

**REPORT TO:** Environment and Urban Renewal  
Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 16 June 2010

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Environment and  
Economy

**SUBJECT:** Winter Maintenance Service Provision of  
Grit Bins and Footpath Gritting

**WARDS:** Boroughwide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To brief Members on Halton's current practice relating to the provision of grit storage bins and manual gritting of footpaths, and to propose improvements for the delivery of the service in the future.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- (1) Requests for the provision of grit bins at new locations on the highway network, will be evaluated using the established risk assessment criteria for gritting routes, as described in this report**
- (2) On request, and subject to the availability of resources to respond, grit bins and salt be procured and subsequently maintained by the Council on behalf of Locality Area Forums, Housing Associations and other community organisations at the expense of the applicant. These bins will not be located on the highway network; and**
- (3) Before the start of the next winter maintenance season, information and guidance on the locations of grit bins and the restrictions on the use of salt for roads and pavements only, be publicised**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **3.1 Background**

Halton's Winter Maintenance Plan includes a list of grit bins that are currently maintained on the highway network (see Appendix 1). The policy for provision of grit bins has developed from established practice over a number of years. The number of bins deployed in Halton has increased year on year, to the point where maintaining and refilling grit bins during periods of severe weather, now places significant demands on resources.

Grit bins are generally viewed as a valuable winter service resource, providing the community with a supply of salt for local use, in areas that are not currently treated on mechanical salting routes, for example on residential side roads, cul-de-sacs and hard to reach areas. Grit bins tend to be used by the public **only** in periods of severe weather, during prolonged icy conditions or when there has been snowfall. Consequently, following several years of relatively little use, the demand for salt from grit bins from the public has been far greater over the last two winters, than ever before. This demand has naturally coincided with numerous other pressures on winter maintenance resources. During last winter in particular, the high demand for salt resulted in national shortages which affected most Councils' ability to provide a full, normal winter service through the severe weather period in January.

### **3.2 Grit storage bins – Current Situation**

- The Council currently maintains grit storage bins at 65 sites on the highway network. By applying a risk-based approach to grit bin provision (as detailed below), the majority of bins are located in Runcorn and in the Halton Castle and Norton wards in particular, due to the road gradients and alignments. The salt is provided primarily for use on roads which do not form part of the routes treated by the gritters, but it may also of course be used on footpaths to improve conditions for pedestrians.
- There are a further 37 grit bins located at schools. The majority of these were paid for using the Primary Care Trust (PCT) five year funding allocation and these are aimed specifically at reducing ice-related accidents involving the young. School managers use the salt to treat areas within school premises only.
- There are approximately 30 grit bins at Halton Council buildings and community establishments (markets, cemeteries, day-care centres etc.) These are provided and funded via Halton's Property Services Division and maintained by the Highway Maintenance Division on request / demand, as resources permit.
- Approximately 40 bins are provided at commercial / industrial estates through funding arrangements with the Business Development team.

The suitability of locations for bins on the highway network is determined by applying a risk assessment process. This forms part of the overall risk assessment for gritting routes, and takes account of road hierarchy, traffic use, steep inclines, sharp bends, local hazards and where localised problems with snow and ice are known to occur. Bins are generally not provided for treatment of roads that are already on the primary gritting route, or in close proximity to an existing grit bin.

Additionally, the positioning of bins must take into account the safety, ease and efficiency of maintaining and refilling them from a vehicle. There must be sufficient space within the footway or verge to site the bin without obstructing pedestrians or visibility for traffic. To prevent vandalism or theft, bins often need to be secured or sunk into the ground, and whilst bins must be convenient and accessible to users, their position must also take into account any potential nuisance to residents in adjacent properties. Even if a proposed location for a bin meets the assessment criteria, it can often be difficult to find a suitable position to site it. Once positioned, grit bins are left out throughout the year. They are checked for damage, repaired or replaced as necessary and restocked with salt at the start of each winter maintenance season.

Whilst the cost of purchasing and charging it with salt is small (around £120 for a 200 litre bin holding around ¼ tonne of salt), the real cost is in deploying the bin and subsequently maintaining and resupplying salt to keep it in operation. This is a very labour intensive operation which last year cost around £18,700. A further £6,300 was charged to HBC Property Services for the maintenance of their stock of grit bins.

### **3.3 Footpath Gritting**

Previous reports to the Board have described the extent of gritting of pedestrian routes. In brief this comprises:

- Routine precautionary gritting of most footbridges, their approaches and connecting strategic footpaths. This comprises approximately 12,000 sq.m of pathways at 23 separate locations.
- Footway treatment around schools during severe weather conditions. Approximately 24,000 sq m of footpaths at 44 separate locations.
- Gritting and snow / ice clearance of major pedestrian routes in Widnes and Runcorn town centres and local centres during severe weather conditions
- Gritting at health centres, doctor's surgeries, nursing and elderly persons establishments as resources permit.

Footpath gritting is carried out manually, by hand or using propelled salt spreaders. It is a very labour-intensive operation and places a high demand on resources. The precautionary gritting of footbridges takes a team of four men around four hours to complete. Due to the extent of the treatment areas around schools and the dispersal of these sites around the Borough, gritting around schools is more cost-effective during the working day, when the workforce can be deployed more efficiently. Of course both of these operations impact on the contractor's ability to resource the routine, day to day highway repair & maintenance operations during the winter season.

The clearance of snow and ice, and gritting at health centres etc. usually involve deployment of the Council's Streetscene workforce, but again only

during periods of severe weather, when the workforce can be diverted from other routine duties.

The extent of footpath gritting described above represents a tiny fraction of the estimated 1200 km of footways and footpaths across Halton. It is a measured response, which addresses the highest risk / highest use routes and is in accordance with the recommendations of the Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance and Management, taking into account the level of resources available. The cost of gritting footbridges and approach footpaths alone last year cost £11,250 (40 treatments). If this cost was extrapolated to the whole adopted footway / footpath network, each treatment would cost around £60,000 per occasion. Additionally, the level of resource required to undertake this work makes it impractical.

### **3.4 Grit Bin Issues**

Policy on the provision of grit bins varies across highway authorities, including different approaches by our Merseyside neighbours. However, the majority of highway authorities do provide bins, and use similar criteria as Halton to assess locations and consider whether the placement of a bin is justified. Of course the number of bins deployed by councils also varies depending upon the size of the authority and the geography / topography of the area.

During the course of the last two winters, in common with many other highway authorities, we experienced problems of misuse of the salt provided in grit bins, either through wastage (e.g. by inefficient spreading) and through use on private property (e.g. driveways etc.). The suspected theft of salt and of bins themselves was also a problem at some locations. The problem of misuse is difficult to control. As bins are provided for general use by the community, it is impractical to control who can access the salt supply and where it is used. Generally however, the majority of the salt used for 'self help' is sensible and entirely acceptable. On balance, it is considered that the advantages of having salt available for use by the community tend to outweigh these disadvantages.

As described in the report to the Board in March, the national salt shortages last winter resulted in the control of supplies through the 'Salt Cell'. The Government required Councils to reduce salt usage by up to 50% in order to preserve stocks for treatment of primary routes. As a result, grit bins in Halton were not refilled with salt during the worst of the severe weather. Only when salt stocks were restored to adequate levels, and resources permitted, were grit bins refilled.

Following the most severe winter for thirty years, an independent panel is conducting a review of English Authorities' winter resilience on behalf of DfT. A 'phase one' report aimed at improving resilience in preparation for next winter is due to be published in July. A 'phase two' report in Autumn, will cover wider issues including communications, public attitudes and their expectations from winter services - and whether these can be met. The

review is expected to provide guidance on the control of use and preservation of salt stocks.

After the last two winters, public expectations seem to be that winter services must be improved for the coming season. However, the Chair of 'Salt Cell' has already indicated that Highway Authorities should seriously consider the impacts of any increase in their treatment regimes, including the provision of 'self help' and extending footpath gritting, on the demand for salt.

### **3.5 Proposals**

During the severe winter weather period, the Council received numerous requests for additional grit bins. Due to the constraints on the availability and use of de-icing salt (as detailed in the report to the Board in March, Minute URB58 refers), the pressures on resources and the winter maintenance budget, these requests were not actioned at the time. Since the end of winter, requests have been also been received from at least one Housing Association and from local ward councillors, through the Area Forums.

There is no statutory Duty or requirement on the Council to provide grit bins. However, as stated in 3.1 above, they are viewed as a valuable winter resource and help the community to deal locally with snow and ice. In providing the facility however, the Councils must be mindful of the level of service that can be provided and maintained throughout the winter season and within existing budget and available resources. It must be emphasised that the refilling of bins can be dependent on a number of factors including the severity of the weather itself (particularly heavy snowfall can prevent vehicular access to grit bins), the resources the Council will have at its disposal and directions from the national 'Salt Cell' which can dictate the extent to which we are permitted to use what grit may be available.

The following proposals are recommended as being a reasonable and practicable approach, which should improve the current level of service, without exposing the Council to significant revenue liability and additional funding demands.

- 1) Grit bins will continue to be maintained at existing locations on the adopted highway network. If a bin becomes damaged beyond repair, its location will be reviewed and risk assessed against the established criteria to ensure that its deployment is still appropriate.
- 2) Grit bins will be provided and maintained at new locations on the adopted highway network, which meet the assessment criteria described in paragraph 3.2. Highway grit bins will be yellow in colour and stamped with an identifying mark to enable recognition in case of theft.

- 3) Halton's Bridge and Highway Maintenance Division will procure grit bins and salt on behalf of Locality Area Forums, Housing Associations, PCT owned establishments, sheltered housing developments, schools and colleges etc. at the expense of the applicant. These bins will not be situated at locations within the adopted highway and will be marked or coloured to distinguish them from the Highway stock of bins. This avoids potential liability / litigation issues. They will be filled with grit / salt at the start of each winter maintenance season at the expense of the owner / provider. Any restocking of grit / salt will be carried out, again at the applicant's expense, subject to current and forecast weather conditions and the availability of resources, including labour, plant, grit / salt material.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Legislation makes it a duty to provide a properly planned and resourced winter service. The Winter Maintenance Plan is reviewed and revised annually to ensure local, regional and national codes of practice, guidance and recommendations are considered and incorporated as required. The plan utilizes a risk based assessment process, and includes for the provision of grit bins and treatment of pedestrian routes and is therefore considered to comply with the guidance.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

##### **5.5 Sustainability**

In addition to the routine precautionary salting regime, the continued provision and maintenance of grit bins, at locations which meet the assessment criteria, makes an important contribution to maintaining access to key services during period of severe weather.

##### **5.6 Legal Implications**

The development and application of the Winter Maintenance Plan, including the risk based approach to the provision of grit bins and footpath gritting ensures that Halton continues to meet its legal obligations under the Highways Act.

##### **5.7 Social Inclusion**

Winter Maintenance operations affect all service users. Gritting during periods of severe weather is targeted to ensure as far as practicable access to schools, public buildings and health establishments are prioritised. The proposed policy to procure grit bins and salt on behalf of other community organizations will assist this aim.

##### **5.8 Crime and Disorder**

Instances of alleged theft of salt from grit bins and of the salt itself was reported last year. As indicated in the report, it is difficult to control who accesses the salt and where it is used. Grit bins provided in the

future will be marked to identify those which are Council property to aid recovery in case of theft.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

There are no specific issues applicable to children and young people, however, the PCT funding for additional footpath gritting specifically targets schools and walking to school.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

Grit bins have already been provided to certain business districts via requests from the Council's Business Development team, as an additional facility to supplement mechanical gritting of main employment areas.

### **6.3 A Safer Halton**

The action by the PCT in supporting gritting operations illustrates the considerable risk to the public from icy surfaces. Whilst the Council cannot undertake to protect all road users from risk the procedures and measures in place demonstrate how careful planning can minimize risk.

### **6.4 Halton's Urban Renewal**

There are no specific implications for Urban Renewal, however by maintaining a safe and accessible highway network, the winter service makes an important contribution to business continuity management for the whole of Halton's business community.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The key risks associated with the proposed action are:

- 1) More requests for grit bins are received than can be afforded and maintained within budgets.
- 2) More grit bins are deployed than can be reasonably and practicably maintained during a severe winter.

These risks are controlled by requiring all requests to be subject to the risk based assessment process to determine whether inclusion in the Winter Maintenance Plan is warranted. This will control the deployment of highway grit bins to locations which meet the assessment criteria. Bins may still be provided to other community organisations and agencies to be sited on private land or premises at the owner's cost.

- 3) Theft of salt and grit bins continues to present a problem to maintaining salt stocks in grit bins for the use of the community.

This risk is difficult to control given the need for accessibility to the salt. However, all new grit bins will have an ownership mark and the feasibility of marking existing bins will be explored. Pre-winter season

publicity will raise awareness of the legitimate use of salt / grit bins amongst the general public.

5) The maintenance and restocking of salt in grit bins on behalf of other organisations and agencies is beyond the level of resources available.

This risk will be controlled by ensuring these bins are not located within the highway and are coloured or marked differently. It will be made clear to those organisations that maintenance and restocking will only take place subject to the availability of resources and that highway needs will take precedence in all cases.

7.2 The key opportunities associated with the proposed action are:

1) Grit bins will be deployed at locations on the highway, which meet the assessment criteria.

2) Additional grit bins may be provided at locations on behalf of other organisations and agencies, and maintained by HBC subject to resources being available, at the owner's expense.

7.3 The proposals do not require a full risk assessment.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

There are no Equality and Diversity Issues in relation to this report.

## **9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Winter Maintenance Plan	HT&L Department, Rutland House, Runcorn	D. Cunliffe



**REPORT TO ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL POLICY AND  
PERFORMANCE BOARD  
16 JUNE 2010**

**LIST OF GRIT BINS AND LOCATIONS**

**RUNCORN**

- 1 *Cornwall Close*. 30m In From Castlefields Av. South
- 2 *Princes Close*. 30m In From Castlefields Av. South
- 3 *Caernarvon Close*. 30m In From Castlefields Av. South
- 4 *Chester Close*. 30m in From Castlefields Av. South
- 5 *The Clough* Near Lamp 64
- 6 *The Clough* Outside School
- 7 *The Croft*. 20m Down From Main St.
- 8 *The Croft*. Near House 48
- 9 *Lodge Lane* .Opposite Lamp 3
- 10 *The Underway*. Junction with School Lane
- 11 *Woodlands Walk*. Opp Lamp 5
- 12 *Stockham Lane*. Junction with Camelot Way
- 13 *Palacefields Av.* Junction With Mullion Close
- 14 *Palacefields Av.* Opp Brookvale Av. South On Slope
- 15 *Padstow Sq.* Adj Lamp 24
- 16 *Windmill Av East*. Jun with Morton Rd.
- 17 *Windmill Hill Av East*. Jun with Wolverton Drive
- 18 *Wolverton Drive*. Near 41
- 19 *Windmill Hill Av East*. Junction with Ledston Drive
- 20 *Firbank Close* O/s 12
- 21 *Townfield View*. 20m in From Windmill Av. West
- 22 *Tower Lane*. Junction with Norton Station Road
- 23 *Tower Lane*. Adj Lamp 11
- 24 *Plover Drive*. Junction with Pochard Rise
- 25 *Highgate Close* Between lamps 5 - 6
- 26 *Broadfields*. Junction with Copperwood
- 27 *Chetton Drive* Opp House No.10
- 28 *Broafields*. Opposite Crabtree
- 29 *Glenwood*. Opposite Glenwood in Broadfields
- 30 *Pinnars Fold*. Junction of Fernwood
- 31 *Eanleywood Ln*. Junction with Norton Gate

- 32 *Hobb Ln* .Adj Canal Bridge
- 33 *Moss Lane*. Junction with Runcorn Rd, Moore
- 34 *Delph Lane*. Junction with A56 Daresbury
- 35 *Delph Lane*. By ( Canal Bridge )
- 36 *Delph Lane*. 20m Before Keckwick Lane
- 37 *Ashville Road*. Junction with Clifton Lane
- 38 *Clifton Road*. 50m down from M56 R/bout
- 39 *Cholmondley Road*. Top Of Hill On Right
- 40 *Cherry Blossom Road*. Opposite 1 Azalea Grove
- 41 *Ascot Avenue*. Outside Shops
- 42 *Buttermere Grove* Junction with Beechwood Av
- 43 *Paddock Rise*. Junction with Pippits Row
- 44 *Ashbrook Ave*. At lamp 8, down hill
- 45 *Betchworth Cres*. Junction with Beechwood Av, next to Bridge
- 46 *Wisenholme Close* Adj lamp 7
- 47 *Cheshyres Lane*. Opp 3
- 48 *Oxford Road*. Opp Hinton Rd (by school fence)
- 49 *Bankes Lane*. Junction with Cavendish Farm Rd
- 50 *Holloway*. Junction with Weston Road
- 51 *Westfield Cres*. Junction with Beaconsfield Rd
- 52 *Russell Road* Junction with Hale View
- 53 *Russell Road* Junction with Hazel Avenue
- 54 *Whitley Close*. Opp 11
- 55 *Penrhyn Cres*. Outside 42
- 56 *Greenway Rd*. Junction with Okell Street
- 57 *Thorn Road*. Opposite Pear Tree Avenue
- 58 *Clarendon Close* adjacent lamp 3
- 59 *Pilgrams Way* adjacent lamp 4
- 60 *Sandymoor In* Junction with Bishams Park
- 61 *Aston Green* Junction with Sandy Lane
- 62 *A56* Junction with Hill Top Road

#### **WIDNES**

- 1 *Wilmere Lane*. (Access To Farm)
- 2 *Wellington Gate*. Adj Lamp 3
- 3 *Cocklade Lane*. Adj Lamp 7