



**Performance and Finance Select
Committee**

16th February 2010

For Information

Wards Affected:
ALL

Report Title: Winter Maintenance 2009/10

Background.

Gritting is undertaken by our waste services contractor, Veolia, using 6 specialised vehicles. These vehicles are stationed at Veolia's depot in Alperton and travel to Harrow for loading of road salt.

Brent does not possess a salt storage facility. We have, for a number of years, relied on an arrangement whereby the London Borough of Harrow purchases salt on our behalf. Harrow stores this salt. They also load our gritting vehicles on demand. This is an arrangement that has always worked reasonably well.

Veolia are contractually required to grit an approved network of priority streets. This network comprises main arterial roads, bus routes, hilly areas, town centres and areas in the immediate vicinity of schools, hospitals and stations. This is to ensure the emergency services, public transport and town centres remain functioning during winter weather. This work is undertaken with respect to the Highways Act Section 41, amended by Section 111 of the 2003 Railways and Transport Act. This gives the council a duty to keep roads free of ice and snow as far as is reasonably practicable. This is not an absolute duty as we are constrained by time, storage capacity and budgets. We are not expected to keep roads completely free from ice and snow even on treated parts of the network. In essence, this means that many roads and nearly all pavements will not be treated.

Budget.

The current budget for winter maintenance is set out below.

Grit Bins	£5,600
Road Salt	£47,100
Salt Storage	£34,700
Salt Loading	£22,400
Gritters	£60,792
Gritting Labour	£142,188
Weather Information Service	£3,500
Call Out	£1,200
TOTAL	£317,480

The Operation - December 2009 to date.

At the start of this winter we had 1400 tonnes of road salt in stock. This represents our full allocated capacity at the Harrow storage facility. Harrow held a similar amount for themselves.

As a consequence of London-wide snow disruption in February 2009, the government issued guidance to local authorities advising them that they should store enough salt for 6 days of heavy gritting. For Brent, this is 900 tonnes. Therefore, our initial stock exceeded government guidelines. In addition, we considered it prudent to order 2 further resupply deliveries in November. This was for 800 tonnes in total - to be delivered at the end of December and the end of January. This would give Brent a full year total of 2200 tonnes. This far exceeded the usage in previous years (see table below).

Year	Tonnes of Salt
2004/2005	1001 tonnes
2005/2006	792
2006/2007	382
2007/2008	371
2008/2009	986

In the current financial year to 18th January 2010 we have used 1517 tonnes.

This winter has been unusually cold. Indeed, there are claims it has been the most severe winter for 30 years. The snowfall came much earlier than in previous years and low temperatures have been endured for an unusually extended period.

The first snowfall came on December 16th and persisted for a number of days. Between the 16th and the 24th December we used 917 tonnes, 69 tonnes short of what had been used during the whole of the previous winter. During that same period, Veolia's gritters had been called out 22 times.

At that time, the first stories of a nationwide salt shortage began to emerge. Other parts of the UK had experienced significant snowfall and many authorities had vastly depleted stocks. It became apparent that the country's two main salt suppliers needed to prioritise those authorities in greatest need. We were informed by our supplier that they could no longer guarantee the supply of our December order.

At that time, we still had 500 tonnes of road salt in stock. Most London authorities found themselves in a similar position. The London Local Authorities Control Centre



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(LLACC) was convened to distribute and co-ordinate London's remaining salt supplies. Brent received 150 tonnes from Ealing. A further 141 tonnes was obtained from TfL.

There was further heavy snowfall on the 7th January. Again, this persisted for a number of days. We quickly used much of our remaining salt. We started rationing our stock going into the weekend of 9/10th January. At this point, we started treating a reduced priority network and stopped refilling grit bins. The weather improved over that weekend and our stock remained intact. However, there was further heavy snowfall on Wednesday 13th January. This depleted our stock to the lowest level so far – 19 tonnes.

In response to the widening national concern over salt supplies, the government convened the Salt Cell which sought to co-ordinate and prioritise the distribution of salt from the mines. Brent was notified that 500 tonnes of our outstanding order would be released. This was expected on Saturday the 10th January but did not arrive.

On enquiry, we were advised that the transport infrastructure was struggling to cope and that we should seek to collect the supplies ourselves. Veolia collected 315 tonnes.

We currently have 427 tonnes in stock. A further 75 tonnes is due for collection this week. We are now refilling grit bins.

Spend to date.

	Budget	Spend to date (20th January
2010)		
Grit Bins	£5,600	£6,000
Road Salt	£47,100	£60,985
Salt Storage	£34,700	£34,700 (Fixed cost)
Salt Loading	£22,400	£72,816
Gritters	£60,792	££60,792 (Fixed cost)
Gritting Labour	£142,188	£64,000
Weather Information Service	£3,500	£3,500 (Fixed cost)
Call Out	£1,200	£1,200 (Fixed cost)
TOTAL	£317,480	£303,993 (to date)

Other issues.

- Officers feel the council maintained road salt stocks at a level greater than recommended by the Government. Veolia's response has been good and their work has been of a very high standard within the requirements set out in the contract. All priority routes have been kept clear. Indeed, the emergency services and TfL have been complimentary in recent correspondence.



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- We have been able to comply with an emergency request for support from the London Ambulance Service by treating station forecourts in Brent.
- We have been able to respond to all police requests for spot gritting.
- Officers have been happy with the quality of advice from the WIS (Weather Information Service) and feel that the opportunity to speak with forecasters over any 24 hour period has been crucial.
- Officers are happy that the current priority network is comprehensive enough to comply with legal requirements and to keep Brent functioning in the event of ice and heavy snowfall. There is no pressing technical need for the network to be significantly extended. We will, however, comply with a TfL request for 5 roads to be added.
- Despite all this, public dissatisfaction has been moderately high.
- There is a perception amongst residents, the media and local politicians that all roads and pavements should be treated. This was not part of the current contact for winter maintenance and never has been a requirement in the past.
- There is a need to better manage that expectation.
- Any extension of the network will require new investment.
- If this is an expectation, we must gauge the need for further investment against the likelihood, or otherwise, of future winters being similarly severe.
- There has been demand for grit bins to be installed at new locations. Again, this is a demand we are not able to satisfy. Any extension of this network will require new investment.
- Our shared arrangement with Harrow has served us well. However, a salt storage facility within Brent may improve response times. Again, this will require significant new investment.
- Waste collections very often need to be suspended as a consequence of heavy snowfall. Road conditions, especially in untreated areas, make the operation unsafe. Collection crews are redeployed, along with street cleansing teams, on clearing snow and ice. These collections are resumed as soon as conditions allow. Very often this means catch-up collections need to be made outside normal working hours. This comes at additional cost to Brent.



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Conclusion.

Although Brent did not run out of road salt we clearly need to review future stock levels along with all other authorities and Central Government. After this winter we need to review whether Members wish to enhance the winter maintenance service as expectation is in many areas currently exceed the agreed specification for the service.

Staff in Streetcare and Veolia have worked extended hours, often during the night to keep priority routes open. Within the resources available and despite the non delivery of promised salt, they have performed a good job during one of the coldest periods of weather in London for three decades.



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