

# **Council 'should not be surprised' by spells of winter weather**

**The council is to review the way it deals with winter weather at a future meeting of the Transport & Environment Committee.**

**Before that takes place, some questions on the subject of snow and ice were asked by councillors at Thursday's full council meeting.**

Cllr Claire Miller asked for priority to be given to pavements and cycle paths when it comes to the council's treatment of roads and pavements during spells of winter weather. She said that there had been a number of residents reporting slips and falls to her, and her councillor colleagues, during the recent bad weather, and that a higher level of priority is necessary owing to the increase in walking and cycling. Cllr Miller also asked that the council evaluates innovations in technology which she thought might help, and suggested this would include the types of de-icer suitable for pavements and cycle paths, vehicles and equipment, and grit bin sensors.

Fellow Green councillor Gavin Corbett said this issue was one which the council discusses annually. He highlighted that there are a number of citizens who want to help on secondary streets, and suggested that the scheme of snow wardens should

be reviewed which might enhance the neighbourhood resilience which has been so evident during the pandemic.

Cllr Susan Webber asked for more grit bins to be added to the 3,000 which the council is already responsible for all over the city. Conservative councillor Jason Rust pointed out that snow and ice clearance is a core council service, but it is one that leaves huge swathes of suburban Edinburgh with little or no gritting treatment. He said there were many streets in Colinton where even Priority 1 routes were left untreated, and that the empty grit bins are a huge danger to those who live in these areas.

Cllr Rust accused the council administration of being “surprised” by the winter weather when it arrived “just like the contents of their Christmas stockings”.

Cllr Kevin Lang admitted that while keeping the roads and pavements safe is an enormous task, he had already penned a question of his own about grit bins and said that there are [legitimate concerns](#) over the reaction by the council to the recent spell of cold weather. He pointed out that half of the requests to refill grit bins took two weeks or more to be addressed.

He said: “We don’t have a target response time. We don’t have a measure of what good is. Why does that matter? But what we can do is help communities to help themselves. One of the best ways to do that is to ensure grit bins are kept full.

“I find people who want to help or do their bit but in too many instances where you have willing volunteers, there is no salt to make their area safe.

“The Transport Convener cannot be blamed for the weather, and she is right, but we can blame her for the way the council prepares and responds. The LibDems believe we can do better.”

Cllr Hal Osler said the transport hierarchy is important and

how we deal with it speaks volumes. She pointed out that on Crewe Road South in her ward which is a Priority one gritting route – the roads were treated but the pavements came last. She said that the message is that if you drive you will be much safer and the temporary cycle lanes may have been treated, but the streets which link the cycleways such as the NCN1 may not. She added that the grit bins in Craighleith were unfilled, and no response came to the requests that they were refilled.

Cllr Scott Arthur said it is a matter of resources rather than the willingness of staff or indeed action by the public. He mentioned one example of Allanmuir Health Centre where they were running their first day of Covid-19 vaccinations. He said everyone was able to keep their appointments, because there was a big effort on the part of council staff to clear the paths. What is interesting is that there have been problems right from the start. I think we should be prepared for more than just a quick event followed by a quick thaw.

“I know we are working within a very limited budget. The last time we reviewed this, I thought we should concentrate on citizen stewardship and that has not been done. I hope we can do that in this coming review.”

Cllr Jim Campbell said it is in nobody's interests that emergency vehicles cannot get around in inclement weather, so it is appropriate to clear main roads first. It facilitates public transport and the movement of goods around the city. He commented: “I am surprised this has not been successfully reviewed in the four years since I was elected.”

Cllr Lesley Macinnes who is the Transport Convener, supported the Greens motion to continue to develop the service and pointed out some technological advances such as thermal mapping. She explained that contrary to some comments the grit bins were all replenished at the start of the winter season.

Cllr Macinnes explained that because of the prolonged winter weather there has been more salt put down on roads and streets since the “Beast from the East” in 2018. She also said that the allocated budget has remained the same for the last six years with no cuts to the service. Most footway gritting routes are in the south west of the city owing to the elevation.

Cllr Nick Cook described himself as the former TEC spokesman of the Conservative Group and claimed these are warm words not followed through by concrete action. He said : “We should not be surprised by winter weather. This is a core service and we must do better.”

35 votes were cast in favour of Cllr Miller’s motion.