
Report To:	Environment and Regeneration Committee	Date:	16 January 2025
Report By:	Head of Physical Assets	Report No:	E+R/25/01/06/EM
Contact Officer:	Eddie Montgomery	Contact No:	01475 712472
Subject:	Winter Maintenance Service		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with information on the current working arrangements for the planning, operation and delivery of the annual Winter Maintenance Service.

1.3 The report provides the background on how the service has been delivered over time and various internal and external factors that contribute to the current budget pressures.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee
- notes the information presented within this report which highlights the budget allocations, resources and statutory responsibilities related to the Winter Maintenance Service and
 - recognises that the existing budget pressures will need to be addressed as part of the 2026/27 budget setting process.

Eddie Montgomery
Head of Physical Assets

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council's current Delivering Differently Change Programme includes an action under Environment & Regeneration to review the existing winter maintenance practices, the cost of which has exceeded the available budget over the last 7 years resulting in a running down of the smoothing earmarked reserve which had been available initially through regular underspends on the core budget and thereafter linked to use as a smoothing reserve to allow the impact of a number of revenue savings to be managed over time.

Council Policy and Relevant Legislation

- 3.2 From October to April each year the Roads Service and the Environmental Service implement the Winter Maintenance Policy (<https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/assets/attach/15650/Winter-Maintenance-Policy-Oct-2024.pdf>). The policy is designed to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to allow safe movement of vehicle and pedestrian traffic within Inverclyde during winter weather conditions. Roads Service staff receive specialist weather forecasts 3 times a day during the winter months including regular flash updates monitoring changing conditions. This forecast system allows the Winter Controllers to allocate appropriate resources, 24hrs a day. The Council has invested considerably in appropriate equipment, infrastructure and staff training to ensure the best possible Winter Service throughout the Inverclyde area and publishes the Winter Maintenance Documents each year which detail the current Policy, Procedures and Resources for the coming winter months.
- 3.3 Inverclyde Councils Roads Service provision includes statutory responsibilities under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1994 and other primary legislation to manage, operate, maintain, and improve the roads infrastructure. The Council has a statutory obligation, under Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, to take such steps as it considers reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads which by definition includes carriageways, footways, footpaths, etc.

It is therefore the aim of Inverclyde Council to:

- provide a standard of service on public roads, (in compliance with the relevant Policies of the Council's Local Transport Strategy) which will permit safe movement of vehicular, cyclist and pedestrian traffic appropriate to the prevailing weather conditions.
 - establish a pattern of working which will keep delays, diversions or road closures to a minimum during adverse weather conditions.
 - conduct operations having regard to the requirements of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, and associated Health, Safety & Welfare legislation.
- 3.4 The Service Manager (Roads) is responsible for specifying the level of winter maintenance service required for carriageways. The Team Leader (Network, Projects & Lighting) is responsible for implementing this service through the Service's Operations Unit for carriageways. The Service Manager (Grounds & Waste) is responsible for specifying the level of winter maintenance service required for footways, footpaths etc., and for implementing this service through the Grounds Service. Inverclyde Council has defined the priorities for carriageway and footway/footpath/cycleway treatment as outlined below.

Prioritisation – Carriageways

- 3.5 Fixed gritting routes are pre-planned to ensure that during "routine" winter conditions, priorities (i) to (iii) plus some priority (iv) to (vi) will be treated. However, under more extreme conditions (heavy snow falls or freeze/rain/freeze cycles) gritters will concentrate on the higher priority roads until attention can be safely transferred to other roads. The lowest categories mainly (vi) and (vii) will only be treated using available gritters if conditions persist and all other routes are clear. This

will be determined by the Head of Physical Assets. During such conditions it is unlikely that all lower category roads (especially cul-de-sacs) will be treated within 48 hours:

- (i) Routes A761 and A770;
- (ii) Routes B786, B788, B7054;
- (iii) Access routes to hospitals, ambulance depots, main police stations, fire stations, main bus routes and schools;
- (iv) Local concentrations of employment e.g. industrial estates;
- (v) Steep roads not included in (1) to (4) above;
- (vi) Other public roads not included in (1) to (5) above;
- (vii) Proposed public roads;
- (viii) Private roads only at express instruction of the Head of Physical Assets.

We routinely treat 49% of the road network (routes 1 to 8). This rises to 66% during persistent and severe conditions (Routes 1 to 8 and 10 to 16).

Prioritisation – Footways

3.6 Footways will only be treated when the Service Manager (Grounds & Waste) considers this to be absolutely necessary (e.g. heavy snowfall or extensive icing). Treatment will generally only occur during normal working hours, the following general priorities will apply:

- (i) Areas of high pedestrian concentration including accesses to schools;
- (ii) Steep routes to urban shopping centres and precincts;
- (iii) Steep hills in housing areas and footways in the vicinity of homes for the elderly.

Gritting Routes

3.7 Routes have been organised as outlined below:

- 4 Primary Carriageway Routes;
- 4 Secondary Carriageway Routes;
- 1 Precautionary Route;
- 7 Tertiary Routes;
- 4 Snow Ploughing Routes;
- Priority Footway Routes

3.8 Treatments are normally planned over a 12-hour period to allow for further weather updates. On receipt of a forecast from the Weather Forecaster warning of frost, freezing or snow conditions, the Winter Controller shall give consideration to precautionary salting of such roads as is considered necessary. Treatments are based on the weather forecast however, if frost or freezing conditions are forecast at high confidence the treatment would normally include pre gritting of the 4 Primary and the 4 Secondary routes followed by further morning treatment. Treatments may take around 3-4 hours depending on traffic and weather conditions. Extended treatments will be required during snow conditions or freezing rain. Gritting route information is included as Appendix 1 (with embedded links).

Roads Service Winter Procedures & Resourcing

Winter Controllers

- 3.9 The Winter Controllers, receive the daily weather forecasts provided by the Weather Forecaster at 0600, 1200, and at 1800 hours (and ad-hoc updates out with those times), throughout the working week, at weekends and on public holidays from October to May. Thereafter, it is the responsibility of the Winter Controller to take action which may include instructing the Winter Supervisor to mobilise the standby operatives to undertake salting/snow clearing. From the weather forecast provided the Winter Controller will then decide on the level of treatment/action required to undertake salting/snow clearing on the roads network.

Winter Resource Stand-by Arrangements

- 3.10 From October to March standby arrangements are put in place to ensure the winter service, these include:
- Winter Controllers - 1 x 24 hours a day/full week;
 - Winter Supervisors - 2 x 12 hours per day/full week;
 - HGV Drivers - 8 x 12 hours per day/full week;
 - Non-HGV standby - 2 x 24 hours a day/full week.

Basic weekly standby requirements are:

- 1 Winter Controller¹.
- 2 Supervisors²;
- 8 HGV Drivers³ (16 over 2 weeks);
- 2 Non-HGV Drivers/Operatives⁴ (4 over 2 weeks).

HGV Drivers

- 3.11 Drivers normally work week on and week off to manage suitable rest provision. HGV drivers require:
- 9 hours rest between shifts;
 - 10 hours maximum driving hours per shift with an exemption in extreme unplanned weather events;
 - 11 hours on duty, with additional breaks;
 - Suitable rest periods.

- 3.12 The Roads Operations Unit currently have 17 operatives, 2 of these HGV driver roadworker posts have recently progressed through recruitment. Prior years savings exercises have reduced the core roads operational staff from 21 in 2018/19 to 17 in 2022/23.

- 3.13 Agency HGV drivers have been utilised to supplement Winter Operations since circa 2018/19 to assist in the provision of essential service cover along with the available Grounds/Waste Service drivers as noted above. It should be noted that Agency HGV drivers are required to operate within the European driving rules and are not permitted to drive out with the Services required operational hours and for this reason there is a requirement to employ agency operatives on a full-time basis to be able to guarantee driver out-of-hours cover and availability. The cost of this

¹ Currently 5nr trained Controllers – Team Leader (x2) / Supervisory Officers (x3)

² Currently 9nr trained Supervisors – Roads Supervisor (x1) / Technicians (x4) / Inspectors (x4)

³ Requirement for 20nr staff to cover HGV/Non-HGV Winter Rota – Core Roads Operation Unit staffing is 17.

⁴ See 3 above.

provision has ranged from £25,000 to almost £100,000 in previous years – this activity has been stopped.

- 3.14 In the weeks ahead of the commencement of winter operations for 2024/25 there were 6 operatives who had not engaged in the rota preparation. With support from Human Resources, letters were issued to those staff to confirm the contractual requirement to participate and advising that any application to be excluded would require to be considered through the Council's Flexible Working Policy.

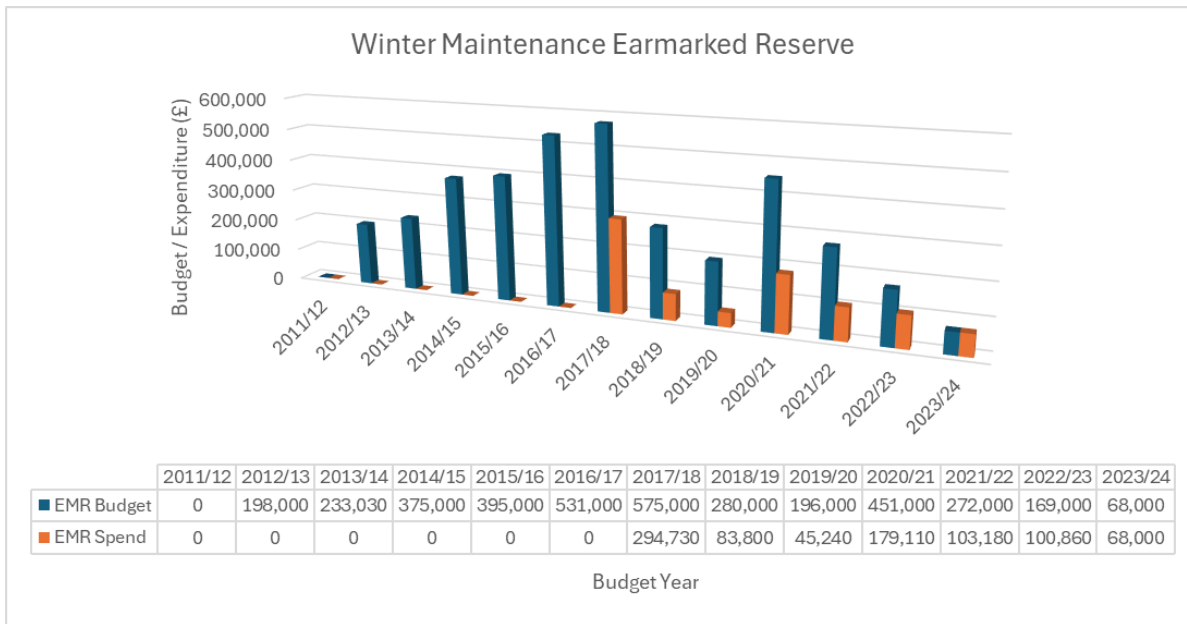
Second Operatives (Spotters)

- 3.15 In addition to the resource requirements detailed in 3.10 above, second operatives are deployed in poor snow or blizzard conditions which normally only happen on a few occasions during winter operations. These operatives are required to:

- Assist the driver to safely mount and dismount the snow plough to the vehicle;
- Assist the driver in difficult or extreme conditions to identify obstructions including abandoned vehicles, pedestrians and the road edge in remote locations;
- Assist the driver as required in alerting emergency services if the vehicle veers off road or is involved in an accident during operations in extreme conditions as other services may not be able to reach the location;
- Provide banksman assistance to the driver to manoeuvre or reverse the vehicle safely in remote locations or in constrained roads which may also be obstructed by abandoned vehicles or other obstacles;
- Assist the driver where "spot gritting" is manually required to free the gritting vehicle or other trapped vehicles on route.

Winter Revenue Budget and Related Pressures

- 3.16 All out of hour's costs and costs for winter treatment are funded from the core annual winter maintenance revenue budget. Since 2012/13 there has been an earmarked reserve budget available to act as a contingency and this has also been used as a smoothing reserve to manage the impact of a number of savings applied to the core revenue budget. Information available on core budgets indicates that there were annual underspends from 2012/13 to 2016/17 against the core winter revenue budget with the surplus (or a proportion thereof) set aside each year in an earmarked reserve. The graph below shows the available budget since its creation in 2012/13 and the expenditure to date.



The budget was 'topped-up' in 2020/21 via a further allocation of £300K from *. Due to ongoing prolonged weather conditions in past years and the significant impact of the 'Beast from the East' in February-March 2018, the earmarked reserve allocated to winter maintenance was exhausted in 2023/24.

3.17 The service has chosen to engage agency drivers in prior years (see summary table below) and as outlined 3.13 above, the Service is not able to engage out-of-hours only agency HGV drivers as there is a need to restrict their driving activities/duties during the day to provide the required unconfirmed out-of-hours cover. As such the cost of agency drivers includes employing them during the day to guarantee HGV driver out-of-hours cover with duties during normal daily working hours covered from either revenue or RAMP/capital budgets (e.g. pothole patching, flooding or other work).

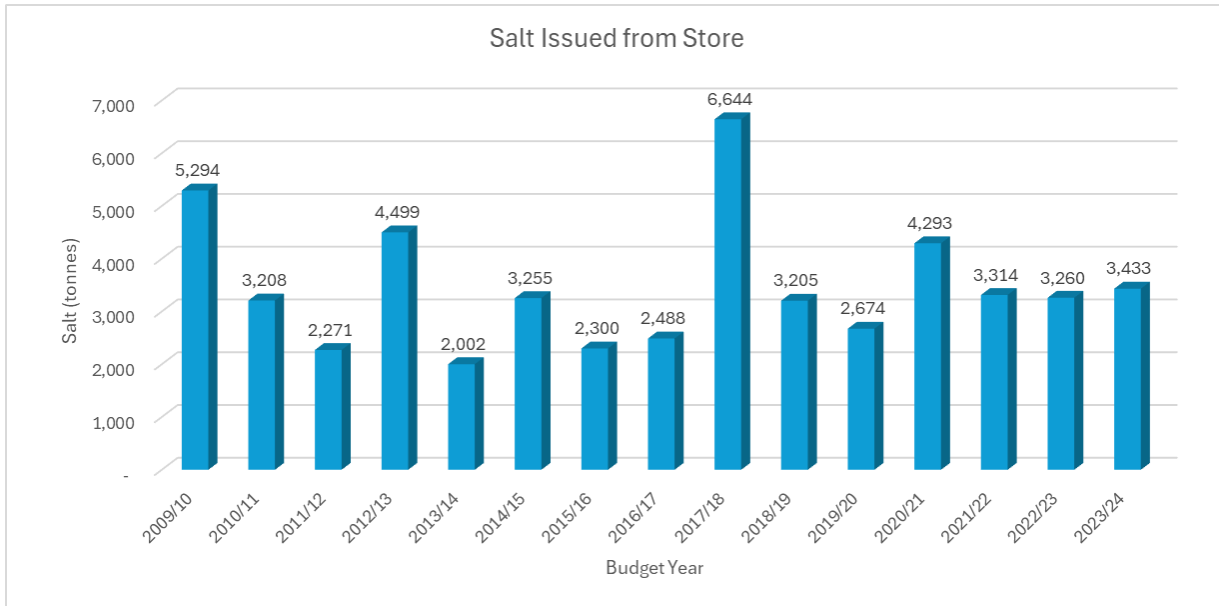
BUDGET YEAR	ROADS OPS	HGV				NON HGV			TOTAL	OVERALL SHORTFALL
		ROADS	GROUNDS	AGENCY	TOTAL	HGV SHORTFALL	NON HGV	NON HGV SHORTFALL		
REQUIRED FOR ROTA		16				4			20	
2018/19	21	12	2	2	16	0	6	-	22	-
2019/20	19	10	2	2	14	2	6	-	20	-
2020/21	19	9	0	5	14	2	6	-	20	-
2021/22	19	9	0	5	14	2	6	-	20	-
2022/23	17	9	3	2	14	2	4	-	18	2
2023/24	17	10	2	2	14	2	3	1	17	3
2024/25	17	12	3	0	15	1	2	2	17	3

* Not all Roads Operatives held HGV licence and were used as Non-HGV.

* Recent years have had to utilise some operatives to cover HGV and non-HGV i.e. on both

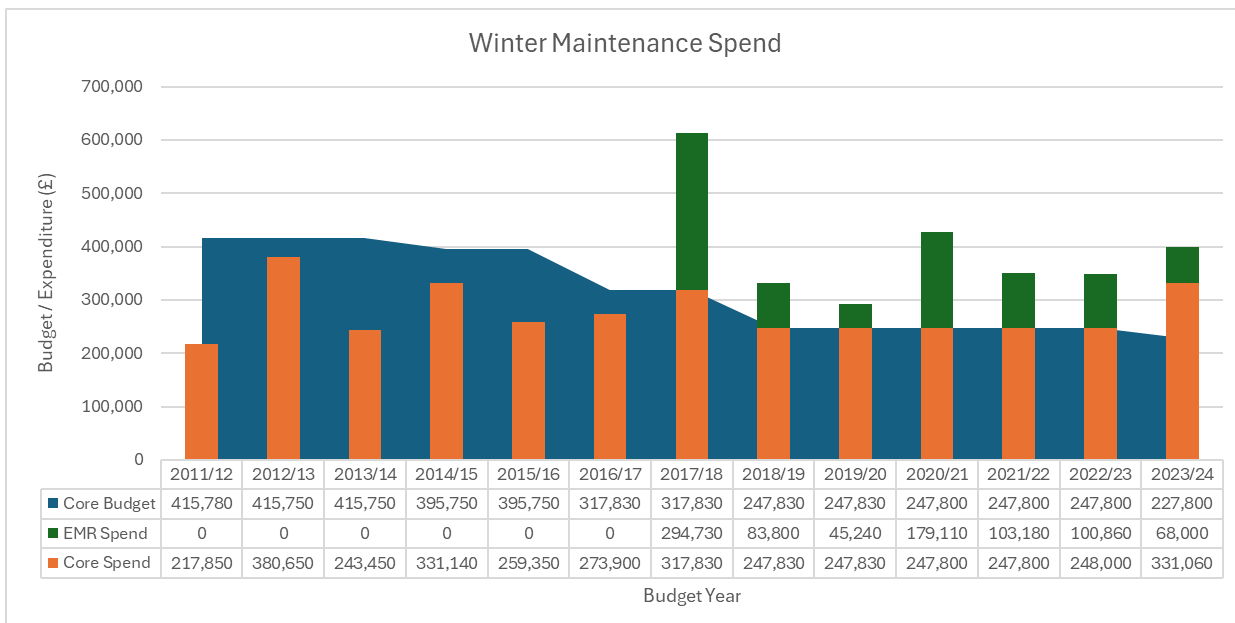
It should also be noted that it has been possible to partially offset external driver costs with internal vacancies over the last few years and there were also issues with long term absence affecting participation rates. There are currently no vacancies as outlined in 3.12 above with all Roads Operatives HGV trained. Participation rates and pressures are now linked to flexible working requests as outlined in 3.14.

3.18 Salt for Winter Road Maintenance (excludes sand and winter wizard) - the graph below shows the annual salt usage from 2009/10 to 2023/24.



The average annual usage is 3,476t (3,250t when excluding 2017/18 'Beast from the East' year). The historical data available on price per tonne is limited however, from 2019/20 to 2021/22 the pricing remained static at £33.10/t, increased to £42.55/t in 2022/23 and with the most recent price in 2023/24 now £47.53/t representing a 43.60% increase in the core material supply in the last 2 years. The salt is procured through the available Scotland Excel framework. (<https://home.scotland-excel.org.uk/our-contracts/contract-directory/salt-for-winter-roads-maintenance/>). The core revenue budget covers the costs of the material purchase, and this budget has not been the subject of any allowances for inflationary pressures. It is also clear from the above that the Winter Maintenance budget will continue to be at risk of overspend related to the severity of the winter and the amount of salt required in any given year.

3.19 The further graph below shows core annual budget, annual core expenditure and annual earmarked reserve expenditure since 2012/13 which outlines the position covered in 3.16 above.



The average annual expenditure over the period above is £335K (£313K when excluding 2017/18 'Beast from the East' year). It should be noted however that the average expenditure since 2018/19 is £358K which reflects the impact of wage rises and inflation in more recent years affecting material costs. The information above indicates that the core budget of £228K is not sufficient to meet the cost of the Winter Maintenance Service.

4.0 PROPOSALS

4.1 The Committee is requested to note the following relevant to the review of the Winter Maintenance Service:

- A further £300K was currently (Period 7), noted as being made available from the Budget Delivery Reserve to address the current zero balance of the Winter Maintenance Earmarked Reserve.
- The current winter rota is operational.
- The Physical Assets Service Plan includes an operational / continuity risk related to Winter Operations and the need to identify additional driver training opportunities to provide resilience and build on the work already undertaken with the Grounds Service.
- There is a need to work in conjunction with Human Resources to manage the winter rota participation levels and to understand the position in respect of staff whose circumstances may be deemed more permanent and not temporary affecting their ability to meet the core requirements of the post.
- There is no scope to reduce the cost of the Winter Maintenance Service without also considering a review of the existing Policy and the currently identified gritting routes. At present the Winter Maintenance Service covers circa 66% of the Council's adopted road network. The impact of labour and material cost inflation over time continues to put pressure on budgets which are not able to be increased to reflect same. The impact of adoption of new assets over time is also relevant with the most recent draft Roads Asset Management Strategy noting that the carriageway asset had increased by 6.4km in the last 3 years.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal/Risk	X	
Human Resources	X	
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing		X
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (if Applicable)	Other Comments

It is recognised that the existing budget pressures will need to be addressed as part of the 2026/27 budget setting process.

5.3 Legal/Risk

The Council has a statutory obligation, under Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, to take such steps as it considers reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads which by definition includes carriageways, footways, footpaths, etc.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no employee implications.

5.5 Strategic

N/A

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required.
X	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Finance Service has been consulted.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 N/A