

# Edinburgh councillor blogs – Councillor Scott Arthur on gritting pavements

Last week in Full Council I supported the call for gritting across the city to be reviewed. I did this whilst recognising the hard work Council staff have invested in keeping our roads, footpaths and cycle paths free from ice and snow during what I feel has been quite a hard winter. The importance of their work became clear to me last month.



On the evening of the 13th of December I stepped out of the train from London to find Princes Street was like an ice rink. At that point, I did wonder what the rest of the city must be like if Princes Street was not safe. We found out in the Evening News 2 days later. 71 year old Michael Wilczynski slipped, broke his ankle and had to wait over three hours on the pavement for an ambulance. He was one of at least 21 people who slipped on ice that day and had to call on the NHS.

We now know there were 500 such slips in December which resulted in visit to A&E – a huge economic and human cost. I don't doubt some of these people may have gone on to put extra pressure on our already stressed social care system.

We should not underestimate the extent to which many older people fear having a slip like Mr Wilczynski's. Indeed, I spoke to a retired headteacher last week who said he'd been trapped in his house for five days when we had a snow fall earlier this month. Likewise, a friend from my church told me she had been stuck at home for a week.

So if we are going to revisit gritting routes, I would urge

the City of Edinburgh Council to give higher priority to areas with greater populations of older people. A second consideration must be altitude. My house is in Buckstone – a full 600 feet higher than Leith, and 300 feet above Morningside.

Whilst people in my Ward don't mind looking down on people in Morningside, that extra elevation means we are more likely to get snow and when we do get it it stays for longer. When we had overnight snowfall on the 25th of December, it took until the 29th for the pavement snow ploughs to reach my Ward. When I went to thank the Council staff for working over the Christmas break, the driver told me he'd been clearing the snow for a few days but had not seen anything like the amount we had experienced in Colinton/Fairmilehead. This was infuriating! Clearly, we need to prioritise based on altitude better.

A third consideration is resilience. Over the Christmas break I encouraged my constituents to grit the public paths outside their home, request grit bin refills and even ask for a new grit bin if they felt one was needed.

When we had our next snow fall almost three weeks later I found that grit bins were still empty, the system for requesting new grit bins was failing and as a result people are getting hurt.

One resident told me about how he watched with his heart in his mouth as two people tried to cycle up an icy West Mill Road – this is a steep street used by many cyclists to access the Water of Leith cycle path. The grit bins were empty and the road was not gritted.

I have raised all these issues with the gritting team. I received, without asking, an unreserved apology for my constituents and a clear commitment that matters will improve. Notwithstanding the school teacher's car that skidded on ice

last week and landed in my constituent's front garden, I feel matters are improving.

The importance of attitude, the age of the local population and the importance of improving resilience are now on the agenda more than ever. Despite this, I was more than happy to support the request that a review is undertaken on this key issue.

I hope that as part of that review the Council engages the public more about how this service is run and what its priorities should be.