

WINSFORD TOWN COUNCIL GRIT BIN PROVISION POLICY AND PILOT SCHEME

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider whether Winsford Town Council should introduce a discretionary grit bin scheme to provide grit bins in locations where Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC), as the statutory Highway Authority, does not provide such facilities. To seek approval in principle for a pilot scheme and the adoption of a sustainable maintenance and inspection regime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

- Notes that Cheshire West and Chester Council remains the statutory Highway Authority and retains responsibility for winter highway maintenance within Winsford.
- Agrees in principle that Winsford Town Council may provide community grit bins where a demonstrable need exists and where provision is not made by Cheshire West and Chester Council.
- Approves the development and adoption of a Community Grit Bin Policy.
- Approves a pilot scheme of up to ten grit bins.
- Adopts the Annual Refill Programme Maintenance Model detailed within this report.
- Authorises the Town Clerk to identify suitable locations, undertake consultation with Cheshire West and Chester Council where necessary, and obtain any required permissions and licences.
- Establishes a capital budget of up to £10,000 for the pilot scheme.
- Establishes an annual revenue budget of £3,000 for maintenance, replenishment and inspections.
- Receives a review report following the first winter season.

SUMMARY

Winsford Town Council periodically receives requests from residents regarding locations where footways, slopes and community routes become hazardous during periods of snow and ice. Whilst Cheshire West and Chester Council undertakes winter maintenance activities across the highway network, requests for additional grit bins do not always meet the authority's assessment criteria. This report considers whether Winsford Town Council should establish a discretionary grit bin scheme to supplement existing provision where a local need can be demonstrated. The report recommends a pilot scheme of up to ten grit bins, supported by a formal policy, objective assessment criteria and a proportionate maintenance programme. The recommended approach would provide a visible community benefit whilst avoiding the creation of unreasonable expectations that the Town Council has assumed responsibility for wider winter maintenance operations.

BACKGROUND

CWAC is responsible for winter maintenance of adopted highways across the borough. As part of its winter maintenance arrangements, CWAC undertakes route gritting and provides grit bins at locations meeting its own assessment criteria. There are locations within Winsford where residents have expressed concerns regarding

winter safety but where additional grit bin provision may not qualify under CWAC's programme. Numerous parish and town councils nationally provide supplementary grit bins as a community safety measure. The Council may therefore wish to consider whether a local scheme should be introduced to support local winter resilience and community safety.

LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

The provision of grit bins by Winsford Town Council would be discretionary. Any Town Council scheme would supplement, rather than replace, the responsibilities of CWAC as Highway Authority. The implementation of a scheme would not transfer responsibility for winter highway maintenance from CWAC to Winsford Town Council. Prior to installation, the Council would need to ensure:

- Appropriate landowner consent is obtained.
- Highway permissions are secured where required.
- Any street furniture licences are obtained.
- The Council's insurers are consulted.

The Council should ensure that any adopted policy clearly states that grit bins are provided as a community self-help facility and do not constitute a winter maintenance service.

BENEFITS OF A GRIT BIN SCHEME

Potential benefits include:

- Improved access and safety during severe weather.
- Support for elderly and vulnerable residents.
- Assistance in treating local footways and community routes.
- Enhanced community resilience.
- Visible delivery of local services.
- Positive resident engagement.
- A relatively low-cost community safety initiative.

Suitable locations may include:

- Steep pedestrian routes.
- Areas with significant footfall.
- Routes to schools and community facilities.
- Access points to parks and open spaces.
- Locations with a known history of icing problems.

RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Financial Risk

- Replacement grit supplies.
- Inspection costs.
- Repairs and maintenance.
- Administration.
- Grounds maintenance staff time.

Public Expectations

Residents may incorrectly assume that the Town Council has assumed responsibility for:

- Winter gritting operations.
- Emergency snow clearance.
- Immediate replenishment of depleted stock.

Appropriate communications and policy wording will therefore be essential.

Liability

Potential risks include:

- Poorly located bins creating obstruction.
- Damage or vandalism.
- Inadequate maintenance.
- Allegations that bins should have been replenished.

These risks can be mitigated through inspection arrangements, policy controls and appropriate insurance cover.

MAINTENANCE OPTIONS CONSIDERED*Option A - Full Council Maintenance*

The Council would:

- Inspect grit bins regularly.
- Monitor stock levels.
- Refill as required.
- Undertake reactive maintenance.

Advantages

- Highest service level.
- Consistent availability of supplies.

Disadvantages

- Highest long-term cost.
- Significant staffing commitment.
- Increased public expectations.

Ongoing Cost

Approximately £200-£650 per bin annually.

Option B - Annual Refill Programme (Recommended)

The Council would:

- Own and maintain grit bins.
- Inspect bins prior to winter.
- Refill bins annually between October and November.
- Undertake additional replenishment where operational capacity and budgets permit.

Advantages

- Affordable.

- Manageable staffing requirement.
- Sustainable long-term approach.
- Clear operational boundaries.

Disadvantages

- Some bins may become depleted during prolonged severe weather.

Ongoing Cost

Approximately £100-£300 per bin annually.

Option C - Community Self-Help Model

The Council would:

- Install bins.
- Refill annually.
- Rely largely upon resident reporting.

Advantages

- Lowest cost.
- Minimal staffing commitment.

Disadvantages

- Less consistent service levels.
- Increased risk of complaints.

Ongoing Cost

Approximately £75-£250 per bin annually.

RECOMMENDATION

Following consideration of financial, operational and governance implications, it is recommended adoption of Option B - Annual Refill Programme.

Under this arrangement Winsford Town Council would:

- Own approved grit bins.
- Undertake an annual inspection programme.
- Refill all bins once each autumn.
- Replace damaged bins where required.
- Consider additional refills where resources allow.

The Council would not:

- Provide emergency winter maintenance.
- Operate a winter call-out service.
- Guarantee that bins remain full throughout winter.
- Assume responsibility for winter maintenance of roads and footways.

This approach provides a reasonable balance between service provision, affordability and public expectation management.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Capital Costs

Indicative costs per grit bin are:

Item	Estimated Cost
Grit bin purchase	£200 - £400
Delivery	£25 - £75
Installation	£100 - £300
Licences and permissions	£250 - £350
Initial salt stock	£100 - £200
Signage and labelling	£20 - £50
Total Per Bin	£700 - £1,375

Pilot Scheme Costs

Item	Estimated Cost
Pilot Scheme (10 bins) Capital Cost	£7,000 - £13,750
Annual Revenue Requirement	£1,000 - £3,000

It is recommended that Council establishes:

- Capital Budget: £10,000
- Annual Revenue Budget: £3,000

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The use of salt and grit can assist public safety during severe weather. The proposed scheme would support walking and access to local facilities during winter conditions and contribute to wider community resilience objectives.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The proposal may particularly benefit:

- Older residents.
- Residents with mobility issues.
- Families using school routes.
- Users of community facilities.

The introduction of objective assessment criteria will help ensure fair and transparent allocation of resources.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Excessive demand for bins	Medium	Assessment criteria and budget limits
Unreasonable public expectations	Medium	Clear policy and communications

Empty bins during severe weather	Medium	Annual refill programme and discretionary top-ups
Vandalism or damage	Low	Inspection and maintenance programme
Liability claims	Low	Insurance review and formal policy
Budget overruns	Low	Pilot scheme and annual review

CONCLUSION

The provision of community grit bins represents a practical and relatively low-cost opportunity to improve local winter resilience and community safety. The proposal would enable Winsford Town Council to respond to identified local needs whilst maintaining a clear distinction between its role and that of Cheshire West and Chester Council as Highway Authority. A pilot scheme of up to ten grit bins, supported by a formal policy and operated through an Annual Refill Programme, is considered to represent a prudent, affordable and manageable approach. Council is therefore invited to approve the recommendations set out within this report.