

Opinion – Council is ‘failing residents with gritting policy’

by Cllr Ashley Graczyk

Edinburgh has had heavy snowfall throughout February, and many local residents have taken to social media to complain about The City of Edinburgh Council’s approach to gritting the streets and pavements during this period.

They have been frustrated by the council’s failure to clear pavements, for days at a time, even in some of the most heavily populated areas of the city, stranding many people inside their homes.

In one such area in my ward, Gorgie-Dalry town centre, the Council failed to clear any pavements for fully five days following heavy snow showers. This was despite the fact that multiple requests and reports were made by local residents, community groups and the Community Council, all of whom were

concerned about the direct impact on the wellbeing of local residents who were unable to safely exercise, reach essential services or carry out care responsibilities.

The current policy completely fails to take account of some very basic priorities that are purportedly supported by the Council. First of all, it prioritises drivers and car users over pedestrians and cyclists. This is not consistent with the council's claims to put walking and wheeling at the top of the travel hierarchy. In my ward, most if not all streets – including arterial routes and side streets serving hundreds of households – were absolutely impassable for days. This issue was particularly acute for anybody in a wheelchair, pushing a buggy or with reduced mobility issues. Even for mobile residents the streets were extremely treacherous, as demonstrated by the number of accidents reported.

The evidence shows us that where pavements are cleared first, there is a significant reduction in the number of accidents and a corresponding fall in hospital admissions. This is because most accidents in such conditions happen to pedestrians and cyclists. There is also an equalities point in the emerging evidence base, as the conscious choice to clear roads first prioritises drivers and commuters who are disproportionately men. It is well established that women make up both the majority of formal and informal carers, and in public transport terms are more likely to walk or use public transport. Prioritising care services and accessibility for all is absolutely essential.

Moreover, we are currently in the midst of a global pandemic.

The Council has adopted some piecemeal infrastructural changes to the configuration of streets to promote social distancing, but these are far less ambitious and less successful than multiple examples in other parts of Scotland and the rest of the world. They have also been largely abandoned with cycle and pedestrian paths uncleared during the recent storms,

showing just how tokenistic they are. I know many people who are struggling during this lockdown period, and jeopardising their opportunities to safely get fresh air, exercise and reach essential services is unacceptable.

I demand that this issue is now addressed at a structural level and the council's gritting prioritisation policy changed to ensure that residents can safely leave their houses in all winter conditions. It is after all no surprise that we get snow during the Scottish winter, so it is unacceptable for the council to be so ill-prepared. We need to review the gritting prioritisation policies to ensure pavements are cleared at the same time, or before, roads on arterial routes and ensure that the programme provides accessibility for the greatest number of people in the shortest time possible.

I commend the advocacy of Living Streets Edinburgh and others on this issue and will be raising a motion with the Transport and Environment Committee to ensure these erroneous policies are corrected.

Cllr Ashley Graczyk is the Independent councillor for Sighthill/Gorgie on The City of Edinburgh Council.



Edinburgh in the Snow. Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam
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