

Winter Service Scrutiny: Queries about costs

Cost per gritting/ploughing machines

Costs for a road gritter vary from approximately £85,000 for a basic model similar to our current vehicles, which are old Mercedes lorry chassis or current equivalent. Prices can be up to £135,000 for a more sophisticated chassis that is adapted to run different services (e.g. gritting, cleansing, and mowing).

The critical factor in purchasing any new vehicles is that they have to be able to deal not just with the routine pre-treatment when roads are clear but also with deep snow and treacherous ice on Brighton & Hove's steep, narrow and uneven hills. The more expensive models tend to be more resilient and better suited to extreme conditions.

Pavement gritters cost approximately £40,000 – products vary but there are now some very efficient slim-line vehicles on the market which could also be useful for off-road cycleways such as The Level and the Drive.

Cost of salt/grit per tonne

The cost paid by Brighton & Hove City Council is commercially sensitive information because there are only 2 suppliers in the UK and a very limited amount of suppliers globally. However, as an estimate, anything up to £35 per tonne is paid for 6mm rock salt. This includes haulage and delivery to the Depot.

Brighton & Hove City Council's salt supplier is Cleveland Potash.

Grit (sharp sand) costs approximately £22 per tonne, including haulage costs. The sharp sand comes from Shoreham Harbour, where it is deposited after being dredged from the sea, and therefore has a slight salt content.

Both salt and grit arrive in the Depot loose in 20 tonne lorries. It is then deposited onto the relevant pile, and is kept as loose stock loaded into the gritters as required by shovel loader.

There are therefore huge logistical issues about supplying residents directly with salt and/or grit as we use coarse rock salt delivered as loose tonnage. It would require a considerable amount of staff resources to deliver this to residents in a contained format e.g. kilo bags.

To purchase bags (e.g. by kilo) is much more expensive, with current rates at approximately £130 per bag. During national salt supply issues, this rate is likely to rise as well as companies find it difficult to provide to all customers.

For health & safety reasons, we cannot allow residents and businesses to arrive unannounced at or to manoeuvre around the Depot unescorted for the collection of salt and grit. For supply calculation reasons, we cannot allow residents and businesses to take unallocated amounts of salt or grit.

It may be possible to explore the option of filling builders' bags with salt/grit and depositing on street but this would still require purchase of bags, staff and haulage resources (e.g. a hiab lorry) to organise.

Cost of a grit bin

The cost is £150 per bin but also need to factor in costs of installation via our Highway Contractor.

Currently the council provides 350 bins on the public highway for highway use.

To fill these once costs £37,000. This cost includes contractor time and salt/grit materials.

In an average winter season, the bins are usually filled at least twice, at a total cost of £74,000.

Cost of spades

Unknown – for Gillian Marston/Mike Moon

Cost of training staff to use machines

It costs just under £1,000 per person to train an HGV driver in the City & Guilds Winter Service qualification. This enables them to operate road gritters.

To train staff for an HGV licence could cost up to £3,000 per person.

Currently Brighton & Hove City Council has 15 trained gritter drivers, and 6 gritting routes. There are 12 gritter drivers on the Winter Service rota, with 6 on weekly standby at a time throughout winter. One of the Out of Hours Officers is a trained gritter driver so can pitch in to help when needed. The remaining 2 drivers were trained as additional resource to call on during extreme events or due to staff sickness if required.

Although training more personnel could help with resilience during major snow events, it has to be borne in mind that there are only a limited number of vehicles.

During the January snow event, being able to utilise Street Cleansing staff as ploughing mates freed up the drivers to run 2 shifts – 6 on night-time and 6 on day-time so there was no major issue with driver availability.

Costs to train staff on pavement gritting machines are unknown but likely to be negligible.