



# **Grit bins and non-priority routes**

## **Overview and Scrutiny Review – August 2018**

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## **Background**

On the 17 November 2017, the Internal Scrutiny Committee received a report on the county council's winter gritting service. In considering the report it was agreed that a task and finish group be established to review the number of grit bins currently in place; grit bin locations; and the criteria used to agree grit bin placement.

## **Scope of the review**

At the start of the review it was agreed that the task and finish group should focus on:

- Reviewing the location and condition of grit bins across the county; and
- Formulating recommendations on expanding the pool of volunteers to assist with the performance of gritting secondary routes.

During the course of the task and finish group's review, the Internal Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 20 July 2018, considered an update report on the county council's highways winter service plan. At that meeting it was noted that a separate report would be presented to Cabinet in August 2018, detailing a proposal to change the road surface treatment intervention level from the current plus 1 degree to plus 0.5 degree for the 2018/19 winter season. As the next scheduled meeting of the Internal Scrutiny Committee was not until 21 September 2018, the Committee resolved that the proposal to reduce the treatment intervention level be considered by this task and finish group and to formulate any recommendations to Cabinet prior to taking a decision in August. The task and finish group's findings and recommendations on this proposal are set out at Annex A to this report.

## **Membership of the task and finish group**

The task and finish group was made up of the following County Councillors:

- County Councillor Joe Cooney (chair)
- County Councillor Steven Holgate
- County Councillor Hasina Khan
- County Councillor Jenny Purcell
- County Councillor Cosima Towneley
- County Councillor David Whipp
- County Councillor Barrie Yates

## **Methodology**

The task and finish group considered documentary evidence from a variety of sources. Key lines of enquiry were submitted in advance of the task and finish group's first meeting.

For the grit bin element of the review the task and finish group enlisted the help of all 84 county councillors to carry out a short survey about grit bins in their division and to report their findings back to the group. The task and finish group stipulated in its communication that it would not be looking to make a recommendation on having more grit bins on the network, but that it would be reviewing how existing provision could be realigned. Complaints data in relation to grit bins was also reviewed.

This report reflects the views and recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the county council. In many cases, suggestions are made for further consideration to be given to issues, and this would need to include a full assessment of the legal and financial risks and implications.

### **❖ Officers**

The following people attended meetings of the task and finish group:

- Harvey Danson, Area Highways Manager North
- Phil Durnell, Head of Service Highways
- Dwayne Lowe, Area Highways Manager East
- Ridwan Musa, Area Highways Manager West

### **❖ Documents and websites**

The county council's:

- Winter service plan 2017/18;
- Winter in Lancashire website: <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/winter/>;
- Local Government Association: [your winter weather questions answered](#)

Numerous council websites from around the United Kingdom were also researched and are referenced throughout this report.

## Findings

### ❖ Context

The Lancashire Winter Gritting Service is an important part of the way the council manages the highway network both financially and in terms of how important it is to people in Lancashire.

The County Council, as the authority responsible for highways, has a legal duty to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that people can use the highways safely without being endangered by ice and snow. This means the county council does everything it can so far as is reasonably practicable and aims to keep traffic moving on priority routes and work to minimise delays and accidents in which ice or snow is a contributory factor.

This is a statutory duty found in:

- Section 41 Highways Act 1980 as amended by Section 111 Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003; and
- Part 2 Traffic Management Act 2004.

The Local Government Association asserts that "given the scale of financial and other resources involved in delivering the Winter Service it is not reasonable either to – provide the service on all parts of the network; ensure running surfaces are kept free of ice or snow at all times, even on the treated parts of the network. It would cost hundreds of millions of extra pounds to grit all roads. Also, many roads are simply too narrow or too steep for a gritting lorry to navigate. Instead, councils try to find other solutions like supplying local grit bins for residents, liaising with parish councils and community groups to grit more residential or remote areas and working with farmers to clear rural areas."

The council's priority routes cover 41% of the network in Lancashire (2900km of 7000km). Secondary routes are treated in periods of prolonged sub-zero temperatures. Local contractors and farmers are also employed to assist in the clearing of snow. The council also has a number of mutual aid agreements with the Highways Agency and neighbouring local highway authorities covering short sections of highway where it is more efficient for that authority to undertake Winter Service operations on the council's behalf. Agreements with district councils (policy WS5 – Method Statement for Agreements with District Councils) are also in place to improve Lancashire's resilience in dealing with prolonged severe winter weather.

There is no legal duty requiring councils to provide grit bins. The specific power to do so is found in S185 Highways act 1980. Being the provision of storage bins for sand or grit or other materials in such positions as the highway authority may determine.

The council's highways service is delivered through three distinct area teams sharing the district areas as follows:

- Area East – Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley, Rossendale districts
- Area North – Fylde, Lancaster, Wyre districts
- Area South – Chorley, Preston, South Ribble, West Lancs districts

The council benchmarks its service provision with the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), Midland Service Improvement Group (MSIG) and the Northern Highways Management Group.

### ❖ Self-help

Government guidance to the public on clearing snow and ice from a road, path or cycleway states, "You can clear snow and ice from pavements yourself. It's unlikely that you'll be sued or help responsible if someone is injured on a path or pavement if you've cleaned it carefully". Advice on how to clear snow and ice is set out at **appendix A** to this report. In addition to this the council's 'Winter in Lancashire' website also provides advice for residents and businesses on snow clearance, gritting and winter maintenance: <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/winter/what-you-can-do/>

### ❖ Grit bins

The material stored in the council's grit bins, and commonly called "grit" or "salt" is a sand/salt mix (50:50 ratio), and can be used by the public on the highway as necessary to melt ice and snow and as a preventative measure to circumvent the formation of ice during cold snaps.

The council's grit bins are stocked at the start of the winter season and are replenished as they are used. An online or telephone request can be made to the council to restock a grit bin, sand / salt stock levels are monitored throughout the season and the grit bins are usually refilled at least once during the winter.

The sand/salt mix stored in the council's grit bins is for use on public roads and pavements and cannot be used on private property. Grit bins for domestic and business use need to be purchased privately and can be purchased by contacting the council using the contact details displayed on its 'Winter in Lancashire' website: <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/winter/gritting/grit-bins/>

There are more than 2000 grit bins and 500 salt heaps (a small pile of salt placed adjacent to the highway used in rural areas where grit bins cannot be sited) placed across Lancashire as follows:

- Area South - **450** grit bins 17%
  - Preston, Chorley, West Lancs and South Ribble – Total 450
- Area North - **383** grit bins and 300 heaps 26%
  - Lancaster – 268 bins / 300 heaps – Total 568
  - Wyre and Fylde – 115 bins
- Area East - **1221** grit bins and 280 heaps 57%
  - Burnley – 194 bins / 11 heaps – Total 205
  - Hyndburn – 197 bins / 3 heaps – Total 200
  - Pendle – 425 bins / 87 heaps – Total 512
  - Ribble Valley – 87 bins / 179 heaps – Total 266
  - Rossendale – 318 bins
- Total grit bins 2054 and total heaps 580 = **2634 grit bins and heaps**

The cost of filling grit bins and providing heaps during 2017/18 was as follows:

- Area South - filled twice - £27500
- Area North - filled 3 times - £36000
- Area East - filled 4 times - bins - £53000 and heaps £6000
- In total the council spent £122,500 and used 800 tonnes of sand/salt mix at £40000 (a normal year is 350 – 400t). Therefore, a grand total of **£163000 or £62 per bin/heap.**

The capital cost of purchasing and deploying a new grit bin is £350 – including an initial fill. Where there is a planned refill across a number of grit bin sites, the refill cost is approximately £62 per bin.

During the review, it was highlighted that the grit bin criteria was last changed during the 2000s and that officers had been using the current form/criteria since at least 2008. The grit bin assessment form was developed against national guidance and was similar to those used by other local authorities. A copy of the assessment form is set out at **appendix B** to this report. A copy of the council's policy (WS7) on the provision of grit bins is set out at **appendix C**.

The council's current grit bin assessment criteria includes the following characteristics:

- Exposed location significantly affected by winter weather;
- Difference in levels causing a hazardous condition such as a steep bend with adverse camber;
- Junction hazard;

- High traffic flows at peak times;
- High pedestrian movements; and
- The number of premises for which the road is an access.

Some factors the task and finish group noted on grit bin provision included:

- A number of grit bins located on priority routes may serve side roads;
- Grit bins were normally sited where there's no obstruction caused by its placement;
- The council does not lock its grit bins. However, any grit bins found to be locked were in the ownership of the parish/town council with parish lengthsman holding the keys and spreading grit (sand/salt mix);
- The policy (WS7) referenced that each grit bin would be identifiable by a unique reference number and a 'highway use only' label attached to them;
- An initial assessment for a new grit bin is carried out via desktop exercise and local knowledge. If there was any uncertainty then officers would conduct a site visit. It was suggested that the cost of any site visit (if required) would not outweigh the cost of providing a new grit bin;
- The council's highways team relied on receiving complaints from the public on the condition of grit bins. If grit bins needed to be replaced the site of the bin would be re-evaluated. If it did not meet the current criteria then the bin would be removed altogether.

It was noted that the council had not sought to cover the cost of purchasing grit bins through sponsorship. However, the council has had requests from and has worked with parish councils.

During the review the task and finish group was informed that if all the grit bins were reassessed against the current criteria, a significant number would be removed from the network.

The task and finish group upon being appraised of this information felt that a review of existing grit bin provision and locations on the network was necessary. Given the size of the task, the group felt that it should enlist the help of all 84 county councillors and utilise their local knowledge to carry out a short survey on grit bins within their division. It was recognised that some members would have very few grit bins in their division whilst others had considerably more. Data on the location of grit bins across Lancashire was requested and provided to all county councillors. The survey comprised of the following questions for members to answer:

1. Is it there?
2. Is the condition poor or adequate?
3. Is it full?
4. Is it in the right location?



5. Do you feel there is a better location for it?
6. Is there anywhere you feel in your division there should be a grit bin?

The task and finish group stressed that it was not looking to make a recommendation on having more grit bins, but that it hoped to assess how existing provision could be improved by moving any surplus grit bins to new locations. Where no response had been received from county councillors, it was automatically assumed that no change was needed in their division irrespective of what might be the case on the ground.

Initially, county councillors were provided with the data set from the council's MapZone/MARIO system which was sorted by county councillor division. However, it was noted that a small number of grit bins (26) were unaccounted for by comparison to the spreadsheet data maintained by the Area teams (sorted by locality). Following this discovery, county councillors were then provided with both data sets, though evidence was received that the data contained within the spreadsheets omitted grit bins that were currently on the network and listed on the MapZone data. The task and finish group felt that the disparity in data needed to be addressed.

In total, 27 members responded to the task and finish group's survey request either in full, partially or by providing comments and in some cases photographs. Some responses were also received from parish and town councils on behalf of county councillors.

In summary:

- 290 grit bins had been surveyed;
- 155 were reported as full (c53%);
- Some grit bin locations had changed on the ground, but locations had not been updated on MapZone data (no evidence had been received to substantiate if this was the case with the spreadsheet data);
- Some grit bins were missing on the network, but still recorded in the data;
- 15 requests were made by county councillors to move grit bins from current locations;
- 24 requests had been made for new grit bins; and
- Only two grit bins had been identified as potential surplus.

From the findings received, the following issues, comments and suggestions were also raised:

1. One grit bin was located behind barriers for some building work and was not accessible;
2. The council should lock all grit bins;
3. The council should consider purchasing grit bins with larger storage capacities;

4. Grit bins should have Lancashire County Council labels on them so that residents know who to contact if there is a problem with the bin;
5. Grit bins should be numbered;
6. A number of grit bins were used as rubbish bins or moved from their known location;
7. Many grit bins were found to be waterlogged;
8. Is the criteria for the provision of grit bins right? Is it too rigid? Would like to see more flexibility built in to the criteria;
9. Can Section 106 monies be used to purchase grit bins for new housing developments?
10. County Councillors are the 'eyes and ears' of their divisions – requests to fill grit bins, replace, move or request a new bin should sit with them;
11. Surveys such as this should be directed to parish councils – suggestion that a similar exercise be conducted on identifying unnecessary/damaged/out of date road signage and other 'house-keeping' aspects;

A number of grit bins surveyed during June/July were found to be full of grit (sand/salt mix). The question of whether these grit bins were needed was posed. In addition, it was reported that a number of grit bins that were full contained hardened grit (sand/salt mix) which needed to be broken up or was perhaps not fit for purpose.

Complaints data from the council's VIP system (councillors, MPs et al) since October 2012, and complaints data from the council's HAMS (Highways Asset Management System) since April 2017 was received as part of the review. The following points were gathered from the data:

- Between May 2017 and July 2018 there were 936 logged contacts received for grit bin refill requests – some of these were repeat requests;
- Between July 2017 and July 2018 there were 555 new and replacement grit bin requests – some of these were repeat requests;
- Theft of grit (sand/salt mix) from grit bins had been reported to the council by members of the public;
- A number of Grit bins had been damaged in road traffic collisions;
- A considerable number of reports had been received in relation to missing or damaged grit bin lids, resulting in waterlogging/open to the elements; and
- Instances whereby people had used grit bins to climb over walls/garages to gain access to private property.

The task and finish group felt that the council should review alternative grit bin designs available, in particular to address the common issue of broken lids.

## **Benchmarking**

A number of county councils maintain large numbers of grit bins. For instance Devon County Council had 3500 grit bins; Surrey County Council had over 1800 grit bins and Northumberland County Council had over 1500 grit bins.

Some councils had carried out a review of their grit bin provision and proposed new ways of working. For instance North Yorkshire County Council gave Parish Councils

in its area the opportunity to keep grit bins that did not meet the county council's assessment criteria and to pay annual maintenance fee of £75, which would see it filled twice over the course of the winter.

East Sussex County Council changed its policy on the provision of grit bins whereby existing bins introduced under its old scheme would still be maintained by the council, and new bins would be provided only when paid for by parish, town or district councils.

At Devon County Council requests from members of the public for new grit bins are discussed with their town or parish council or county councillor who then contacts the council to assess the request.

In 2013, Surrey County Council took the decision to adopt a new digital software system developed by KaarbonTech. The software enables the council's highways team to monitor the location, filling and usage of grit bins using Android smart devices. The software can record bins in need of repair and/or filling and work packages are allocated wirelessly to teams out on the road. Work can be planned more strategically resulting in fewer journeys and lower fuel costs. Details of asset ownership and management agreements are also recordable.

There are many examples of unique ideas implemented by councils throughout the United Kingdom including using different colour grit bins to differentiate ownership, private purchase schemes, community gritting partnership schemes, selling bags of salt at household waste recycling centres and sponsorship opportunities on grit bins. The task and finish group felt that the council should consider measures such as the sponsorship of grit bins.

### **Salt heaps**

Whilst the grit bin survey did not focus on salt heaps, a report had come through from one county councillor via a farmer that their sheep had eaten much of a salt heap and suggested that a grit bin be provided instead. It was noted that the location of the salt heap was amongst unfenced land which belonged to the farmer.

Some councils, in particular Oxfordshire County Council, no longer provide salt heaps on the roadside because salt is also damaging to grass, hedgerows, trees and water courses.

## ❖ Winter gritting of secondary routes and snow clearing

### Secondary routes

The council's policy (WS10) on secondary road network treatment states that "once the defined Priority Road Network is maintained clear, where persistent ice and/or snow are present or forecast to be present on the defined Secondary Road Network during the current 24 hour period (midnight to midnight) and are forecast to remain for the succeeding 24 hour period (midnight to midnight), treatment of the Secondary Road Network will commence as soon as possible using all available resources, but only during daylight hours."

In reviewing the scope to increase the capacity for the gritting of secondary routes, it was noted that one town council had invested in its own facilities and regularly salted routes in its area. Members were informed that there was no control over anyone assisting in this way and that on the whole, this would be of benefit to the council's winter service. However, not all areas were parished. A number of parish and town councils did not receive enough precept and some did not employ a lengthsman.

The policy for Agreements with district councils were mainly for the clearance of footways. Although, not all districts were working to same principles/arrangements.

### Snow clearing

Whilst the task and finish group had already noted that additional resources in terms of labour and plant were already provided by district and parish councils, it was also noted that the private sector, including farmers, contractors and plant hire companies assisted with snow clearance. Section 150 of the Highways Act 1980 imposes a duty upon highway authorities to remove any obstruction of the highway resulting from the accumulation of snow.

During the course of the review, the task and finish group was informed that a large number of contractors, in particular farmers no longer provided snow clearance on behalf of the county council.

It was reported that the snow clearing contract was a low value contract. The actual value of spend in any given year was dependent on weather conditions. Over the last four years usage had been low due to the relatively mild winters we had experienced. Snow Clearing is managed through a Framework Agreement which enables the council to manage critical areas such as health and safety, insurance, vehicles, operators and to identify training needs.

During 2017, the council conducted a new tender process but due to the low return was unable to proceed as there was insufficient bids to place the contract. Current arrangements were therefore extended to cover the winter period 2017/18. However,

the council was due to go out to tender again this year (around September 2018) to put in place a new Framework Agreement. The procurement exercise would be carried out via the council's website.

The feedback from the contractors on this contract highlighted two main areas of concern. These are:

1. The low value of spend on this contract; and
2. Insurance requirements – contractors were having to meet a level of insurance which can be an additional cost. Due to the low usage on this contract some contractors don't consider the contract to be viable for them. The council previously paid an hourly rate.

The council's procurement team has been working with the highways team to resolve the situation. On the issue of insurance, the highways team were considering the feasibility of providing contractors with assistance. On the procurement process, the team was looking to simplify the process although due to the nature of the work, it was reported the team had to conduct due diligence checks to ensure there was no significant risk to the public, operatives, property and infrastructure. Prospective contractors are therefore required to provide essential information to the council.

The task and finish group was provided with a copy of an article published on the Farmers Weekly website (dated 1 January 2016) written by Tim Price, Rural Affairs Specialist at NFU Mutual entitled "Am I insured for snow clearing jobs?"<sup>1</sup>.

The article recognised that;

"Clearing snow from blocked rural roads is a service carried out by many farmers. It is a task often done without payment – or for expenses only – while some farmers have contracts with councils or other bodies to provide snow clearing services on a profit-making basis."

Amongst other advice, the article explains that the

"First step is to check your tractor insurance policy. Typically, agricultural vehicle policies will include what is termed "permitted standard uses".

Policies providing this cover will include wordings such as "Covered for use whilst lent to public authorities for the purpose of snow, frost or ice clearance".

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<sup>1</sup> Farmers Weekly: <https://www.fwi.co.uk/business/business-clinic-insured-snow-clearing-jobs>

Cover is provided while the policyholder is using the vehicle for these purposes.

The insurance position is different if snow-clearing services are provided on a contract or one-off basis for profit.

In these circumstances, insurers should be informed so policies can be extended to provide cover. Underwriters may charge an additional premium relative to the risk.

Agricultural vehicle policies usually provide cover for trailers and implements such as snow ploughs when attached to any insured vehicle.

When not attached, the amount of cover provided may be limited unless the implement has been specified – so it is worth checking the position with your insurer.

The same rules usually apply for farmers using vehicles insured under a tractor policy to clear snow from roads and car parks for organisations such as village halls."

On the possibility of utilising large contractors to assist with snow clearance, the council had to be mindful of a contractor's core business and that having their drivers out in the evenings/nights would inevitably affect their ability to drive and work the following day and therefore jeopardise the business. In essence, officers wished for more farmers to come forward. Although, it was confirmed that the contract could be offered to anyone including parish councils and not just limited to farmers.

It was confirmed that the council would not ask contractors to spread grit.

In considering all the information the task and finish group felt that the council should work with the National Farmers Union, NFU Mutual and farmers to address and allay fears around liability.

To assist the contractors with the new tender, the procurement team was considering running open days/home visits to assist contractors in providing the details needed.

Contractors would be required to state what equipment they had. It was also confirmed that officers from the county council would visit contractors and check equipment. The council also provided training for contractors.

The task and finish group felt that the council should enlist the help of all county councillors to promote the snow clearing contract once the tender was published on the county council's website.

Some examples of other council processes include:

Lincolnshire County Council's website currently invites interested contractors and farmers to complete an application form rather than navigate/login to an online procurement process.

In the county of Gloucestershire, snow plough operators are appointed by the parish councils within the county council's administrative boundary. Parish and town councils within West Sussex County Council's boundary also work with farmers and contractors who can assist with snow clearance as and when needed.

Derbyshire County Council paid a minimum of £200 per year even if there was no snow.

The Department for Transport in November 2013, issued a guidance note on temporary snow ploughs<sup>2</sup> which provides examples of schemes including Wiltshire Council's Parish Response Scheme whereby snow clearance is co-ordinated by Parish Councils. The council's own insurance covered all accidents and damage to the road surface.

Renfrewshire Council utilised JCB3X plant machines with the bucket replaced by ploughs. One company that assisted the council in this way confirmed that liability is covered in the first instance via the council policies as they are working their behalf. The company's own insurance policy in respect of motor and road furniture damage also covered duties performed under council direction.

Practical considerations were also set out in the guidance note. Under legal requirements it was confirmed that tractors and other vehicles used for snow clearing on public roads, using a snow plough may also use 'red' diesel. From the 1 November 2013, agricultural tractors, light agricultural vehicles and agricultural material handlers used for gritting roads would also be permitted to operate on 'red' diesel.

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<sup>2</sup> Guidance note: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/temporary-snow-plough-use>



### ❖ Volunteer schemes

The task and finish group received a report evidencing existing and former voluntary "snow angel/warden" schemes implemented by some councils to support the delivery of winter gritting services across England. Voluntary schemes such as these and in particular at Bradford Council had proven to enable communities to provide an enhanced winter service whilst bringing local people together for a common goal; even suggesting that over 50% of people who signed up to become a snow warden volunteered for other projects and schemes within their community.

Some councils as part of their schemes provide equipment such as snow shovels, high-visibility vests, shoe grippers and grit to volunteers/parish councils. Guidance on personal safety measures, fitness to participate in the scheme, useful contacts, public liability and the availability of grit was also provided. Cambridgeshire County Council's community gritting scheme allows parish or town councils to agree specific routes in their area which are important to the local community and agrees them with the county council. Volunteers then sign up to grit these routes.

Parish and Town Councils within Derbyshire County Council's administrative boundary who sign up to its snow warden scheme are asked to encourage local residents to help themselves by clearing areas of footway adjacent to their property and to identify an individual with the authority to order the refilling of grit bins on behalf of the parish or town council.

Devon County Council's snow warden and community self-help scheme encourages Parish and Town councils that sign up to the scheme to take responsibility for the grit bins and salt bags in their communities and also encourage responsible use of grit and help minimise abuse of grit.

The task and finish group was informed of Chorley Council's partnership with Spice – a charity founded to support and strengthen communities using Time Credits. "The Time Credits model works simply: for each hour that an individual contributes to their community or service, they could earn a Time Credit. This Time Credit can then be spent on accessing an hour of activity, such as local attractions, training courses or leisure, or gifted to others."

The task and finish group felt that as well as recommending a voluntary snow warden scheme be implemented for Lancashire it should also include the ability for volunteers to be rewarded through a time credit scheme.

In addition to this, it was also suggested that the council should explore any opportunities with the Youth Offending Team and Safer Lancashire Community Payback Teams to assist with snow clearing and gritting.



### **Conclusions**

From the findings received, the task and finish group felt that additional opportunities and initiatives could be explored to enhance policy and the provision of grit bins in Lancashire and these are reflected in its recommendations.

The task and finish group welcomed the work being undertaken by the council to address the issues of insurance and the low return rate for the snow clearing contract. Members of the group felt that county councillors could greatly assist in the promotion of the contract with local farmers in their divisions.

It was felt that the council should implement a voluntary snow warden scheme to enable community groups and parish and town councils to assist with snow clearance, gritting and grit bin monitoring throughout the county and enhance the council's winter service and the provision of grit bins.

## Recommendations

This report reflects the views and recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the county council. In many cases, suggestions are made for further consideration to be given to issues, and this would need to include a full assessment of the legal and financial risks and implications.

The task and finish group recommends that the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport:

1. Address the inconsistency of grit bin location data held in MapZone/MARIO/Highways Asset Management System and the spreadsheet data retained by the Highways Teams;
2. Permit the sponsorship of grit bins;
3. Amend the grit bin policy so that the views of the county councillor are sought on new/move or remove requests;
4. Review and act on the findings of the grit bin survey;
5. Review grit bin locations every two years;
6. Review alternative grit bin designs available, with particular focus on more robust lids/access/design;
7. Write to all Lancashire district councils to consider including the purchase of grit bins through Section 106 Agreements in relation to new housing developments;
8. Implement a voluntary snow warden scheme for community groups and parish and town councils in Lancashire to sign up and assist with snow clearance, gritting and grit bin monitoring;
9. Explore the opportunity to implement a time credit scheme to support volunteers, should a voluntary snow warden scheme be implemented;
10. Explore opportunities with the Youth Offending Team and Safer Lancashire Community Payback Teams to assist with snow clearing and gritting;
11. Invite all county councillors to promote the snow clearing contract tender once published on the county council's website;
12. Work with the National Farmers Union/NFU Mutual and farmers to address and allay concerns around liability.

**The task group is grateful for the support and advice of those who provided information and evidence to support its work.**

## Appendices

- ❖ **A – Clear snow from a road, path or cycleway (advice from gov.uk website retrieved 28 August 2018)**

<https://www.gov.uk/clear-snow-road-path-cycleway>

"You can clear snow and ice from pavements yourself. It's unlikely that you'll be sued or held responsible if someone is injured on a path or pavement if you've cleared it carefully.

### How to clear snow and ice

When you clear snow and ice:

- do it early in the day - it's easier to move fresh, loose snow
- don't use water - it might refreeze and turn to black ice
- use salt if possible - it will melt the ice or snow and stop it from refreezing overnight (but don't use the salt from salting bins as this is used to keep roads clear)
- you can use ash and sand if you don't have enough salt - it will provide grip underfoot
- pay extra attention when clearing steps and steep pathways - using more salt may help"

## ❖ B – Grit bin assessment form (2017/18 winter service plan)

Proposed/ Actual Location of Salt Bin	Date of Assessment	Assessed By	
Characteristic	Severity	Standard Scores	Assessed Score
Gradient	Greater than 1 in 10	75	
	1 in 10 to 1 in 30	40	
	Less than 1 in 30	Nil	
Severity of bend	Sharp	60	
	Moderate	25	
	Slight	Nil	
Close proximity to and falling towards	Heavily trafficked road	90	
	Moderately trafficked road	75	
	Lightly trafficked road	30	
Assessed traffic density at peak times	Moderate	40	
	Light	Nil	
Number of premises for which this is the only access	Over 50	30	
	20 - 50	20	
	0 - 20	Nil	
Pedestrian movements	High	60	
	Moderate	25	
	Low	Nil	
<b>TOTAL</b>			

*Please circle as appropriate:*

Request Approved    Request Not Approved    Keep Existing    Remove Existing

**For scores between 120 and 200, please provide additional justification:**

Signed:.....Date.....

❖ **C – Policy (WS7) provision of grit bins****8. Provision of Grit Bins****Policy WS 7****Provision of Grit Bins**

The County Council will only provide grit bins at new locations on roads maintainable at the public expense that are not on the Priority Road Network for precautionary salting. The County Council will assess requests for new grit bins based on the following criteria:

- exposed position or otherwise significantly affected by winter weather;
- combination of vertical and horizontal profile producing a hazardous condition such as a steep bend with adverse camber;
- junction hazard such as a steep road down to a junction with a main road;
- traffic density at peak times;
- high pedestrian movement such as to local centres and public transport interchanges, including railway stations;
- the number of premises for which the road is an access.

The County Council will not provide a grit bin at locations scoring less than 120, but will give further consideration to locations scoring between 120 and 200, with the final decision dependent on the judgement of an appropriate senior officer. Locations scoring more than 200 warrant the provision of a bin.

Where for any reason a grit bin requires replacing, the County Council will reassess the location. Should a location no longer warrant a grit bin, removal can only take place following consultation with relevant local councillors (County, District and Parish) and approval by an appropriate senior officer.

**8.1** All requests for new grit bins and reassessments of existing locations require completion of the Grit Bin Assessment form (Appendix C). In general, the more criteria met the higher the justification, but the assessment methodology allows for a degree of flexibility within the overall policy framework. Area Offices should send copies of approved Grit Bin Assessment forms to the Head of Asset Management to update records.

**8.2** The County Council currently has over 1,800 grit bins/heaps and has stockpiled untreated salt and sand with a 50:50 salt/sand mix to fill and maintain these bins/heaps. This will reduce the amount of salt used and thereby contribute to increased resilience whilst still providing de-icing in typical winter conditions and better traction on snow. Inquiries with other local authorities indicate a 50:50 mix to

be optimum, with further reductions in the proportion of rock salt potentially compromising the de-icing property. A facility for the mixing storage and distribution of this material is operational at Myerscough Smithy, Samlesbury.

**8.3** All County Council grit bins will have a 'Highway Use Only' label attached to discourage misuse of the material and each bin will be identifiable by a unique reference number. The County Council will monitor the use of material and restock as required, but cannot guarantee to maintain supplies of material to all grit bins at all times as this will ultimately depend on the continuing availability of material.

## ❖ **Annex A - Road surface treatment level and recommendations**

Following the resolution of the Internal Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 July 2018, the task and finish group received a copy of a draft report on a proposal to change the road surface treatment intervention level from the current plus 1 degree to plus 0.5 degree for the 2018/19 winter season. The report would be presented to Cabinet at its meeting scheduled for 9 August 2018.

The proposal set out the rationale to reduce the level of the forecast road surface temperature to falling below plus 0.5 degree, before gritting of the route would be instructed. This was based on evidence gathered over the previous two winter seasons and with consideration by county council decision makers (Area Duty Officers – ADO). It was noted that the advancement of forecast and monitoring technology, equipment developments, existing salt storage and fleet management arrangements provided an opportunity to reduce winter maintenance costs and disruption to ordinary daytime highway maintenance activities due to downtime.

A summary of the treatments undertaken over the previous two winters was provided and compared with the same scenario at the proposed plus 0.5 degree treatment intervention level. Of the 7434 individual route treatments undertaken countywide, the proposed treatment intervention level would have resulted in an overall reduction of 894 individual route treatments and a salt usage reduction of approximately 3600 tonnes. Whilst this would have contributed significantly to the cost saving, it would also have represented a significant reduction in the amount of natural mineral used.

In essence the evidence suggested that gritting had been instructed when it was not necessarily required and that an intervention level of plus 1 degree was too pessimistic.

It was reported that officers had benchmarked treatment intervention levels with neighbouring authorities. Fifty percent of neighbouring authorities had reduced their intervention levels to +0.0C. It was stated that Highways England was currently reviewing its treatment intervention level for motorways and trunk roads in England. It was confirmed that there was no guidance on trigger levels. However, a new code of practice – "Well Managed Highway Infrastructure" was due to be published soon.

The task and finish group was informed that the accuracy of forecasts had improved in recent years. Previously forecasts were made using increments of a degree. However, recent advancements in technology provided readings in increments of 0.1 degree. The county council had contracted MetDesk as its third party forecaster. It was highlighted that reducing the intervention level also reduced the margin for error by the forecaster and subsequent lack of action by the council. The third party forecaster would also be informed of the council's reduced intervention level and



would report to the council accordingly allowing the decision maker to instruct reactive treatment to the network.

It was reported the decision making process would not be affected by the change to the intervention level and that consequently there would be no increased risk to the council from misinterpretation of the forecast by the area duty officer. All area duty officers had recently undertaken the Institute of Highways Engineers (IHE) Professional Certificate in Winter Services Decisions Makers course – a recognised national accreditation.

On whether the reduction would give more capacity to grit more secondary routes, it was highlighted that the criteria for gritting secondary routes would remain the same – officers would continue to make decisions on priority routes only.

In discussing recommendations, the task and finish group welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport's proposal prior to any decision being taken. Whilst one member wished for the intervention level to remain unchanged, there was a consensus that the proposal be approved by Cabinet with a recommendation that the Internal Scrutiny Committee be asked to review the impact of the revised intervention level on the forthcoming winter service and for this review to take place in Spring 2019.

The task and finish group agreed to recommend Cabinet to:

1. Approve the proposal to reduce the treatment intervention level; and
2. Request the Internal Scrutiny Committee in Spring 2019 to review the impact of its implementation on the forthcoming winter service.

Cabinet at its meeting on 10 August 2018 resolved:

That;

1. The recommendations of the Internal Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish Group on the proposed lowering of the treatment intervention level as set out in the report be noted;
2. The proposed amendment to the Winter Service Plan, as set out in the report, be approved.