

# Winter readiness survey

## 2011/12





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# Summary

This report provides findings from an online survey of all councils who carry out winter weather gritting activities<sup>1</sup>, conducted in September 2011.

The online survey was launched on Friday 5 September 2011, and sent to officers with responsibility for winter weather gritting activities; by the 26 September 2011 a response rate of 53 per cent had been achieved.

## Key findings

### Salt stocks

- Fifty-one per cent of councils aimed to have more salt in stock for this year's winter gritting season than last year's, with 48 per cent aiming for the same amount of stock.
  - In total, responding councils used 74 per cent of their salt stock in the last winter gritting season, with a median average of 4,000 tonnes of grit being used per council.
  - This season, councils are aiming to have a median average of 4,900 tonnes of grit in stock at the start, compared to 3,400 tonnes at the start of last season.
  - Eighty-five per cent of councils stated that their suppliers had been able to provide all the salt required for the start of this winter gritting season, with four per cent stating no and the remainder being unsure.
- The four per cent (four councils) who had not received all the salt ordered were short by a median average of 500 tonnes each.
  - Eight per cent of councils had a contract with a foreign salt supplier, whilst 88 per cent of councils did not and the remainder did not know. Of the eight per cent of councils who had a contract, one council stated this was a new arrangement for this year's winter gritting season.

### Resources

- Ninety-two councils provided data on the number of full-sized gritters and mini gritters owned or leased by their council; councils owned or leased a median average of eight full-sized gritters and one mini gritter.
- Twenty-six councils had purchased full-sized gritters in the past 12 months, with a median of three gritters for each of these councils. Twenty-eight councils had purchased mini/specialist gritters, with a median average of two gritters per council.
- Responding councils covered a median average of 37 per cent of their road networks with gritting routes.

<sup>1</sup> This is all councils except districts.



### **Innovative practice**

- Nearly two fifths of councils (37 per cent) were planning to share their salt stocks with other councils.
- Eighty-two per cent of councils were using community grit bins so members of the public could access salt, whilst 72 per cent of councils were using the global positioning system (GPS) to help manage their gritting activities.

### **Communications**

- Ninety-five per cent of councils said that they were planning to communicate their winter service plan/routes for this year's winter gritting season, with two per cent stating they would not and three per cent not knowing.
- Nearly all councils (99 per cent) stated that they would be using their council's web page to provide instant web updates to inform residents in detail about gritting routes and general gritting activities in this winter season; 41 per cent stated that they would be using Twitter.

# Introduction

The Local Government Association is preparing for this winter by gathering information about councils' plans and preparations in case of severe weather.

This report provides findings from an online survey of all councils who carry out winter weather gritting activities<sup>2</sup>.



<sup>2</sup> This is all councils except districts.

# Methodology

The online survey was launched on Monday 5 September 2011, and sent to officers with responsibility for winter weather gritting activities. Two reminder emails were sent to respondents who had yet to complete the survey and, by the 26 September 2011, 92 councils had responded, yielding a response rate of 53 per cent.

The tables below show response to the overall questionnaire by both council type and region:

**Table 1: Response rate by council type**

Council type	Response rate (%)	Base
English unitary	59	56
London borough	52	33
Metropolitan district	42	36
Shire county	63	27
Welsh unitary	41	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>174</b>



**Table 2: Response rate by region**

Region	Response rate (%)	Base
East Midlands	56	9
East of England	55	11
London	52	33
North East	67	12
North West	48	23
South East	42	19
South West	69	16
Wales	41	22
West Midlands	71	14
Yorkshire and the Humber	47	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>174</b>

Please note that the winter gritting season starts on the 1 October.

Where figures are grossed for England and Wales, calculations have been made on the basis that those answering would be representative of non-responding councils in England and Wales.

Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

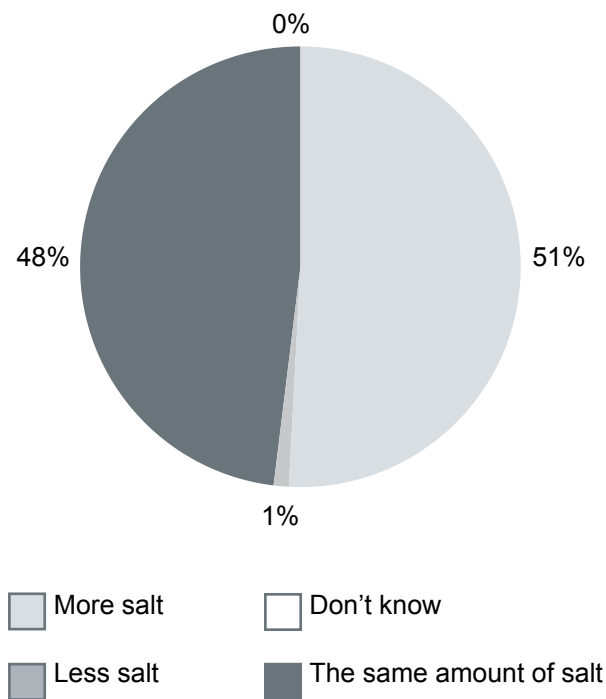
Where a finding is statistically significant this is stated within the report.

Where tables and figures report the base, this refers to the number of councils who responded to this question; please note that bases vary throughout the survey.

# Salt stocks

Respondents were asked whether their council aimed to have more, less or the same amount of salt in stock as last year's winter gritting season. Fifty-one per cent of councils aimed to have more salt in stock, with 48 per cent aiming for the same amount of stock.

**Figure 1:** For this winter season, is your council aiming to have in stock more salt, less salt or the same amount of salt as last year's winter season?



**Base:** all councils (92)

Councils were asked the reason why they had ordered more, less or the same amount of salt.

For the 51 per cent of councils who were aiming to have more salt in stock, common reasons included:

- councils' experience of national shortages in the last winter gritting season, and concerns about the reliability of their suppliers
- councils are looking to increase resilience and self-sufficiency for this winter gritting season
- councils have improved their salt storage capacity.

For the 48 per cent who answered the same amount of salt, most councils stated that this was due to the fact that they had no more storage capacity for an increased amount of salt stock, or that the amount of stock was adequate based on the last few severe winters.

All councils were asked to provide the total tonnage of salt they had in stock over the 2010/11 winter gritting season (ie the total ordered over the course of the season) and the total tonnage of salt that they had used in the 2010/11 winter gritting season.

Eighty-six councils provided data on the total amount of salt they had in stock over the course of the season, and the tonnage they used in last year's winter gritting season. There was a median average of 5,500 tonnes in stock per council throughout the season, and 4,000 tonnes of grit used per council in last year's season. In total, councils used 74 per cent of their stock.

**Table 3: Total amount of salt in stock and used, in tonnes**

Please state the total amount of salt, in tonnes, your council

- a) had in stock throughout the whole of the last winter gritting season (2010/11) (ie the total amount ordered over the course of the last winter gritting season) and  
b) actually used in the last winter gritting season (2010/11)

Salt stocks	Total for all councils (tonnes)	Median average per councils (tonnes)	Mean average per councils (tonnes)	Estimated total for England and Wales <sup>3</sup> (tonnes)	Base
Had in stock throughout the last winter gritting season (2010/11)	884,865	5,500	10,300	1,600,000	86
Total used in the last winter gritting season (2010/11)	656,053	3,900	7,600	1,200,000	86

**Note:** total is the amount of salt in stock or used in 2010/11 by responding authorities who were able to provide data for both elements of this question.

If this is used as an indication of the likely picture in non-responding authorities, councils in England and Wales had in stock throughout the last winter gritting season an estimated total of around 1.6 million tonnes of grit; they used an estimated 1.2 million tonnes of grit.

Ninety two councils provided data on the amount of salt they were aiming to have in stock at the start of this year's (2011/12) winter gritting season. The median average amount of salt that was in stock was 4,900 tonnes, compared to a median average of 3,400 tonnes in 2010/11.

**Table 4: Please state the total amount of salt, in tonnes, your council aims to have in stock at the start of this winter gritting season (2011/12)**

	Total for all councils (tonnes)	Median councils per authority (tonnes)	Mean councils per authority (tonnes)	Estimated total for England and Wales <sup>4</sup> (tonnes)	Base
At the start of this year's winter gritting season (2011/12)	768,415	4,900	8,400	1,400,000	92
At the start of last year's winter gritting season (2009/10) <sup>5</sup>	646,177	3,400	7,800	1,200,000	83

**Note:** total is the amount held or expected by responding authorities who were able to provide data for both elements of this question.

3 Estimated numbers for England and Wales are grossed figures. The grossed figure is calculated through taking a mean average for respondents by authority type as an indication of the response for non-respondents.

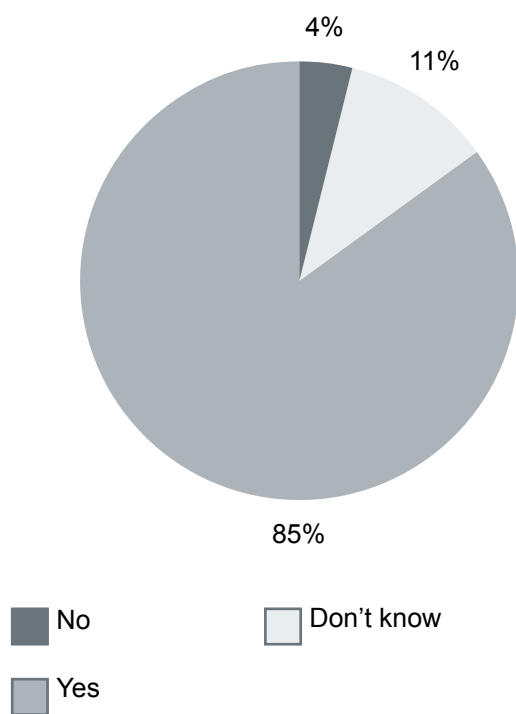
4 Estimated numbers for England and Wales are grossed figures. The grossed figure is calculated through taking a mean average for respondents by authority type as an indication of the response for non respondents.

5 Data for 2010/11 is taken from the 2010/11 Winter Preparedness survey, please see <http://tinyurl.com/WinterLGA>

If this total figure is used as an indication of the likely picture in non-responding authorities, councils in England aim to have in stock an estimated total of around 1.4 million tonnes of grit at the start of this year's winter gritting season.

All respondents were asked whether their suppliers had been able to provide all the salt their council required for the start of this winter gritting season. Eighty-five per cent stated that suppliers had, with four per cent stating no and the remainder being unsure.

**Figure 2:** Have your suppliers been able to provide all the salt your council requires for the start of this winter gritting season?



**Base:** all councils (92)

Of the four per cent (four councils) who stated that their suppliers had not been able to provide enough salt, they were short by a median average of 500 tonnes each.

All respondents were asked whether their council has a contract with a foreign salt supplier. Eight per cent of councils did, whilst 88 per cent of councils did not. The remainder did not know.

The eight per cent (seven councils) who currently have a contract with a foreign salt supplier were asked if this was a new arrangement for the winter season. One council stated it was, with the remainder stating no.



# Resources

Ninety-two councils provided data on the number of full-sized gritters owned or leased by their authority. On average (median), councils owned or leased eight full-sized gritters.

Ninety-one councils provided data on the number of mini gritters owned or leased by their council. On average (median), councils owned or leased one mini gritter.

Councils were asked how many new gritters and mini gritters they had purchased in the last 12 months. Twenty-six councils had purchased new gritters, purchasing a median average of three per council. Twenty-eight councils had purchased new mini gritters, with an average of two purchased per council.

All councils were asked to provide detail on the total number of miles of road network<sup>6</sup> in their area, and of this, the number of miles covered by their gritting networks. Eighty-six councils provided detail on both; for these councils on median average 41 per cent of their road networks were covered by gritting routes.

**Table 5: Percentage of road network covered by gritting routes**

Network	Total for all councils (percentage)	Median average per council (percentage)	Mean average per council (percentage)	Base
Percentage of the network covered	37	41	45	86

**Note:** total is the percentage of road network covered in total for responding councils who were able to provide data for both elements of this question.

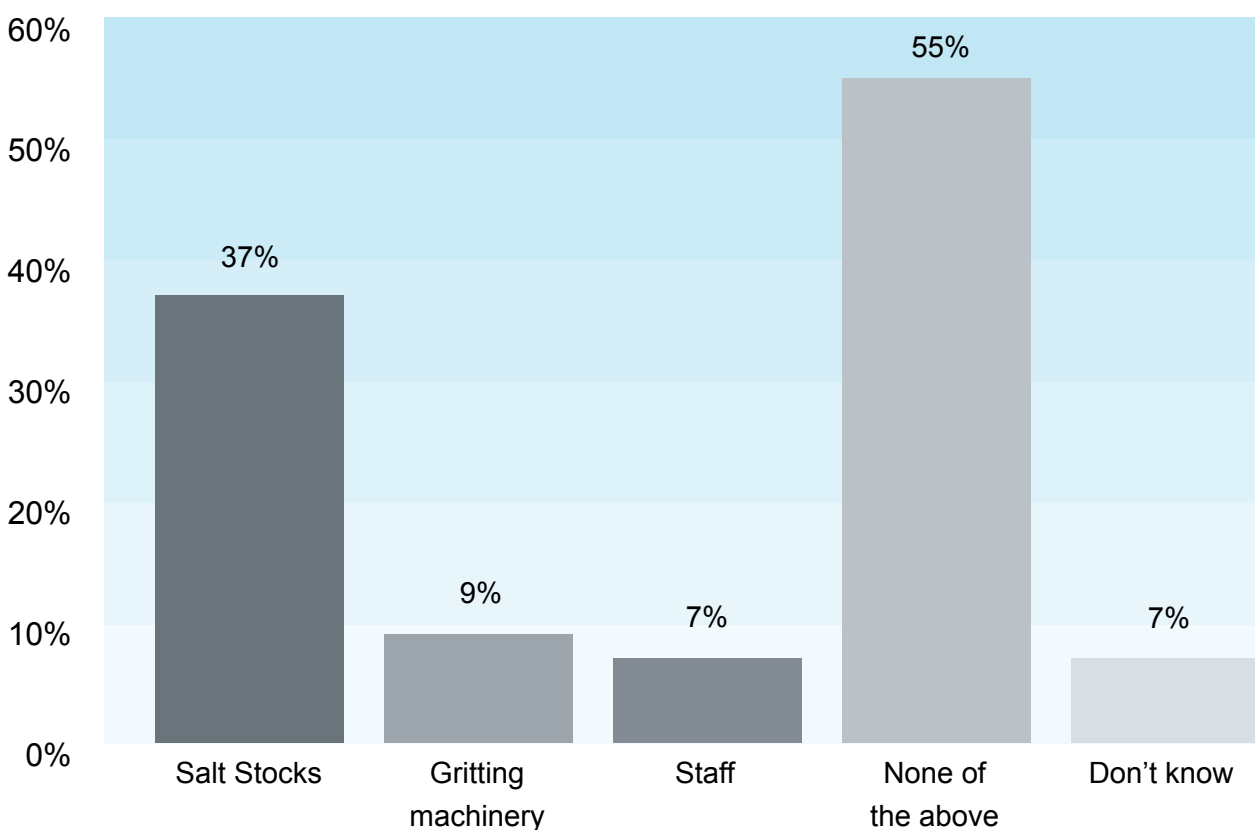
<sup>6</sup> Local authorities are responsible for all roads, except motorways and some major A roads.

# Innovative practice

All councils were asked which, if any, resources their council was planning to share with other councils in this year's winter gritting season. More than a third (38 per cent) of councils were planning to share resources in some way.

Nearly two-fifths (37 per cent) were planning to share salt stocks, with under 10 per cent planning to share either gritting machines or staff (nine and seven per cent respectively). The majority of councils (55 per cent) had no plans to share any resources.

**Figure 3:** Which of the following resources, if any, is your council planning to share with other councils during this year's winter gritting season?



**Base:** All authorities (92)

Councils frequently shared salt stocks, either through a formalised agreement (for example, sharing salt barns and other storage space) or on a basis of mutual aid as and when necessary (where they would share salt). Some councils stated that they were sharing salt stocks with other councils, but this was actually for the Highway Agency rather than a council. Some councils also shared salt stocks with parish and town councils.

All councils were asked if there were implementing any particular council or community based measures for this year's winter gritting season. Most councils were using the global positioning system (GPS) on gritters to manage the gritting process (72 per cent of councils).

Working with communities, most frequently councils were using community grit bins for members of the public to help themselves to salt (82 per cent of councils).

Other actions taken within councils, included different methods of treating snow (for example, salt and sand, agricultural bi products), using specialised equipment to treat snow on pavements and footpaths, and deploying staff from other areas of the council (for example, parks) to help treat the snow.

Other actions taken within communities included working directly with parish councils to combat wintry conditions, appointing snow wardens (sometimes via parish councils) and providing community snow shovels and salt (either freely or at a low cost).

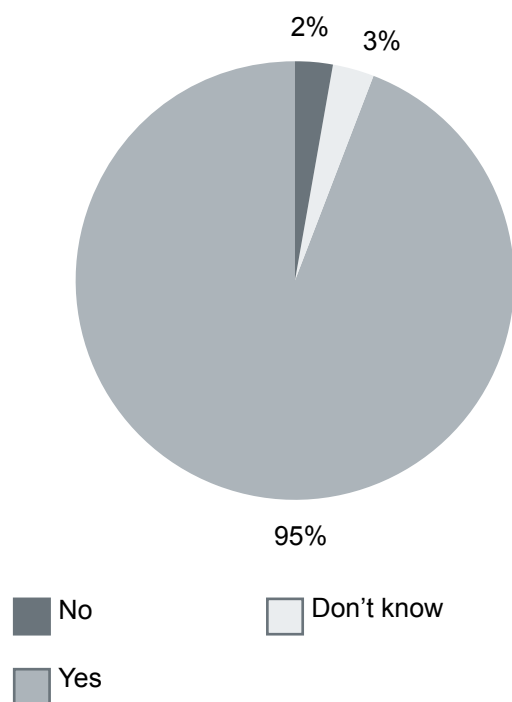
**Table 6: Which of the following measures, if any, does your council plan to implement for this year's winter weather season?**

Measure	Percentage of councils planning to implement
<b>Measures within the council</b>	
Using GPS technology on gritters to manage gritting process	72
Equipping street cleaners with salt to spread on pavements	62
Using means other than salt to treat pavements (eg liquid de-icer)	28
Other measures	18
<b>Measures for communities</b>	
Using community 'grit bins' for members of the public to help themselves to salt	82
Providing salt to community groups	47
Enlisting large vehicle owners (eg farmers with tractors, 4*4 owners) to help treat the roads	39
Other community action	35
<b>Base</b>	<b>92</b>

# Communications

All councils were asked whether their council was planning to communicate its winter service plan/routes that will be gritted, in advance of or during this year's winter season. Ninety-five per cent of councils said that they would be, with two per cent stating no and three per cent not knowing.

**Figure 4:** Is your council planning to communicate its winter service plan/routes that will be gritted, in advance of or during this year's winter season?



**Base:** all councils (92)

All councils were asked what types of instant web updates they would be using to inform residents in detail about gritting routes and general gritting activities in this winter season. Nearly all (99 per cent) stated that they would be using their council's web page to provide updates. This is broadly the same as last year when 95 per cent of councils were using their websites.

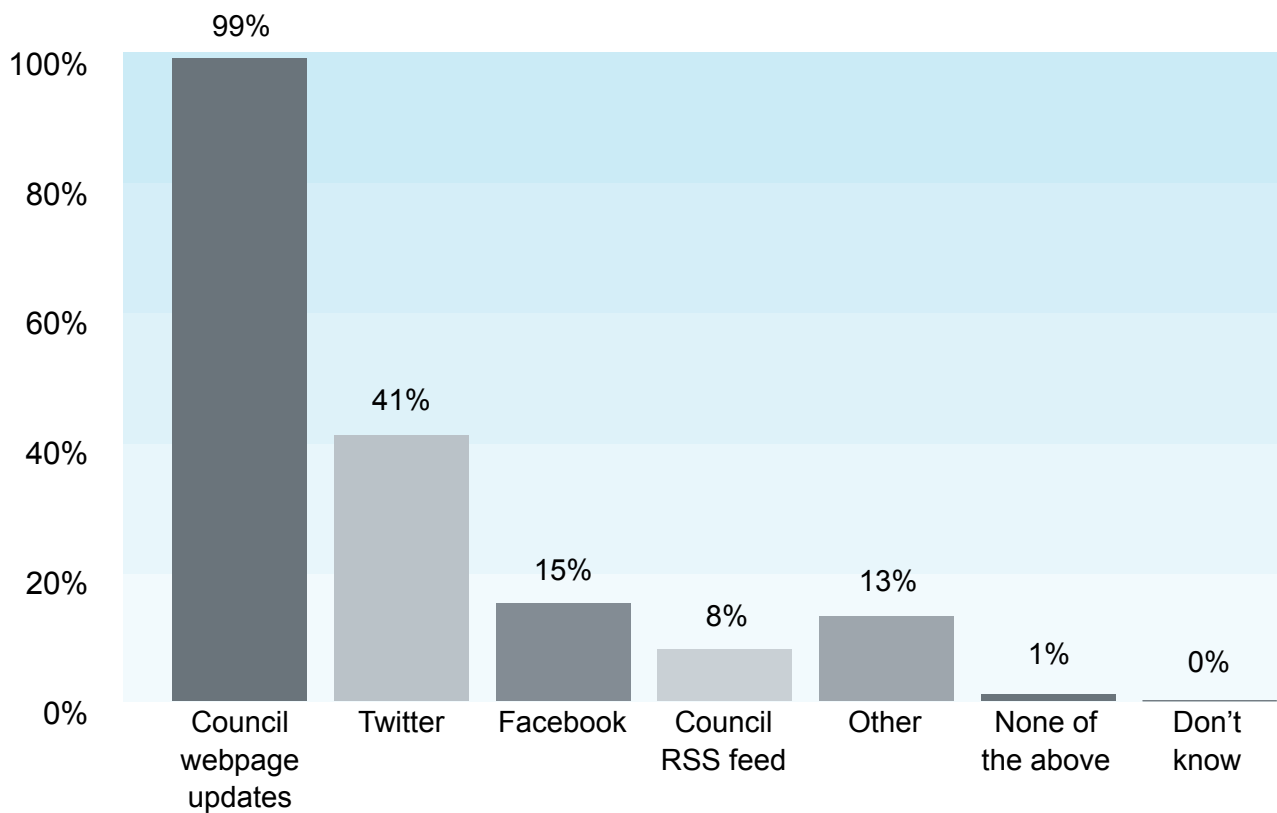
Forty-one per cent of councils stated that they would be using Twitter (significantly increasing from 18 per cent of councils last year), with 15 per cent using a Facebook page (significantly increasing from five per cent last year).

Four councils were updating through other online methods (for example, emailing community groups and YouTube), whilst one council was not going to use any of the methods listed.





**Figure 5:** Which, if any, of the following instant web updates will your council be using to inform residents in detail about gritting routes and general gritting activities in this winter season?



**Base:** all councils (92)

Councils were asked to report what guidance they had provided to support individuals who want to help in their communities during periods of severe winter weather. A number of councils suggested that they either published the Snow Code, a link to the Department for Transport advice, or a link to DirectGov advice so that self help could be promoted.

Even where Government guidance was not explicitly referred to, many councils were focussing on promoting self help in local communities:

‘The council’s website offers community self help advice, winter driving advice, [and information on the] location of community grit bins. The council also utilises its councillors, Community Area Forums and other community groups to inform the public on how best to prepare themselves for severe weather.’

#### **Metropolitan district, North West**

Some councils focused on the legal aspects/ risk involved in clearing snow, ensuring that residents felt reassured about their involvement with snow clearing activities:

‘The web page includes general advice to the public on snow clearing including “Members of the public are unlikely to be held liable, following an incident related to their snow clearance or salt spreading, as long as the condition of the road/footway is no worse than it was before they carried out the work.”’

#### **County, South East**

Additional types of guidance covered included guidance around driving in severe weather conditions and how to help other members of communities who may be less able.



# Conclusions

The majority of councils (51 per cent) aim to have more salt in stock of salt for this year's winter gritting season because of their experiences in previous winter gritting seasons with national shortages of salt.

On median average, councils had ordered broadly similar levels of salt for the start of this winter gritting season compared to the last (4,900 tonnes this year compared to 3,400 tonnes last year).

Within the last winter gritting season responding councils used a large percentage of their total salt stock (74 per cent). This suggests that councils had on the whole ordered enough salt to support them throughout the winter gritting season.

Similarly to last year, councils were concerned about shortages occurring once the gritting season had started (ie for obtaining additional stocks); most (85 per cent) had received the amount they required for the start of the winter gritting season. Only eight per cent had a contract with a foreign salt supplier.

In terms of resources, most councils owned or leased a median average of eight full sized gritters, with one mini gritter per council. Only a small number of councils had purchased new gritting machinery over the last 12 months (26 councils had purchase gritters and 28 councils had purchased mini gritters). In total, responding councils covered 37 per cent of their road networks with gritting routes.

Over a third (38 per cent) of councils were planning to share resources: 37 per cent of councils were planning on sharing their salt stocks. Many councils were also taking innovative measures to counter winter weather in their area, for example, managing their gritting routes more effectively by using GPS in their gritters, and providing community grit bins.

Providing residents with information about gritting routes and general gritting activities is still more commonly achieved through councils' websites (99 per cent). However, increasing numbers of councils are also using Twitter (41 per cent) and Facebook (15 per cent) compared to last year (where 15 per cent and five per cent of councils used these social media respectively).



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