

Council Leader Jenny Dawe talks snow

✖ The City of Edinburgh Council Leader Jenny Dawe has sent us an update on the current position.

“As we enter into our second weekend of dire weather, with cold weather expected to last for a further 12 days, I am taking the opportunity to give you an update on the situation.

During the past week, Edinburgh has experienced its heaviest snowfall in nearly 50 years. Combined with freezing temperatures, it has been a real challenge to keep the city moving and to continue to provide services. As you will know, road, air and rail services have all been affected. The Airport struggled to reopen and weather conditions closed the Forth Road Bridge for the first time ever.

I am very pleased to report that our staff, partner organisations and the public of Edinburgh have responded to this exceptional challenge with an outstanding effort. Many people have commented on the welcome sight of so many Lothian Buses operating, albeit sometimes on diverted routes.

Council officers and crews directly involved in keeping the city moving have been working round the clock, with many more battling the elements to get into work. I want to thank all of them, especially those who are helping to care for our more vulnerable citizens and maintaining other essential services.

Of course, the emergency services, transport organisations, shops, businesses and communities have all played a vital role too in trying to keep city life running normally and I thank them on behalf of everyone in the Council.

Council response

We learned lessons from last winter's severe weather and,

despite the earlier than usual snowy weather, this time we have more road salt, more equipment, more staff deployed and better arrangements for helping vulnerable people. We are operating to an agreed emergency plan.

Our response to the snow and freezing cold has been operating at a high level for a week now. It is impossible to mention every aspect of our staff's work, but I want to highlight the following:

- 24-hour shifts gritting and clearing snow from pavements and roads, with the initial prioritisation of Category 1 roads, which are the vital trunk routes/bus routes and routes to hospitals

- keeping open those schools where a risk assessment shows it is safe and practicable to do so

- opening and operating our Community facilities as much as possible

- turning out for emergencies with dangerous buildings

- maintaining contact with clients of our day centres and offering assistance where required

- operating care homes and respite centres

- providing personal care for our most vulnerable citizens, including those in sheltered housing

- emergency repairs to essential services in Council houses

- emergency supplies for those with an urgent need and unable to access help for shopping.

There has been close communication between Council staff to help ensure resources have been targetted at the right priorities, such as the hardest-hit areas and routes that are important for health services.

With 30-50cm of snow falling in one four-hour period, for example, it is inevitably the case that our crews have had to remain largely focussed on our 'Category 1' routes, meaning they have had little opportunity to start work on areas such as residential streets. We have allocated extra staff

(including streetcleaning, gardening, refuse collection staff and office volunteers) to snow clearing and efforts have successfully secured additional support – both of people and machinery. We are using an average of 600 tonnes a day of salt.

‘Good neighbours’

My appreciation also goes to everyone in Edinburgh for their patience during this unprecedented period of severe weather, and particularly anyone who has been looking out for frail, disabled or elderly neighbours. There are many stories of Edinburgh residents being community spirited, from digging out paths to providing 4x4s.

By the way, don’t worry that you should not clear snow for fear of someone slipping on the cleared area and suing you for damages. As long as you are attempting to make the area safer, it is fine to clear a path.

I am sure there are many unsung heroes who deserve recognition and I commend Radio Forth’s ‘snow patroller’ initiative to highlight such efforts . I would encourage everyone to do what they can to look after those around them and be a good neighbour.

If you are unable to help but know someone who needs assistance, our Social Care Direct team on 0131 200 2324 (out of hours service in evenings and weekends at 0800 731 6969) will arrange appropriate follow up.

Looking ahead

At the moment, the forecast appears to show that we will have some respite from the snow. However, with temperatures remaining so low, it means there is still a massive challenge to clear what is already there. Rest assured, this is our number one priority at the moment and our efforts will continue unabated. In the meantime, please bear with us while our staff keep working hard to return the city and services

back to normal as quickly as possible.

I am also acutely aware of the significant economic impact of the severe weather for all businesses, but especially shops and others for which the festive period is particularly important. Our winter festival programme once again offers a fantastic range of activities and I sincerely hope that we will all be able to look forward soon to a Christmas and Hogmanay which is memorable for all the right reasons.

For updates, visit the Council website's Severe Weather section.