

Comhairle Chontae Liatroma

Leitrim County Council

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Fire Service
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Motor Taxation
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Rates/Revenue
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Register of Electors
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Roads Section
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THIS MATTER IS BEING DEALT WITH BY _____ TEL. No. _____ EXT. No. _____

Date: _____ Our Ref: _____ Your Ref: _____

11th January 2010

Cathaoirleach agus gach Ball **COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LIATROMA**

**RE: Severe Weather Conditions 19th December 2009 – Date
– Leitrim County Council Response**

Dear Member

Due to the severe weather conditions experienced in the County which intensified over the Christmas and New Year period, it was necessary for Leitrim County Council to initiate its Crisis Management Process.

The following report outlines the Council's response and also serves to provide a detailed response to the various notices of motion and questions raised by Members. For ease of reference the report separately addresses the issues, activity and response in relation to road conditions, water supply and other services.

Through the Crisis Management process, the response of the Council to the issues affecting the public was developed and monitored on an hourly basis. All available resources were mobilised which involved all relevant staff responding to the significantly increased level of operational issues arising in particular to water and roads services. In addition, the Council put in place a staffed hotline telephone service for the public to contact the Council for the period following Christmas through to the 4th January. The large number of calls received were individually dealt with and responded to. The public were kept fully informed through a number of press releases issued daily to the local and national media (print and radio) and updates were also posted on the Council's website. In addition contact was also made with relevant local community and voluntary organisations.

While it was not necessary to activate the Council's Major Emergency Framework, the protocols set out within the Framework were followed and ongoing liaison took place with the HSE and the Gardai as required.

Road Gritting Activity

The maintenance and gritting of roads in County Leitrim during the winter period is provided for in the "Maintenance of Essential Services in Severe Weather Conditions Plan". Our policy as outlined in that Plan is as follows:



- Keep all National Primary Roads ice free at all times
- A schedule of regional roads is outlined for precautionary gritting
- Other regional roads and important local primary roads to be dealt with as required

Given the current financial circumstances, the precautionary gritting programme (i.e. salting in advance of frost as notified by the ICECAST system) for the winter season (November 2009 – April 2010) was prioritised at the start of the season as follows:-

- All National Roads
- R280
- R202 Dromod to County Boundary
- R201 Mohill to N4
- R199 Ballinamore to County Boundary
- Other regional routes to receive attention within the working day as required.

This programme was notified to Members and was also publicised in the local media at that time.

On 19th December, a snow warning was received. In advance of the expected snowfall, all national primary roads and all regional roads in the County were salted - in total 75km of National Routes and 275km of Regional Roads were salted that weekend.

In the 23 days since the 19th December our salt gritters have been operational in excess of 40 occasions salting the national and regional roads with salting taking place at least once per day and up to four times on some days.

When weather conditions deteriorated, and problems arose on local roads, these were attended to on a case by case basis. Any minor roads or laneways were also dealt with on a needs basis. Assistance was also provided in relation to access for funerals or other emergency events and access to elderly to replenish food supplies etc.

Leitrim County Council deployed all available staff in addressing the road conditions. Extra plant and machinery was hired for transport of materials and spreading of grit.

The Council responded to requests from elected representatives, the general public (by direct contact or emergency phone numbers) and liaised with other agencies i.e HSE (district nurse, home help etc) and the Gardai.

While it has not been possible to grit every local road, every effort has been made to try and ensure that roads are passable with care.

The Council Staff have worked very hard in difficult conditions to ensure that all cases brought to our attention were prioritised and dealt with as quickly as possible.

To date this winter 1,700 tonnes of salt has been used which compares with 1,800 tonne last winter (Nov 08 to April 09). In addition we have used over 2,000 tonnes of grit on roads in the County. When it became apparent that stocks of salt were running low nationally, a decision was made on 2nd January to conserve salt for national routes only. On the 8th January in order to further conserve supplies, Leitrim County Council decided to mix salt and grit for use on national routes and that remains the position. The supply of salt is a national issue and all local authorities are working closely with the NRA and salt suppliers in this regard. Currently, we have adequate salt stocks to last 4-5 days depending on weather conditions with additional deliveries expected today, 11 January, 2010.

Leitrim County Council has also made grit available to the public at all of our depots and loads of grit have been deposited at various locations throughout the County, e.g. at junctions and hills. It should be noted that the situation in relation to salt supplies has meant that we have on occasions had to refuse the supply of salt to members of the public. Furthermore, we have not been in a position to refill the small salt bins located throughout the County.

The cost of the road gritting operations to date is in the region of €500,000. Obviously this level of expenditure, will require additional funding from the Department, although no indication of such funding has been given to date. If additional funding is not provided this may have implications for our Roads Programme 2010.

Given the prolonged nature of these extreme weather conditions and the decision at national level to make army resources available to local authorities, Leitrim County Council decided to accept the Army's offer of assistance. Army resources have been deployed since Saturday 8th January to augment the Council's response. 20 Army personnel have been deployed initially to grit footpaths in our towns and villages and will then be available as required, to assist with gritting in rural areas.

Activity continues on road gritting as outlined above and the situation is under continuous review. While weather conditions are changing, the thaw may initially make road conditions more hazardous and extreme care continues to be required by all road users.

Water Supply

Leitrim County Council's two Water Treatment Plants - Carrick-on-Shannon and Dromahaire - supply the bulk of water for the County. As a result of the extreme weather conditions both of these Plants have been producing between 35% and 40% additional water to meet increased demand. Notwithstanding the extraordinary increase in production, reservoir levels dropped to dangerously low levels on 24th December 2009. As a result, customers have experienced difficulties with water supply throughout the County.

The problems experienced in relation to the supply of water were largely due to customers leaving taps running in an effort to prevent their pipes freezing, to defective drinking troughs, burst pipes both on the mains and within unoccupied houses, etc. Since 23 December, all Water Services staff have been deployed to restore water supplies to the general public.

A number of leaks identified on the Public Mains Network were repaired. However, controlling leaks on the network was hampered by the fact that Leitrim County Council distributes approximately one-third of the water it produces to Private Group Water Schemes and has no control over the management or maintenance of these private group schemes. Responsibility rests with the group schemes and their organising committee to ensure that the water supply to their scheme is distributed to all members of their scheme.

Since 26th December, Water Services Management - Director of Services, Senior Engineer, Senior Executive Engineer, Water Services Supervisor - and all of the Water Services Caretakers of Leitrim County Council were available each day, to advise group scheme representatives on possible remedial action. A number of meetings were also held on-site with representatives of individual group schemes.

However, it must again be emphasised that the responsibility for private group water schemes rests entirely with the group schemes themselves. Leitrim County Council would like to acknowledge the group schemes which are well run and well organised, but unfortunately there are a number of problematic schemes which have adversely affected the complete network.

Leitrim County Council has been highlighting for some time its concerns regarding leakages and other underlying issues within group schemes and has been proactive in encouraging schemes to avail of subsidies and grant aid to refurbish their schemes.

It is vitally important that customers served by group schemes ensure that there is an effective committee in place to deal with the routine maintenance and servicing of their group schemes.

Initially, to address water supply difficulties across the County, water tankers were made available at various locations based on need from 30th December – 4th January. Over the last week significant progress has been made to restore water to most areas and the need for tankering water to the worst affected areas no longer applies.

At this point in time, where difficulties are being experienced by the general public, these are most likely to relate to the pipe work on their own property i.e. frozen pipes or airlocks etc which they will need to address themselves, or in relation to problems within their private group schemes, in which case they should contact their local group water scheme Secretary.

In general there is a lack of appreciation of the cost of water production and the need to conserve this expensive resource.

The extreme weather conditions have again highlighted problems and issues within the Private Group Water Scheme sector. Key concerns include

- The absence in some schemes of any effective committee willing to take responsibility for the running of the scheme.
- Substandard Group Water Scheme networks in need of urgent refurbishment.

Leitrim County Council's Rural Water section will continue to make contact with all Group schemes with a view to encouraging and assisting them to address the issues arising.

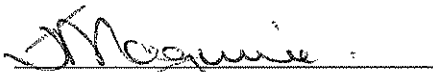
Other Services - Civil Defence/Fire Service/Housing

The Council has been liaising with the HSE in relation to the provision of assistance where required. The Civil Defence Service has been on call since 27th December 2009 to provide 4x4 ambulances in instances where the HSE ambulance service would be unable to access a patient in an isolated location within the County. Civil Defence has been working with the HSE Community Care Service since 2nd January 2010 in the provision of transport to Public Health Nurses in County Leitrim to access isolated patients and it has provided the service on at least ten occasions to date. Civil Defence has also assisted in the erection of signage at many water bodies throughout the County warning of the danger of accessing frozen ice.

In addition to dealing with normal call outs, the Fire Service assisted in the provision of water tankers at the various locations throughout the County. The Fire Service also assisted the Community Care Service in transporting Public Health Nurses.

The Council's housing maintenance staff were also available and mobilised to deal with issues arising in Council Housing stock i.e. frozen pipes, leaks, gritting of footpaths within Council estates, etc.

Yours sincerely



Jackie Maguire
County Manager