

MEETING	Communities Scrutiny Committee
DATE	18 September, 2025
TITLE	Gritting Arrangements and Salt Bins
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	Follow-up following scrutiny at the 28 September 2022 meeting
AUTHOR	Steffan Jones, Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC
CABINET MEMBER	Cllr. June Jones

1. Why does it need to be scrutinised?

- 1.1 At the Committee meeting on 28 September 2022 an update on the management of salt bins was scrutinised as part of the Winter Maintenance Service.
- 1.2 The service has since carried out a review of how first priority roads are determined as part of the gritting arrangements and therefore it is timely to submit an update of the Winter Maintenance arrangements to the Scrutiny Committee.

2. What needs to be scrutinised?

- 2.1 The points below need to be scrutinised
 - Current Gritting Arrangements
 - What factors are considered at present to designate roads as a first priority
 - What factors will be considered for the future
 - Whether the salt bins are located in the correct places on the road network
 - How risks are managed
 - How the provision is funded

3. Summary and Key Issues

- 3.1 We draw the attention of the committee to the key issues below:
 - Since November 2024 the Service has been using a Gritting Vehicle Monitoring System called 'Locatu' by Advanced Communications Projects Ltd (ACP) to record the routes. The system has a number of features which assist the service to operate more efficiently and safely as set out in parts 6 of this report.
 - When considering first priority roads further consideration is given to school bus routes as well as the other factors that are in place for this year.
 - By now, the salt bins have all been numbered and work will be underway to ensure that their location is available on an external Map of Gwynedd so that residents and Community/Town Councils can report if there is a problem with the bins through self-service.

- The Winter Maintenance budget is apportioned per area according to the number of first priority routes. See Appendix 1 (i, ii, iii) for the details of our network of first priority routes by area.

4. Background / Context

Gritting Arrangements

- 4.1 The purpose of the winter service is to provide support to the users of our roads by manipulating the highway network to alleviate the effects of ice and snow and to keep transport moving while reducing the impact of the service's operations on the environment.
- 4.2 The Council aims to provide a winter service which will permit, as far as is reasonably possible, the safe movement of vehicular traffic on the more important parts of the highway network.
- 4.3 The service is essential for public safety and to the national and local economy in maintaining movement of vehicular traffic, cycles and pedestrians. Owing to limited resources and available finance, it is essential that the provision of winter service reflects the importance of traffic routes. It will not be reasonably practicable to provide the service on all parts of the network or to ensure all surfaces are kept free of ice or snow at all times, even on the treated parts of the network. Consequently, the primary pre-salting routes (the carriageways which will have first priority) have been determined on the basis of those that present the greatest risk to road users.
- 4.4 The Council, as the Highway Authority, is responsible for providing a winter service on adopted public highways within the county. However, the Council also treats all of the trunk roads within the county on behalf of the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency (NMWTRA). In addition, the Council also provides a winter service for a section of the A55 managed by UK Highways A55 Ltd, the client organisation for the A55 DBFO contract.
- 4.5 Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 imposes a duty on highway authorities to maintain highways maintainable at public expense. In particular, Section 41(1A) which imposes a duty on highway authorities to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.
- 4.6 The winter maintenance period is operational from the 1st of October to the 30th of April and the Service operates on the basis of three operational areas namely Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd. This includes the gritting routine of first priority routes and second priority routes along with the provision of salt bins. All class one and two roads and some of the class three category are included within first priority gritting routes. Some of the remaining class three and non-class roads would be included within the second-priority circuits but not all of them.
- 4.7 The following factors are taken into account when designating first priority roads:
 - roads with high traffic; or those which
 - provide at least one access to the emergency response centres; or those which
 - receiving emergency admissions; or those which
 - are County Class II or III road with approximately one access to towns and villages.

5. Weather Forecasts

We currently receive winter weather forecast provision and advisory services from MetDesk. The service runs 24 hours a day from 01 October to 30 April. We will receive the following information:

- Morning summary issued in graph format at 06:00 each day containing a summary of actual weather that has occurred in the previous 36 hours and a preliminary forecast for the following 36 hours.
- 36 hours and 2 – 10 day text forecast and graph issued at 13:00 each day for each of the five climatic domains within the County.
- Review of the forecast at 18:00
- 24hr/day unlimited direct telephone access to a forecaster with local knowledge to discuss any aspect of weather conditions.
- MetDesk forecaster to phone stand by numbers for three areas should there be a significant change in the weather.

- 5.1 Pre-treatment decisions during normal office hours are undertaken by designated officers within the Highways Maintenance Service in each of the three area offices. Verbal instructions are initially given for the proposed works which are then confirmed in writing.
- 5.2 In addition, each Area Office operates an 'out of hours', on duty system whereby duty officers within the service are available outside office hours to react to changes in the weather conditions as information becomes available. Each officer is contactable via a designated emergency telephone number. In the event of a change in circumstances, the relevant officer relays the information, and any varied action as necessary, to the gritting operatives.

6. Vehicle Monitoring System (ACP)

- 6.1 Since November 2024 the Service has been using ACP Gritting Vehicle Monitoring System to record the routes. The system provides the following information:
- Comprehensive "Telematics" package that tracks vehicles in real time
 - Insights into driver behaviour
 - Gritting vehicle navigation
 - Pathway compliance
 - Create forms and collect data
 - Detailed activity reports in multiple formats
 - Create, edit and distribute routes in the cloud
 - Driver safety features.

6.2 In terms of the safety features the system will help to reduce any risks to the employees as they are "lone workers". It can:

- Create a warning if a vehicle remains stationary for longer than the set time
- Built-in panic buttons
- Alerts sent by email to specified addresses
- Trigger warnings when entering and exiting known risk areas.

6.3 Following the introduction of the system it is intended to change some of the routes ahead of this year's gritting season and any change will be reflected by the system. The changes to Arfon routes reflect the changes to the network following the opening of the bypass, and the downgrading of the old A487 to the A4871 which is now part of the county network.

6.4 There are several benefits that the service has recorded deriving from the new system:

- it gives the service the opportunity to review their circuits in terms of efficiency (time/distance) across the three areas within Gwynedd
- Better monitoring of gritting in 'real time'
- monitoring the grit levels used, and the operational status of the vehicles
- keep a full record of our gritting activities, which can be extremely useful should queries or claims relating to our severe weather response procedure arise.

7. Managing Salt

7.1 The Council's salt supply is with a company Salt Union. It is delivered on a 'stock management' regime where the replenishment of the stores on use takes place. The salt is stored in stores at the six locations below. The first 4 locations have a dedicated salt dome. Salt is kept indoors in Blaenau Ffestiniog and Llandygai which are also Welsh Government Strategic Stores. These strategic stores enable the Council to retain more salt than in previous years. Although we and the Welsh Government have better 'resilience' in terms of salt stocks, the potential for a restriction on salt use remains.

See below information regarding the salt storage locations:

Location	Tonnes
Depo Cibyn, Caernarfon	2,500
Depo Afonwen, Chwilog	3,000
Ffridd Arw, Dolgellau	3,800
Depo Bala	3,000
Blaenau Ffestiniog	4,500
Llandygai	4,000

8.0 Salt Bins

8.1 Salt bins are part of the Winter Maintenance service and are filled as needed. The salt bins are located in troublesome/difficult locations involving steep slopes, junctions and sharp turns on second-priority roads.

8.2 An application for a new salt bin will be agreed with the Community or Town Council and the service will look at relocating rather than adding a new bin in the first place. Each request to relocate will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The points below will be taken into account when considering each application.

- Is the location on a current first priority or second priority grit path
- Could the gritting vehicle be able to handle the road if the need arises
- Is there another salt bin nearby? If yes - is that bin in use
- What is the elevation at the location? Highland or coastal
- Steep or flat road
- Do water problems exist here.

8.3 The salt bins are inspected as part of the routine road inspections programme. Other specific inspections are scheduled at the beginning of the winter season to ensure that the bins are full and in satisfactory condition. There will be further in-season inspections after cold spells to replenish as needed.

8.4 By now, there are stickers on the bins with a specific reference and each area has a register of the locations in the form of a spreadsheet. Below is a table showing the number of salt bins per area:

Region	Number
Arfon	353
Dwyfor	140
Meirionnydd	251
Total	744

8.5 Salt bins have been recorded within an internal 'Map of Gwynedd' in order to share the details/locations of each bin. It is now intended to place a list on the external map so that the information will be available. This will enable a simple and easy procedure for Members and Community/Town Councils to submit an application/enquiry via self-service.

9.0 Budget

- 9.1 The winter maintenance budget is part of the main road maintenance budget with 17.5% of this budget committed for winter maintenance. This amount is equivalent to £1,127,770.
- 9.2 The cost of winter maintenance can be much greater than the budget commitment and entirely dependent on the weather over the winter period.

10. Consultation

- 10.1 I have consulted with the relevant officers within the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department prior to submitting this report to the Scrutiny Committee.

11. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 11.1 This legislation places a duty on local authorities to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.
- 11.2 **Have you included residents/service users? If not, when and how do you intend to consult them?**
Discussions have already taken place with Local Members and community and town councils regarding the locations of salt bins to ensure they are in appropriate and effective places on the road network to protect the public. The gritting paths are reviewed annually, with comments from residents, Members, and local councils contributing to the process.
- 11.3 **Have you considered collaborating?**
The Service is already working with neighbouring councils to complete the gritting of roads that cross boundaries on their behalf.
- 11.4 **What has been done or will be done to prevent problems from rising or worsening in the future?**
The Service carries out ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of its gritting operations to ensure that Gwynedd's roads are as safe as possible for users and residents, within reasonable and practical limits. This means that the Service is committed to scrutinising how the gritting is being carried out ensuring that any risks are minimised.
At the end of the season, a review of the gritting decisions is carried out. The aim is to learn from the experiences and improve the process for the following winter, ensuring that any lessons or areas for improvement are implemented in a timely manner.
- 11.5 **How have you considered the long-term and what will people's needs be in years to come?**
Winters are predicted to be warmer and wetter on average in the future as a result of climate change. It is difficult to estimate the timeline for this; however, in the meantime, the demand for the service is forecasted to remain the same.
- 11.6 **To ensure that integration, have you considered the potential impact on other public bodies?**
Before the start of each winter maintenance season, the Service consults with neighbouring local authorities about the Council's Winter Support Plan. The aim of this process is to co-ordinate the gritting routes across administrative boundaries, ensuring that the proposed actions by the Service are aligned with neighbouring Plans and do not cause any negative impact on other authorities activities or infrastructure. This collaborative approach helps to avoid duplication of work, ensure efficient use of resources, and maintain consistent standards of safety across the region.

12. Impact on Equality Characteristics, Welsh Language and Socio-Economic Duty

12.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to give due consideration to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equal opportunities and foster good relationships between different communities.

12.2 The Department has already recognized the need for impact assessments.

13. Next Steps

13.1 The service will act on the points below as next steps:

- Continue to review the gritting routes making use of the ACP system by providing vital information.
- Ensure that the risk of running out of salt is monitored.
- Continue to review the number of salt bins we have and ensure that the best use is made of existing ones.
- Submit information on the first priority gritting routes to the Council's website.
- Proceed to set the location of the salt bins on the external Gwynedd Map.
- Continue to monitor and ensure that our expenditure will be within the budget set for the service.

Appendices

Appendix 1 (i, ii, ii) - First priority route plans of the three areas.