

## Getting to grits

Council grit teams are coping despite the severe weather conditions says APSE, a local government organisation that supports councils deliver frontline services such as Highway gritting teams.

In a snapshot survey sample APSE found that most councils are reporting suppliers are 'better than last year' in getting fresh stock of grit and salt to councils but warn that hauliers, who salt suppliers rely on to get stock to councils, may not deliver over the Christmas period. This could create problems for some areas. Stocks are holding up well but the frequency of the snow falls and the extreme cold are also creating specific problems.

Paul O'Brien Chief executive of APSE said *'Last year councils faced severe shortages with some councils relying on over-seas deliveries of grit and salt to meet demand. This year the problems are slightly different. Salt and grit stock has been built up by councils and suppliers but for many areas the snow has come earlier than usual, is heavier than usual and the severe cold weather and frequency of the heavy snow falls means gritting teams are struggling to keep ahead of the weather'*

Most councils in the APSE snapshot survey say that they:-

- Are able to meet demand and have enough stock left to see them into the New Year, without additional supplies.
- Have had to increase gritting rounds because repeat heavy snowfalls and extreme cold temperatures have led to a need to re-grit routes already done
- Heavy snowfalls when traffic is already at a peak means gritters have got caught in gridlock situations trying to keep up with constantly changing weather conditions
- Fresh snowfall on gritted areas which then freezes due to the extreme cold and very low daytime temperatures, means there is no 'thaw time' making conditions particularly hazardous

O'Brien explained *'the cold day time temperatures and fresh snow fall has left even gritted routes with a build up of ice and snow meaning councils need to re-treat these roads. Even when they have ploughed all available resources into keeping roads clear it is no easy task. Councils have had to concentrate on priority routes and roads. Particularly at this time of year it is important not only to local people but to local businesses that areas are accessible as possible.*

In answer to criticisms that other countries with heavier snowfall seem to cope with the conditions much better than the UK O'Brien said *'It is a question of resources - it is fanciful to imagine councils here would have the same resources as those in places like Canada. It boils down to a choice of resources. In areas where we know the weather will be severe on a regular basis hard choices are made to put in additional resources, for example in some areas such as Aviemore in Scotland. However for the rest of the UK it is unlikely council taxpayers would be willing to pay more council tax for additional snow ploughs and gritters for extreme, but thankfully rare, weather conditions.*

## Notes to editors and survey findings

The APSE survey found that councils have taken measures that include:-

- Storing sufficient salt and grit for short to medium term use in the winter months
- Call-off arrangements with suppliers to meet demand more quickly
- Re-gritting has in some cases trembled the normal demands on routes due to repeat snowfalls
- Extreme cold day time temperatures in many areas has added to the problem of freezing and ice on major roads
- Suppliers who have been unable to deliver have been 'rescued' by councils sending their own vehicles to collect supplies to ensure gritting services can continue.
- Some suppliers have advised they may face problems with deliveries over the Christmas period due to hauliers – from private companies – being unavailable to deliver
- Grit bin refilling has been hit by sheer volume of demand and as fast as bins are refilled – as with the grit runs – new snowfalls have meant supplies are being used up more quickly than they can be refilled.

### **About APSE**

APSE is the association for public service excellence working with over 300 local authorities, police and fire authorities throughout the UK, promoting excellence in front line service delivery

For further details or to arrange an interview please contact Mo Baines on [mbaines@apse.org.uk](mailto:mbaines@apse.org.uk) or mobile 07971 843515