

Roads

Proactive PR with Elected Members and Public

South Lanarkshire Council

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South Lanarkshire place a high priority on taking care of their road network, and that this is reflected in its roads cost data. The data shows that its road network has lower levels of disrepair compared to the Scottish average and other councils, and the case study details some of the ways it achieve higher service levels compared to others.

Background

South Lanarkshire Council has placed a strategic priority on ensuring its roads are safe and well cared for, especially in the winter months. This is reflected in its roads costs for maintenance of roads per kilometre, which is higher than the Scottish average of £10,789 at £13,936 (although the council has managed to reduce the overall cost by 41% since 10/11).

The service has adopted a very pro-active programme of communications with elected members and the public to outline the key service messages and service level standards the public can expect in relation to the Winter Roads Service. The aim here is to manage expectations and promote “self-help”. These are outlined below:

Key Messages

- This Council provides a high level of service relative to others · Strong commitment to keep our main roads open
- Major service improvements initiated in recent years
- But – Mother Nature can still severely challenge us

The Service levels to expect

- Carriageways – we treat 52% of our network on a precautionary basis (Scottish average 44%)
- Footways – generally main town centre routes only
- During severe weather (snow)
 - Further ‘secondary’ carriageway routes
 - Further ‘accessibility’ footway routes

Service levels not to expect

- Carriageways in residential areas are generally not routinely treated

- Footways in residential areas are generally not routinely treated
- Self-help message promoted
- However, in severe weather we will do as much as our resource permit in these areas

Key Activities

Every year around late September/ October the roads team have a pre winter briefing with elected members. At these meetings they will discuss the previous winter, costs etc. as well as going through the service review that takes place during the summer to prepare for the coming winter. This will usually generate some changes in the way the service is delivered and these changes are explained to elected members. They also inform the elected member's on what to expect and what not to expect in terms of level of gritting.

For all council staff they have a winter awareness week. For one week a new message will be communicated to staff each day regarding preparation for winter, this can be suggestions about driving in snow, preparing a vehicle for winter, what to do at home and also about work arrangements if the weather is very bad.

Corporate "winter awareness" leaflets are prepared and made available at key council facilities. This provides useful information about preparing for winter and the levels of winter maintenance service to expect.

An article is carried in a council newspaper distributed to all households in the council area. This explains what to expect, and what not to expect and promotes the "self help" message.

Website advances - The council website also shows the mapping of gritting routes as well as the locations of grit bins.

Twitter is also used to keep the public informed and up to date, weather information is tweeted along with severe weather warnings. Our gritting decisions are also tweeted three times each day as decisions are made.

Daily severe weather bulletins are sent to elected members when a period of severe weather is experienced. This confirms our actions over the past 24 hours and provides the forecast and planned response for the next 24 hours. This keeps elected members well informed.

Finally the press are usually invited down to a local depot immediately ahead of the winter period. It is explained to them the work that is done, what they do and what they don't. The press also get the opportunity to go around the depot, have a look in the gritters and talk with the drivers.

Benefits and Impact

This approach has been successful in managing the public and elected member's expectations. They are now far better informed of what to expect and also just as importantly, what not to expect. This has supported an investment strategy involving higher comparative expenditure, but continues to deliver comparatively better road conditions than the average (and are continuing to improve).

