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State of the Market Survey 2010

Highways, Street Lighting and Winter Maintenance

Briefing 10/22
May 2010

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Highways, Street Lighting and Winter Maintenance

State of the Market 2010

APSE conducted an on-line survey during February and March 2010. A series of questions were asked covering a range of issues of interest to those officers and councillors responsible for highways, street lighting, winter maintenance and related issues. 85 responses were received from local authorities throughout the UK. This report identifies the key findings of the survey.

This is the second year APSE has undertaken a state of the market survey so a comparison over time is available. This comparison will be highlighted where appropriate.

Results from the survey

1) How do you expect the budget for the highways, street lighting and winter maintenance service to change over the next 12 months?

Answer Options	2010 **Highways** Number (%)	2009 **Highways** Number (%)	% change 2009-2010
Increase	12 (16.4%)	12 (16.7%)	-0.3
Stay the same	27 (37%)	41 (56.9%)	-19.9
Decrease	34 (46.6%)	19 (26.4%)	+20.2
Total	73	72	

Answer Options	2010 **Street Lighting** Number (%)	2009 **Street Lighting** Number (%)	% change 2009-2010
Increase	4 (4.9%)	12 (16.7%)	-11.8
Stay the same	37 (45.7%)	41 (56.9%)	-11.2
Decrease	40 (49.4%)	19 (26.4%)	+23.
Total	81	72	

Answer Options	2010 **Winter Maint.** Number (%)	2009 **Winter Maint.** Number (%)	% change 2009-2010
Increase	10 (13.9%)	5 (7.6%)	+6.3
Stay the same	58 (80.6%)	55 (83.3%)	-2.7
Decrease	4 (5.6%)	6 (9.1%)	-3.5
Total	72	66	

Out of 226 individual responses, 54% thought budgets would remain the same over the forthcoming year, whilst 11.5% thought they would increase with the remainder 34.5% expecting smaller budgets.

This year fewer respondents thought budgets would remain the same or increase compared with last year, whilst more think they are likely to decrease in the forthcoming year. Responses from those with highways and street lighting responsibilities showed large differences in expectations about changes in budgets with far more people envisaging decreases in budgets.

In contrast to this although the great majority expected budgets to remain the same, there was an increase in those with winter maintenance responsibilities expecting an increase in budgets for that service. It is understandable that officers might expect budgets to increase for winter maintenance services due to the high level of scrutiny that the service has been under for the past two winters and the costs poor weather to the local and national economy. The higher cost of salt, potential plans for higher stocks, storage facilities and regional stores means there will be further costs for local authorities – all of which may explain expectations.

Pot holes are another repercussion of the snow and ice over winter and also have a knock on effect for vehicle users. They also lead to further problems on the road surface as the area of deterioration is more likely to expand as the surrounding surface breaks up. There have been grants made by government and it will be interesting to see whether highways budgets increase to address this issue.

More generally the cuts in public expenditure levels envisaged as a result of public sector debt mean that budget reductions will have to be made a level of 15% being a commonly discussed. Although funds for winter maintenance are likely to found when required, highways and street lighting services are likely to experience budget reductions.

2) Do you expect the service to remain in-house over the next 12 months?

87.8% of highways respondees, 76.5% of street lighting respondees and 91.8% of winter maintenance respondees expected the service to remain in house over the coming 12 months

These figures are roughly in line with responses to this question last year although a higher percentage of street lighting responses thought the system would remain in house compared with last year.

This question provides a context for expectations rather than a specific reflection of circumstances as some of these services will be externalised at present, there are a number of PFI schemes in place and other councils have mixed delivery arrangements involving the private sector.

What does emerge is that there are no expectations of a vastly different picture developing in the short term.

3) Has your organisation completed Job Evaluation?

Of the 85 responses to the question 61 (or 71.8%) said they had been through job evaluation. Last year the percentage responding similarly was 59.5%.

4) Has Job Evaluation affected wage costs?

Of the 59 (out of 85) respondees who have completed job evaluation, 35.3% answered that there had been an increase or significant increase in wage costs as a result of job evaluation. 22.7% noted that the wage bill had stayed virtually the same whilst 11.8% noted a decrease or significant decrease in the overall wage bill.

The comparable figures last year were 49% showing an increase or significant increase, 12.7% noting the wage bill had stayed the same and 5.1% showing a decrease. Clearly the figures will change as more councils implement job evaluation but there does appear to be an impact on salary budgets as job evaluation carried out.

5) Are you having trouble recruiting or retaining operatives or technical/managerial staff? (over the past 6 months)

Answer Options	2010 Total Number (%)	2009 Total Number (%)	% change 2009-2010
Yes, trouble recruiting operatives	21(11.1%)	23(13.7%)	-2.6%
Yes, trouble recruiting technical/managerial staff	33 (17.5%)	33 (19.6%)	-2.1%
Yes, trouble retaining operatives	12 (6.3%)	7 (4.2%)	+2.1%
Yes, trouble retaining technical/managerial staff	10 (5.3%)	13 (7.7%)	-2.4%
Yes, trouble recruiting and retaining operatives	12 (6.3%)	8 (4.8%)	+1.5%
Yes, trouble recruiting and retaining technical/managerial staff	13 (6.9%)	22 (13.1%)	-6.2%
No	88 (46.6%)	62 (36.9%)	+9.7%
Total	189	168	

The recruitment and retention of staff is dependent upon a range of factors not least being the availability of vacancies at a time of economic downturn. Compared with last year the major factor emerging from responses is that there has been an increase in the number of people who are not experiencing problems with staff retention or recruitment.

Across all three service areas here has been a reduction in the number of respondees having problems with the recruitment and retention of technical and managerial staff.

Textual comments received noted a number of councils have frozen recruitment presumably due to budgetary constraints. One council noted recruitment and retention of staff has greatly improved due to the downturn in the private sector and the uncertainty in the market place whilst another commented that recruitment has improved dramatically particularly for electricians

6) Do you feel staff absence levels are acceptable?

Answer Options	**Highways** Number (%)	**Street Lighting** Number (%)	**Winter Maint**. Number (%)	Total Number (%)
Yes	29 (56.9%)	38 (67.9%)	36 (72%)	103 (65.6%)
No	22 (43.1%)	18 (32.1%)	14 (28%)	54 (34.4%)
Total	51	56	50	157

Out of all responses, over a third felt that the level of sickness was not acceptable. Clearly tackling absence is difficult but it would be expected that all those councils who are unhappy with the rates of absence would be taking significant action to address the issue. Doubtless there are a range of activities in place looking at this issue but the figure of 34.4% of respondees unhappy with the rate of absence shows no improvement on the figure from last year. The question makes no distinction between short term and long term absence and it is a well known fact that small numbers of long term absentees can have a significant impact on overall absence levels. It will be interesting to see how this issue develops over the next couple of years.

Textual responses to the survey show that there is recognition that more can be done even though there are projects in place to reduce absence - the general picture is of improving sickness absence levels.

7**) Do you run an apprenticeship scheme?**

Apprenticeships schemes are only offered by a third of councils a figure which is constant with that from last year.

The average number of apprentices is approximately 4.5 per council.

The inclusion of a requirement for an apprenticeship scheme in contracts, the issue of community benefits, the push for more apprenticeships from government and the desire to skill staff internally has raised the profile of apprenticeships. However councils with apprenticeship schemes are still in the minority.

8) What is your training budget?

The size of the training budget will be linked to the size of the council and the service delivered so comparison is not too helpful, however the smallest budget noted was £1,500 with the highest being £250,000. The majority did have a defined training budget as normal practice would dictate. It was interesting to note that some services did not have a specified budget for training. Others noted that they get training as required, that they are allocated an element of the corporate training pot or that it is funded out of their trading account.

9) What is the average age of your operational staff?

The average age of operational staff for all service areas is approximately 45 years old from 110 responses. The lowest average age is 35 years with the oldest being 58 years.

Of course a number of factors could impact on the average age of staff in future such as the ability for councils to train and recruit staff, the state of the economy, how attractive councils are seen as employers and whether older staff are seen as a benefit or a drag on the workforce. Overall the average age of the population is increasing so this may be reflected in the age of the workforce.

10) How are your services currently delivered?

Answer Options	**Highways** Number (%)	**Street Lighting** Number (%)	**Winter Maint.** Number (%)	Total Number (%)
In house - combined services	33 (63.5%)	38 (64.4%)	35 (72.9%)	106 (66.7%)
In house - client/contractor split	11 (21.1%)	5 (8.5%)	8 (16.7%)	24 (15.1%)
Externally provided	6 (11.5%)	15 (25.4%)	4 (8.3%)	25 (15.7%)
Arms length organisation	1 (1.9%)	1 (1.7)	0	2 (1.25%)
Joint venture company	1 (1.9%)	0	1 (2.1%)	2 (1.25%)
Total	52	59	48	159

A large majority of highways, street lighting and winter maintenance services are delivered in house either via a combined service (66.7%) or with a client /contractor split (15.1%). 1.25% are provided through an arms length organisation whilst the remainder are provided by a joint venture(1.25%) or external organisation (15.7%). Client contractor splits within councils still provide a significant proportion of services from the responses received. There is a mix of arrangements with some officers being in house and operatives external, services supplemented by framework contracts and some elements of the service delivered in house whilst others are externalised or an external organisation is used for top up purposes only.

11) Do you currently sell your services to organisations external to the council?

Answer Options	2010 **Highways** Number (%)	2009 **Highways** Number (%)	% change 2009-2010
No and not considering it for the near future	22 (44.9%)	22 (50%)	-5.1%
No but considering it as an option in the near future	5 (10.2%)	8 (18.2%)	-8%
No but likely to start doing it in the near future	0	1 (2.3%)	-2.3%
Yes and expecting to continue	21 (42.9%)	12 (27.3%)	+15.6%
Yes but not expecting it to continue long term	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.3%)	-0.3%
Total	49	44	

Answer Options	2010 **Street Lighting** Number (%)	2009 **Street Lighting** Number (%)	% change 2009-2010
No and not considering it for the near future	17 (31.5%)	13 (29.5%)	+2%
No but considering it as an option in the near future	3 (5.6)	4 (9.1%)	-3.5%
No but likely to start doing it in the near future	0	0	0%
Yes and expecting to continue	33 (61.1%)	26 (59.1%)	+2%
Yes but not expecting it to continue long term	1 (1.9%)	1 (2.3%)	-0.4%
Total	54	44	

Answer Options	2010 **Winter Maint.** Number (%)	2009 **Winter Maint.** Number (%)	% change 2009-2010
No and not considering it for the near future	33 (71.7%)	26 (65%)	+6.7%
No but considering it as an option in the near future	1 (2.2%)	2 (5%)	-2.8%
No but likely to start doing it in the near future	0	1 (2.5%)	-2.5%
Yes and expecting to continue	11 (23.9%)	9 (22.5%)	+1.4%
Yes but not expecting it to continue long term	1 (2.2%)	2 (5%)	-2.8%
Total	46	40	

Overall nearly 41% of councils (compared with 36% last year) are working with organisations outside of the council to generate income with 5.6% considering it for the near future. 45% of councils (47% last year) are not considering it as an option.

Councils have generated income for many years through providing services to external organisations and this survey shows that a large proportion of respondents do so. There is little change overall from last year but there is a large increase in the proportion of highways services carrying out external work. With the current economic climate as it is and budgets cuts looming councils should be prepared to take advantage of all potential income streams. Not only are they often able to win work in competition due to competitive process and high quality but they can enable other public bodies to achieve best value. There has been an inbuilt reticence to charge for work outside the council but legislation is in place to allow councils to do so and there are hundreds of examples of it working successfully for both the provider and customer.

12) Where do you see growth areas for the service over the next 12 months?

A number of responses noted that there were no growth opportunities anticipated whilst another claimed that there were potential opportunities everywhere but no budget to take advantage of them. Further comments included

- Carriageway repairs and maintenance due to weather damage; pot hole repairs; surfacing and patching; proactive and reactive maintenance
- Specialist signing
- Recycling road materials; pavement recycling techniques
- 278 agreements
- Partnership working; external work; shared services (specialist services such as barriers installations and repairs)
- New building developments; out of town superstores; major developments
- Highways capital works
- Asset management
- Carbon reduction; energy saving measures; lighting (part night burning/dimming)
- On street permits for scaffolding and skips; parking schemes and enforcement; traffic management act
- Drainage issues
- Environmental maintenance
- Diversifying into new areas; private works
- Ensuring utility reinstatements are to specification

13) Where do you see areas where work may decrease for the service over the next 12 months?

Responses to this question ranged from the very positive with some expecting no reduction in work to the very negative saying that no service was safe from cuts.

Some specific responses included

- Capital investment; major works; large restructuring and surfacing projects; construction work over £25K
- Highways revenue maintenance; kerb and footway work; planned maintenance; reduced maintenance frequencies
- Structural highways maintenance
- Minor repairs

- Non-safety related work
- Private street lighting work; installation of new equipment; column replacement
- Aesthetic highways works
- LTP schemes
- Training
- Work for other councils
- Work for developers; external trading
- S38 supervision
- Cess pit emptying

It is interesting to note that some issue which are considered areas of growth by some are considered areas of stagnation for other. Clearly this will depend upon the circumstances in each local authority. It is concerning to see that training may suffer especially as others see new areas such as carbon reduction and energy saving as growth areas alongside trading and partnership work all of which require staff to acquire new skills.

Street Lighting

14) What is your council's approach to lamp replacement within your street lights (burn to extinction, planned replacement or other)?

32 of the 47 responses noted that they have planned or bulk replacements programmes in place. 11 councils operate a burn to extinction policy. The remaining 4 councils operate a mix of the two approaches such as burn to extinction except on high speed dual carriageways which is planned replacement or urn to extinction except for Metal Halide lamps. Once again the impact of budget cuts on council's ability to fund bulk replacements or governments to promote PFI remains unknown. Pressure on budgets may prompt moves to use longer lasting light fittings, energy reduction via switch off or dimming.

15) Does your council scout for failures?

There were 49 responses to this question and only one council stated that it did not scout for failures. The frequency with which scouting takes varies with common approaches being 2 weekly in winter and 4 weekly in summer, whole network inspections 3 times a year. One council has just commenced night time find and fix, one uses a free 'Roadline' phone service and the geography of each local authority will have an impact for example on scouting just towns or gritting routes or using night time inspections time observations.

16) How does your council track energy usage (by half hourly metering, estimated annual consumption or other)?

25 councils (of 45 respondents) use estimated annual consumption whilst 16 use half hourly metering. One council has some metered and some bulk supply whilst 2 have unmetered supply arrangements; and 1 is tracked monthly on actual returns.

17) What is your council's target time for restoring street lights to working order (in days)?

The most popular target for restoring lights is 5 days with15 councils noting this as their target. 15 councils have targets below 5 days with the shortest beings 1 day. A further 15 councils have target times of more than 5 days with 2 councils have target times of 10 days and one having a target time of 14 days. The average for all responses is 5.3.

Clearly a range of circumstances will impact upon target times which are set such as the area and the number of lights to be covered by the service, the urban/rural split or the split between different types of roads. Target times are distinct from actual restoration times.

18) Which energy supplier do you use?

A variety of power providers are used by the 44 respondees. These are as follows

EDF – 15
Scottish Power - 11
Scottish and Southern Energy (Scottish Hydro and Southern) - 8
E.ON - 4
NPower – 3 with another council about to move away from NPower to Scottish Power
Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation - 1
One council purchases via spot contracts as part of a consortium

19) What is the length of your current energy contract?
Contracts last for a variety of time spans from 6 months to 5 years with the most being for 1 year. Some have the option of 1 year extensions and not all are for a multiple of a year with examples being for 6 and 18 months. Three councils have 5 year contracts. One council operates with a rolling segmented supply.

20) When does your current energy contract end?
As expected contracts end at various times and are being negotiated on a continuous basis

There is always further room for collaboration on purchasing and although geographical distance would make this more difficult it is not an insurmountable issue. There are many examples of councils working together and energy should be no different from other commodities.

Winter Maintenance

21) Have the orders you placed for salt to cover winter maintenance over 2009/10 been met by your suppliers?

Answer Options	2010 Number (%)	2009 Number (%)	% Change
Orders met in full	8 (19%)	15 (40.5%)	-21.5%
Order partially met with our full knowledge of shortfall	7 (16.7%)	17 (45.9%)	-29.2%
Order partially met without our full knowledge of shortfall	6 (14.3%)	1 (2.7%)	+11.6%
Significantly less delivered than ordered with our full knowledge of shortfall	13 (31%)	3 (8.1%)	+22.9%
Significantly less delivered than ordered without our full knowledge of shortfall	8 (19%)	1 (2.7%)	+16.3%
Total	42 (100%)	37 (100%)	

Last winter only 19% of respondents felt their salt orders were met in full with the remainder having either a partial or significant shortfall. The comparison with the year before is stark when over 40% felt their orders were fully met. The message from the responses to this question appear to show that communication was confused – some felt that they were given adequate information from suppliers whilst others said their information came mainly from the wider media rather than directly from suppliers and Salt Cell could have been more helpful. 33% of respondents (14 councils) felt they were not kept informed of the status of their orders.

The situation regarding the extreme weather conditions and the available levels of salt are well known especially as this is virtually a re-run of the previous year. The issue was raised in the equivalent document to this last year that lessons had to be learnt from the poor conditions in 2008-09. In that year nearly 11 % of respondents (4 councils) received significantly less salt than they expected whereas in 2009-10, 50% (or 21 councils) found themselves in this position. There have been a range of recommendations from the UK Roads Liaison Groups but the issues must be addressed if improvements are to be made next winter.

22) What type of salt do you use (pre wet, dry or other)?

Out of 38 responses 26 councils use dry rock salt, 7 use Safecote, 2 use pre wet, 2 use a mix of wet and dry and 1 uses salt with and ABP additive.

23) What size of salt do you use (10mm or 6mm)?

22 councils use 6mm whilst 15 councils use 10mm and one uses both.

24) How do you purchase salt supplies (jointly with other authorities, via Highways Agency, independently, via consortium such as YPO or other)?

18 councils that responded purchase salt independently whilst another 18 purchase it in consortia, one council uses both methods and another is likely to switch from independent to joint purchase. The proportions have not changed significantly from last year which indicates that neither method is better at delivering salt to order based on he answers to question 21 above.

25) Which company supplies your salt?

Of the 35 responses, 7 were supplied by Cleveland Potash, 22 by Salt Union and 4 by Irish Salt Sales and 1 by Holmes Dodsorth with one using more than one supplier. Some councils have considered altering their arrangements so that they get supplies from a range of suppliers rather than a single organisation. This may have an impact but there will always be circumstances beyond the control of suppliers such as the intervention of the Salt Cell, conditions on the roads stopping deliveries from all suppliers and depletion of stocks due to higher demand in previous years.

26) Would you be interested in being involved in a salt sharing brokerage with other local authorities in future?

29 out of the 42 councils that responded would be interested in a salt sharing brokerage with other local authorities if the need arose again in future. Some discussions are taking place between councils following on from the problems experienced in 2008-09 and regional salt stores was one of the recommendations of the UK Roads Liaison Group which has prompted further discussions. There may well be financial efficiencies to be gained from storing salt jointly with neighbouring councils and this may prompt councils to look at this in future.

27) Do you have any suggestions for how councils or suppliers can act to avoid salt shortages in times of very bad weather in future?

The most common response was the obvious one which is that councils should simply store more salt prior to winter. There has been a gradual reduction in storage facilities both due less severe weather and to perceived savings to be made by selling of premises and storing less salt. There is a danger that moves will be made to increase salt stocks over the next few years only for the same pattern to be followed we do not experience heavy snow falls. Collaboration with other councils was also mentioned as was regional stockpiles and the intervention of central government.

28) What changes did you make to service arrangements as a result of poor weather in 2008/09?

The most common response to this question was to increase stock holdings prior to winter with other responses being to reduce spread rates and length of priority routes; increased stock prior to winter; replenished used material immediately; followed the recommendations of the UK Roads Liaison Group; review of where and when to grit; utilisation of all staff to do jobs which ensured no drop in service and make sure snow and ice removed; utilised mixes of sand and grit; re-prioritised highways programme and spend.

9 councils noted that made no changes at all either because they experienced no severe weather in 2008-09, because they are located physically close to salt suppliers or because they felt they dealt effectively with the situation in 2008-09. It will be interesting to see if those councils felt that any changes which could have been made but were not would have had an impact on the situation they found themselves in. Most changes which can be made will have a cost and at a time of limited budgets this may be considered investment which is not appropriate.

29) Has your authority experienced any of the following (you may answer more than one)

Answer Options	Number (%)
Excessive 'freeze-thaw' damaging road surfaces	35 (92.1%)
Increase in demand for urgent highways repairs	35 (92.1%)
Increase in damage to street lighting columns	5 (13.2%)
Increase in damage to street furniture/signs/traffic lights	8 (21.1%)

There are a range of potential problems which occur following poor weather conditions and responses point to further damage especially to road surfaces. By dealing with the increased demand for urgent highway repairs there is a chance that deterioration has been halted but there will be areas where budgets have not been made available for repairs leading to expanding areas of deterioration. Damage to street lights, street furniture, signs and traffic lights has also been experienced by a number of councils.

30) Do you think that the 'big freeze' will lead to any of the following (you may answer more than one)

Answer Options	Number (%)
Increase in legal claims for slips, trips and falls	35 (92.1%)
Review of gritting / salt routes	29 (76.3%)
Review of clearing /gritting pavements outside schools/key public buildings/civic centres/residential homes	27 (71.1%)
Review of clearing / gritting pavements outside of shops and in town centres	28 (73.7%)

Responses to this question have seen majority agreement with all the above questions reflecting the need to review operations in the face of severe weather. Comments included that public demand and expectation will always outweigh what is reasonably practicable; that complete service reviews will be undertaken in summer and that grit bin policy will be reviewed.

31) What has been the impact on your budget?

Answer Options	Number (%)
We have had to overspend on our budget	27 (69.2%)
We have had to work within existing budgets and limit the service provided	1 (2.6%)
We have been given additional resources to cope with demand	10 (25.6%)
We have overspent on our budget but we must recover these costs within the current financial year	7 (17.9%)
We have overspent on our budget but we must recover these costs within the next two to three years	3 (7.7%)

Nearly two thirds of respondents had to overspend their existing budgets which will come as no surprise. Comments from 5 councils pointed to extra funds being provided either by the corporate centre or from contingency funds and this is not surprising either bearing in mind the nature of severe weather being outside the normal financial planning process which would consider normal weather.

32) What will be the likely additional costs of repairing pot holes which have come about as a result of the poor weather?

Answer Options	Number (%)
No expected additional costs	1 (2.6%)
Less than £50,000	1 (2.6%)
£50,000 - £100,000	8 (21.1%)
£101,000- £250,000	8 (21.1%)
£251,000- £500,000	7 (18.4%)
£500,000 - £1,000,000	8 (21.1%)
In excess of £1 million	5 (13.2%)
Total	100%

Although it is difficult to allocate a figure for the whole cost of pothole repairs across local government the table shows that only one out of 38 councils does not envisage extra costs related to pothole repairs. Nearly all councils will have a cost and for some it will be very significant.

33) When do you expect road repairs due to damage from poor weather to be completed by?

27% of councils thought that damage will be repaired within 3 months with 50% repaired within 6 months and the remainder within 12 months. It is likely that temporary repairs will be made immediately with more permanent repairs held over until resurfacing schemes. The danger of further deterioration taking place is increased when repairs are not tackled immediately so the cost is likely to be higher. In the meantime the damage to cars will be greater over a longer period.

34) During the big freeze did you:

Answer Options	Number (%)
Deploy resources from within your department (but from services areas that would not normally work on highways issues) to address the impacts of the snow/ice?	23 (56.1%)
Deploy resources from other departments / services to address the impacts of the snow/ice?	22(53.7%)
Resources were sufficient within the department / service area to avoid using extra resources	6 (14.6%)
Total	41 (100%)

In the main councils deployed resources from within their own departments and other departments to address the impacts of snow and ice. A number also received help from external contractors and partners to clear snow.

35) Did the 'salt cell' operation where government took control of supplies help or hinder the situation?

15 councils (40% of respondents) thought that the Salt Cell helped the situation whilst 16 thought they hindered and 6 thought they had no impact at all.

Some thought that those with the right connections may have benefitted more than others whilst the need for Salt Cell should have been noted earlier. There were comments about communications from Salt Cell and this is perhaps the most worrying as this is fundamental to the operation of Salt Cell. Some councils who had planned their stocks well in advance were disadvantaged because they were not able to get the deliveries they had ordered because they were diverted elsewhere to councils who did not have good plans in place. One commented that it did give the council a degree of confidence that in the event of serious difficulty support from other suppliers or Authorities outwit our partnership would have assisted. Others have noted that the arrangements in London and Wales were more effective than national arrangements.

36) Would you support future central intervention in salt supplies in a critical situation?

81% (30 councils) of respondents would support central intervention in future although the comments made above should be borne in mind. It is important to understand the interpretation of 'intervention' – it must be effective and add value rather than just be intervention for the sake of it and communication and responsibility must be clear. However there does appear to be recognition of the fact that there is a role for central government.

37) Did the working time directive act as a barrier to operations? Which of the following best describes your views?

Answer Options	Number (%)
Yes it is a barrier but it is necessary to maintain sensible driver hours	10 (26.3%)
Yes it is a barrier and should be amended to accommodate emergency situations	15 (39.5%)
No - the working time directive had no direct impact on operations	13 (34.2%)
Total	38 (100%)

The working time directive did act as a barrier for some but it is by no means seen as a universal barriers. A number of councils noted that it had no direct impact on operations.

Comments noted that any problems could be overcome with proper shift patterns whilst another said that the main shifts are rotas which complied fully with the directives but exemptions were applied when necessary in emergency situations. A further comment noted that the directive was not followed to any degree.

38) Did your service experience an increase in complaints with regard to lack of gritting in general or on specific roads, salt bins, removal of snow/ice on footways, subsequent damage to roads/footways or other highways related issues?

Answer Options	Number (%)
No increase in complaints	1 (2.6%)
Estimated increase of up to 25%	13 (33.3%)
Estimated increase of up to 50%	6 (15.4%)
Estimated increase of up to 100%	6 (15.4%)
Estimated increase of greater than 100%	13 (33.3%)
Total	100%

Public expectations have risen with regard to council services and the same appears to be true of the support councils are expected to provide during severe weather. Clearly councils act to help their communities as much as they can but resources are limited and there are practical difficulties of access to smaller roads, commercial properties and domestic homes which mean their hands are tied in some respects. All but one of the councils that responded experienced an increase in complaints over the level they would expect during the severe weather. There will be issues of interpretation here with some citizens requesting roads to be gritted or snow to be cleared on roads about which council decisions have already been made or requests for service may be deemed as complaints. Although there is no doubt that there has been an increase in contact with the councils, it is difficult to put a figure to the scale of increase.

The Association for Public Service Excellence

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular advisory groups, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The advisory groups are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Advisory groups are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE advisory group meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national advisory groups include:-

- Efficiencies, procurement and service transformation
- Building cleaning
- Citizen engagement
- Local authority, police and fire authority partnerships
- Community safety and security
- Housing, building maintenance and construction
- Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Social care
- Leisure management and community venues
- Vehicle maintenance and transport operations
- Waste management, refuse collection and street cleansing
- Workforce strategy and employee relations