicles) 5 - trailer mounted salt/grit spreaders 6 - petrol powered snow blowers/brushes 37 - manual grit spreaders 2 – additional snow brush and gritting attachments for mechanical sweepers 3 – small snow plough attachments (Parks) 3 - storage sheds (salt) (Parks)</p>																								
	<p><u>Financial</u> £000s</p>																								
3.3	<p><u>Cleansing Services</u></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 80%;">2 - 4 X 4 vehicles (cost difference only)</td> <td style="text-align: right;">17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 - trailer mounted salt/grit spreaders</td> <td style="text-align: right;">12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6 - petrol powered snow blowers/brushes</td> <td style="text-align: right;">27</td> </tr> <tr> <td>25 - manual grit spreaders</td> <td style="text-align: right;">10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 – additional snow brush and gritting attachments</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><u>30</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: right;">96</td> </tr> </table> <p><u>Parks Service</u></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 80%;">3 – small snow plough attachments</td> <td style="text-align: right;">8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 - trailer mounted salt/grit spreaders</td> <td style="text-align: right;">18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>12 - manual grit spreaders</td> <td style="text-align: right;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 - storage sheds (salt)</td> <td style="text-align: right;">10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>150 tonnes salt/grit</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><u>13</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: right;">54</td> </tr> </table>	2 - 4 X 4 vehicles (cost difference only)	17	2 - trailer mounted salt/grit spreaders	12	6 - petrol powered snow blowers/brushes	27	25 - manual grit spreaders	10	2 – additional snow brush and gritting attachments	<u>30</u>		96	3 – small snow plough attachments	8	3 - trailer mounted salt/grit spreaders	18	12 - manual grit spreaders	5	3 - storage sheds (salt)	10	150 tonnes salt/grit	<u>13</u>		54
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	<p><u>Staffing</u></p>																								
3.4	<p>Operationally, most gritting has to be done before the snow falls for it to be effective. Therefore, as with the DRD operation on the roads, gritting of footpaths etc may have to be done at night/early morning. This would have implications for additional payments for staff which at this time cannot be estimated as it depends on numbers of staff willing to undertake work at these hours and the number of times they are required to do it.</p>																								
3.5	<p>In addition, once agreed, the proposed expanded snow/ice clearance areas will have to be passed to the Council insurers to ascertain if any additional premium would be due. Cleansing Services are in the process of supplying maps to the Council’s insurers highlighting the additional footways which will be covered by the agreement to assist the insurer in estimating if any additional premium will be payable.</p>																								
3.6	<p>There are no allowances in the revenue or capital budgets for the additional resources referred to above. The Health and Environmental Services Committee, at its meeting on</p>																								

	the 4 August 2011, approved the allocation of £95K for the purchase of grit/salt and some equipment to be made available from unexpected additional income, which has been identified as forthcoming to the Department during the 2011/2012 financial year.
3.7	All other funds will have to be sourced. Given the procurement arrangements, some expenditure for vehicles may be incurred in 2012/13.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	None.

5	Recommendation and decision
5.1	The Committee is asked to accept the proposals to expand the operations in relation to footway clearance and salting/gritting to the categories of "hot spots" as indicated in the report.
5.2	Members are also asked to note the resource requirements and to give permission for the required resources to be sourced. Given this, Members are also asked to note the fact that finances for these additional resources are not contained within existing revenue or capital budgets and to authorise the Director of Finance and Resources to source monies from within existing Council finances.
5.3	The Committee is also asked to give permission for the existing Snow/Ice Clearance Agreement, between the Council and the DRD Roads Service, to be updated to include the above proposals.

Decision Tracking
<p>The Head of Cleansing Services, in conjunction with the Council's Legal Services Department will undertake to update the current Snow/Ice Clearance Agreement with the DRD Roads Service.</p> <p>The Head of Cleansing Services, in liaison with the Council's Insurance Officer, will pass details of the expanded snow/ice clearance areas to the Council insurers to ascertain if any additional premium would be due.</p> <p>The Head of Cleansing Services and the Assistant Director of Parks and Leisure will, in liaison with the Director of Finance and Resources, ensure that the appropriate equipment is sourced, funding permitting, and activate the operational plan when called upon to do so by the DRD Roads Service</p>

Key to abbreviations
None

Documents attached
Appendix 1 - Strategic Policy and Resource Committee minutes 10 th December 2010

Winter Maintenance Arrangements

- [Meeting of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, Friday, 10th December, 2010 10.00 am \(Item 7.\)](#)

Minutes:

The Chief Executive submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

"1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of recent correspondence from NILGA and the Roads Service in relation to ice and snow clearance.
- 1.2 To update the Committee on the current inter-agency arrangement in place between the Council and DRD Roads Service in relation to Winter Maintenance for the clearance of ice and snow from public footpaths and roadways in Belfast.
- 1.3 To take the Committee's views on entering into further discussions with DRD to develop such arrangements further.

2. Relevant Background Information

- 2.1 The Committee is reminded that the Council has no statutory function in relation to clearance of ice and snow from roads or footways.

Article 9 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 empowers the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to take such steps as it considers reasonable and practicable to prevent snow or ice interfering with the safe passage of persons using a road (including footways), and for that purpose may enter into an agency arrangement with any persons for the treating of roads affected by snow and ice.

- 2.2 Heavy snow and a prolonged period of bad weather in January 2008 prompted a meeting between the Council, BCCM and DRD. This resulted in proposals being taken to the Health and Environmental Services Committee for the Council to enter into an arrangement with DRD to assist in certain circumstances with the clearance of snow and ice from footpaths and roadways in the city centre. The reason why this was limited to the City Centre was as a result of limited resource in terms of staff and equipment to undertake such work in a wider area.

On 6 February 2008 the Health and Environmental Services Committee noted, that as a matter of civic leadership, the Council should seek to ensure that the city centre footways remained accessible during times of severe winter weather. As such, the Committee approved the purchase of equipment to be used for the clearance of snow and ice and recommended that a suitable form of agreement with DRD be drawn up by then Director of Legal Services.

3. Key Issues

Current Position

- 3.1 Under sections 104 and 105 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972, the Council is empowered to exercise functions on behalf of, and to enter into arrangements with other Statutory Agencies (including government departments) for the supply of services. The Council entered into an agreement with DRD on 27 November 2008 whereby, during extreme conditions following heavy snow falls or prolonged freezing, the Council will assist the Department with ice and snow removal from footways and pedestrian areas and with the treatment of such areas affected by snow or ice by the provision of labour, material and vehicles. This agreement is renewable annually. The arrangement only extends to certain specified streets within the city centre area which are considered to be the main pedestrian thoroughfares and approaches to the city centre.
- 3.2 Under this agreement, a request for assistance is made to the Council by DRD, and works will only be carried out when it is practicable for the Council to do so and when resources are available (up to 20 staff members from Dunbar Depot). An annual service fee, calculated in accordance with the Service Fee Scale, is currently payable to the Council by DRD. This amounts to about £5,000 annually.
- 3.3 The Committee is also reminded that the Council's Cleansing Department has expended £30,000 to purchase snow removal and gritting attachments for a number of the Councils mechanical sweepers. Accordingly, under Article 19 of the local Government Northern

Ireland Order 2005, the Director of Legal Services approached the Department of the Environment (DOE) regarding this expenditure in order to obtain sanction and that sanction was duly granted.

- 3.4 The Council's insurers were provided with a copy of the agreement with DRD along with copies of the Health and Safety risk assessments which had been carried out, and then confirmed that they were satisfied that work carried out by the Council under this agreement would not result in an increase to the Council's premium for public liability insurance.
- 3.5 There has been no increase to the Council's insurance premium as a result of entering into the agreement with DRD. However any action taken by the Council in relation to the gritting of pavements will expose the Council to the risk of litigation from members of the public. It is the opinion of the Town Solicitor that this risk is relatively low, and in any event would be outweighed by the benefit offered to the general public. Legal Services have been informed by DRD Claims Department that over the last 3 years there have been 21 claims due to slipping on ice all of which were successfully defended.
- 3.6 NILGA held a meeting with the DRD Minister on Monday 6th December and the press release following that meeting stated that an agreement had been reached in terms of indemnification of Councils and third parties (contractors) to carry out such work in city and town centres. Belfast City Council already had such an agreement. NILGA and the Roads Service have now written to Councils following their meeting and copies of both letters have been circulated.
4. Proposals for further discussions
 - 4.1 During the current prolonged spell of cold weather, it has become evident that there is a need for public service agencies to provide more support to communities. It would be impractical to grit and salt all footpaths and side streets on a regular basis. However it is proposed that the Council should enter into urgent negotiations with DRD and the Road Service to assess the possibility of:
 - 4.2 Exploring with the DRD and Roads Service the potential of identifying 'hot spot' sites across the city which need to be gritted to allow access to essential public services. The DRD have indicated that resources do not permit regular gritting of side streets and footways but in the same way as agencies have worked together to identify sites particularly 'at risk' of flooding, it is suggested that a similar exercise should now be conducted in relation to key sites rendered inaccessible by snow and ice. Such a conversation could be enabled through the Council's emergency co-ordination arrangements.
 - 4.3 Exploring with the DRD the potential of the gritting of some side streets to enable essential operational services such as refuse collection to be maintained.
 - 4.4 Exploring with the DRD the potential of making grit/salt available to members of the public to allow local communities to help themselves via local action. Roads Service have indicated that resource availability and cost issues would need to be overcome to enable this to happen but it would be worthwhile to examine whether the Council could facilitate such a process using Council sites where resources permitted.
 - 4.5 Reviewing the list of city centre streets within the current agreement to assess if they are sufficient in periods of prolonged severe weather.
 - 4.6 Clearly there will be considerable logistical issues which would need to be worked through. However it is anticipated that there will be further extreme weather conditions this winter and hence these discussions should happen as soon as possible.
- 5 Resource Implications

Financial

The Council has expended £30,000 for the purchase of snow removal attachments for some of its existing mechanical road sweepers. An annual service fee, calculated in accordance with the Service Fee Scale, is currently payable to the Council by DRD. This amounts to about £5,000 annually.

Human Resources

Council staff are only currently deployed for the removal of snow and ice in circumstances where normal operations are rendered impracticable.

Any additional agreements for support to DRD would have staffing implications.

Asset and other implications

Depending on the agreements reached it is likely that further equipment and, potentially, vehicles will need to be purchased.

6. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

1. **Note the existing arrangements in place with DRD**
2. **Agree that officers should enter into urgent discussions with DRD Roads Service and other agencies to develop the partnership approach further, within existing resource constraints.**

7. Decision Tracking

A further report will be brought back to the Committee

8. Key to Abbreviations

**DRD – Department for Regional Development.
DOE – Department of the Environment
BCCM – Belfast City Centre Management Company Limited.”**

The Committee adopted the recommendations.