



APSE survey on impact of bad weather on parks services

Summary of results and commentary for Horticulture Week by Debbie Johns, APSE Principal Advisor for Parks

In a survey of local authorities, the Association for Public Services Excellence (APSE) found that council parks services have been significantly affected by the adverse weather during January, mainly due to staff being diverted onto other duties such as gritting pavements, snow clearance in cemeteries, schools and day centres, delivery of meals on wheels to elderly residents, waste collections and clearance of recycled material from residents properties.

APSE has some 260 members from local authorities providing front-line council services, including parks, across the UK. The APSE snapshot survey found that 91% of councils have had a gap in planned work as a result of the weather conditions and 95% of councils said that staff have been diverted onto duties outside their normal work.

Other areas of impact from the salt and icy conditions include:-

- 50% said their crops and plants have been affected
- 23% have seen an impact on their highways verges
- 32% said there has been an impact on fine turf
- 36% said arboriculture has been affected

Other areas affected included a backlog of sports fixtures with football and rugby leagues.

When asked what arrangements councils were putting in place to repair the damage and catch up with planned work, this included:

- Programming of repair work
- Reprioritisation of minor work
- Treatment of fine turf to control diseases
- Extending the current sporting season
- Prioritising health and safety issues
- Bringing in additional staff

Some councils were still reviewing the damage and said that it was too early to assess the full extent of the damage, particularly to plant growth and development.

When asked about lessons learnt as a result of the weather conditions, some councils thought that other services would have been severely impacted if it was not for the ability to call upon resources from the parks section and also commended the ability of staff at the council to respond to the conditions. Other comments included the need for a contingency plan for periods of adverse weather conditions or to improve the current plan, to review gritting/slating procedures in parks and to always plan for disruption.

Debbie Johns, APSE's principle advisor on parks, commented: 'This survey shows the important role parks staff played in assisting other services during the adverse weather earlier this year. Councils are still trying to deal with the results of diversions from planned work, and damage to plants but report that lessons have been learned.' She added: 'What is clear is that the flexibility of council services to respond in emergency situations was a key factor in keeping services moving and disruption to local residents minimised'