

**From:** Peter Osborne Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport  
Andrew Loosemore Director of Highways and Transportation

**To:** Growth, Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee Meeting – 5 May 2026

**Subject:** Winter Service– Update Report

**Key decision:** No

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of Paper:** N/A

**Future Pathway of Paper:** N/A

**Electoral Division:** All Districts.

**Summary:** This report updates the committee on the progress of our Winter Service up to the end of March 2026.

**Recommendation:**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the details of this report and actions being taken regarding our ongoing winter service.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 A report detailing the Winter Service Policy was presented to ETCC in September 2025.
- 1.2 The winter service started on the 17 October 2025 and ended on 17 April 2026.
- 1.3 This report is a current update on our winter service, which covers not only the normal winter hazards, but also the demands on our service for other weather events such as high winds and rain.
- 1.4 During the period 17 October 2025 to 31 January 2026 we have had five named storm events covering wind and rain with additional enquiries being received across the highways teams.

## 2.0 Background

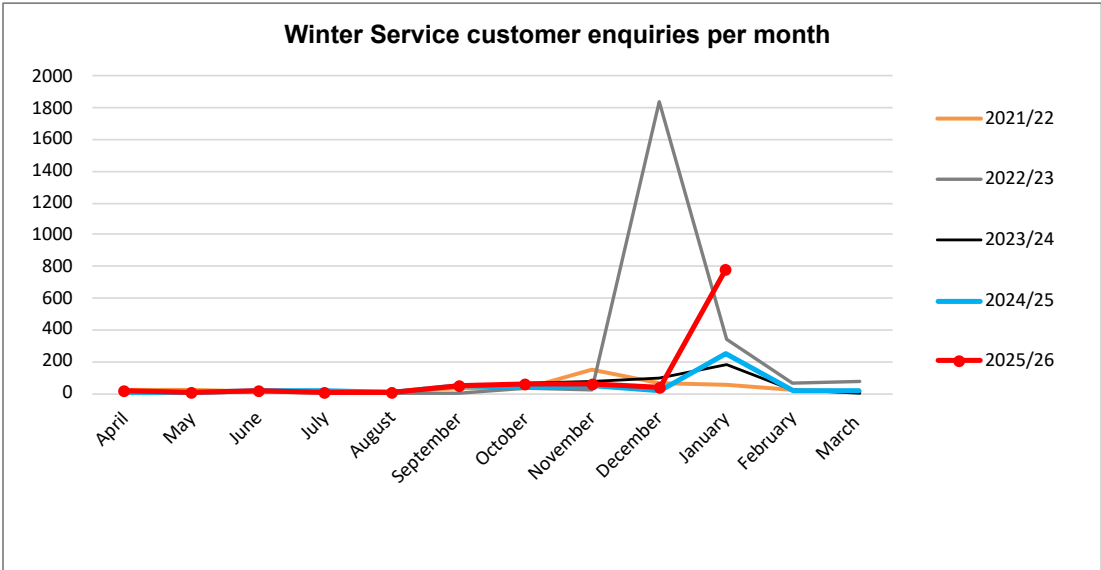
- 2.1 Throughout the winter service we closely monitor weather and road conditions to be ready to deploy our winter service resources at any time.
- 2.2 **October** was a warmer but wetter month, with **Storm Amy** arriving on the 3<sup>rd</sup> before rain eased in the second week as high pressure moved in with persistent cloud. There was further rain across the rest of the month, particularly after the 22<sup>nd</sup>, as heavy rain and strong winds were present across the south coast. Temperatures were 0.7°C above average for October and rainfall was barely

below average at 99% of the long-term average. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> dullest October on record for the UK with only 69% of the average sunshine hours across the month.

- 2.3 **November** started with temperatures above average by as much as 7°C across the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of the month. The first two weeks were also wet with bands of rain across the country, with the 14<sup>th</sup> seeing exceptional heavy rain due to **Storm Claudia**. Temperatures dropped following this but returned toward average at the end of the month, which was mild but still wet. Overall temperatures were 0.7°C above average for November with a much wetter-than-average 131% average rainfall across the UK.
- 2.4 **December** was wet and warm as low pressure brought unsettled conditions across the country. The 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> saw heavy rainfall as **Storm Bram** arrived, along with some strong winds. These unsettled conditions continued through the month until the 24<sup>th</sup> when high pressure arrived with further strong winds and some freezing temperatures and frost. Conditions remained clear, sunny and cool for the remainder of the final week. The majority of the rainfall occurred in the first half of the month before turning drier, this resulted in a 14% above average rainfall across the country. Overall temperatures were 1.6°C above average for December, along with 108% long-term average sunshine hours.
- 2.5 **January** started very cold with frost, fog, ice and snow in parts, across the county. **Storm Goretti** reached the UK on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> bringing in very strong winds and poor weather. After the storm, wet and unsettled weather continued throughout the month. The final week saw two further storms **Ingrid** (24<sup>th</sup>), closely followed by **Chandra** (26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup>) which brought heavy rain and strong winds before closing out the month. Overall, the temperature across the country was 0.5°C below average for January, along with an average amount of sunshine hours for the month. An Ice Emergency across the county was declared 5<sup>th</sup> January with Highways teams prioritising local action. There was 117% long-term average rainfall for the UK, with the regional variation provisionally setting the South & South-East at 188% average rainfall (159mm).
- 2.6 **February** saw persistent rain and unsettled weather throughout the month, with overall temperatures resulting around average. Strong frontal systems remained for the first half of the month, but unsettled weather remained even after this stopped. Consistent wet weather resulted in England seeing 170% long-term average rainfall across the month (123% across the UK), and with a warmer latter half the overall England temperature across the month reached +2.1C above the long-term average (+1.5C across the UK). Due to the poor weather, the number of recorded sunshine hours in the UK reached 41.6, just 58% of the long-term average which is the 4<sup>th</sup> dullest February ever recorded.
- 2.7 Data for March & April is not yet available.
- 2.8 These weather events have put additional demand on our operational teams both financially and in terms of resources, to deal with the various events both in and out of hours with well over 1000 additional enquiries received, which included fallen trees and drainage issues.

**3.0 Winter Service**

3.1 The data provided below demonstrates our current general winter service enquiries:



3.2 Our annual winter service budget is **£4.3** million this does not budget for emergencies or other exceptional weather events.

3.3 When icy conditions or snow is forecast, we treat about 30% (2586km) of the county's total carriageway (road) network which includes the A and B roads, major strategic, other strategic and locally important roads – these are termed Primary Routes.

3.4 Salting routes are published online at [www.kent.gov.uk/highways](http://www.kent.gov.uk/highways), throughout the winter service.

3.5 This service is time sensitive. The salt must be laid before ice forms or snow falls to be effective. Instructions for action are issued by the Winter Duty Officer (WDO) based on the forecasts received from Metdesk, our contracted weather forecast provider.

3.6 Social media is used to communicate the winter service action, including the Highways & Transport Facebook page, and on 'X'. This is updated when crews are going out, giving details of where we are operating, and the expected road hazards.

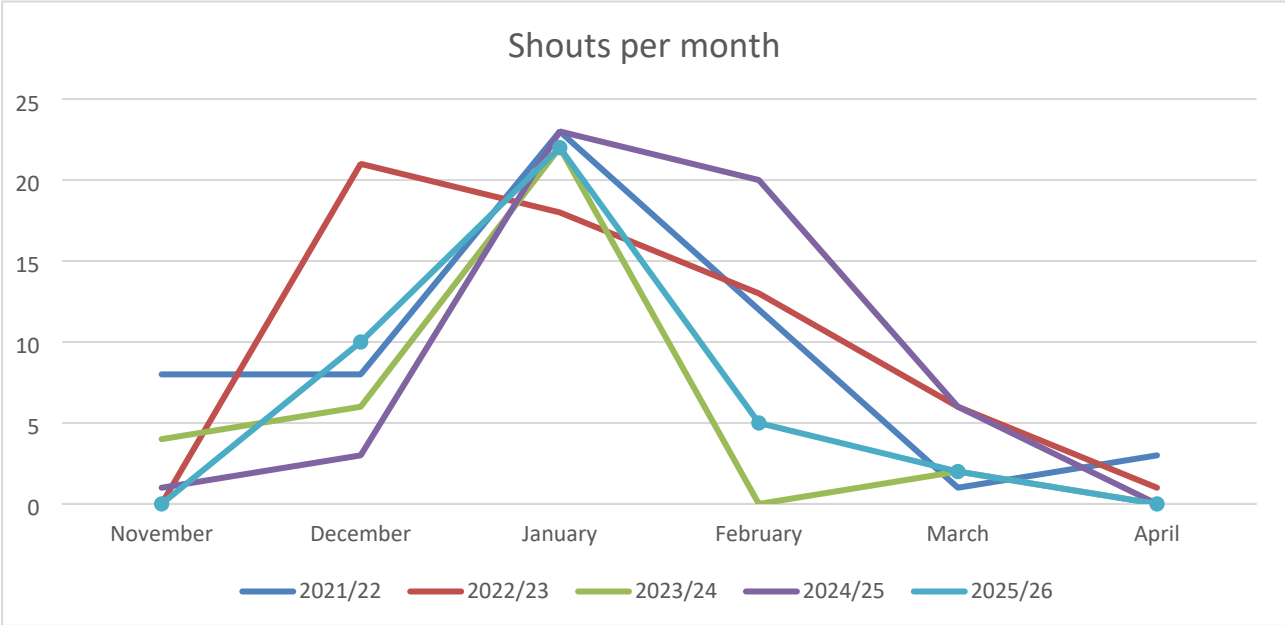
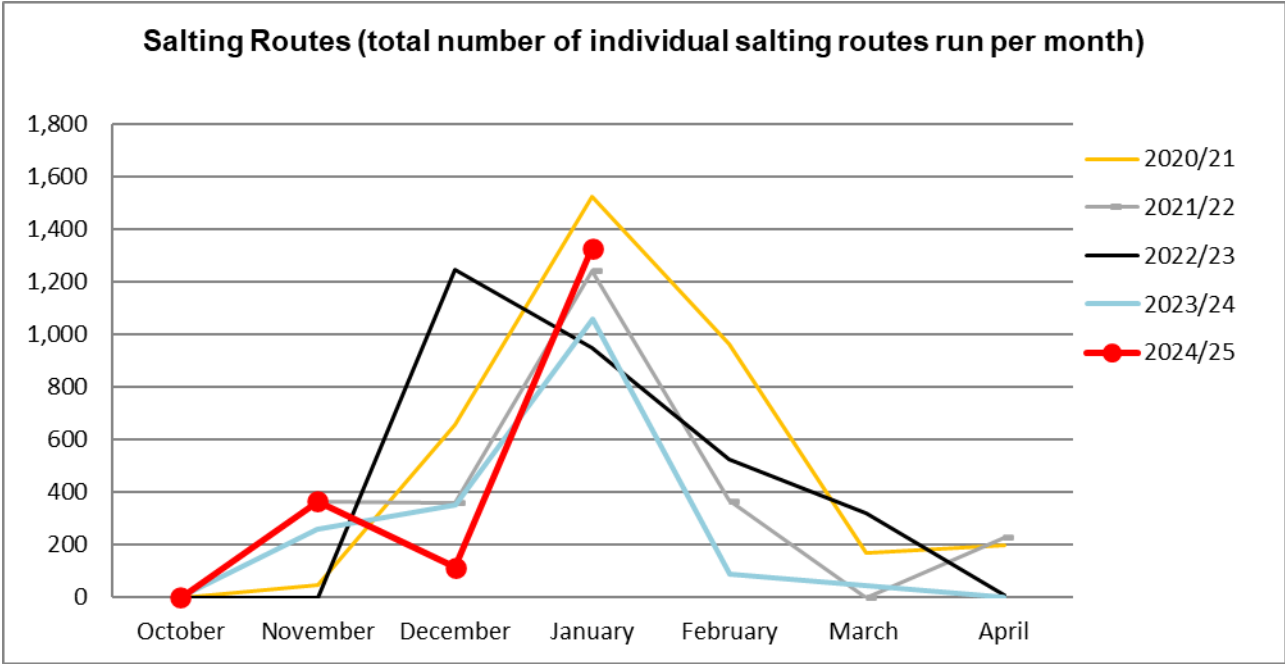
3.7 As well as the 60 salting vehicles which are on standby, we have more than 100 farmers around the county supplied with snow ploughs that can be fitted to their tractors. Under a signed agreement, they clear pre-determined rural routes, when there is more than 50mm of snow on the ground.

3.8 In addition to our normal highways out of hours service, we currently have four dedicated Winter Duty Officers, monitoring and actioning salting instructions throughout the winter period. Each WDO is on call 24/7 for a week on a rota basis. The WDO works closely with the Senior Duty Officer (SDO) to coordinate out of hours actions when required.

**4.0 Monitoring**

- 4.1 Winter data is produced monthly highlighting the volume of salting shouts and the action taken by the winter duty officers.
- 4.2 Since the start of the season (17 October 2025 – 31 January 2026\*) we have had 44 salting shouts covering 1855 individual salting runs, using 8,390 t of rock salt.

\* Data for February/March/April unavailable at time of writing



**5.0 Salting Routes**

November saw a slight increase in salting runs when compared to the same period over the last 4 years. December and January were on par with previous demand over the past 4 years, with a total of **1141** salting runs in January 2026.

- 5.1 The Operation Performance Measure 17 (OPM17) across the season so far, for Salting runs completed within the specified timeframe **98.36%**.
- 5.2 At the start of the winter service season we hold 23,000 tonnes of salt in stock in depots around the county. National guidance to local authorities suggests a resilience benchmark of 12 days/48 runs i.e. the authority would be able to continuously salt its winter network during its core winter period for 12 days. This equates to 16,800 tonnes therefore the level of salt in stock ensures that this number of runs can be carried out. Each of our depots has received an additional **200 tonnes** of salt. This is to ensure we meet our minimum resilient stock levels for the remainder of the season and are ready for any further winter events.
- 5.3 The salt supply is managed and purchased by the Highways Term Maintenance Contractor.
- 5.4 We continue to monitor requests for additional roads to be added to our primary salting routes and assess their suitability in line with the Winter Service Policy
- 5.5 In most cases, it is not possible to add additional sections of road to our existing primary salting routes, without removing something from a route. Our routes have been designed to capacity, either in length of network covered or available time to complete the salting operation. The Highways Act 1980 S.41(1A) states that we must do **what is reasonably practicable** to ensure that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. Our policy approach and network length receiving treatment balanced against available resources meets this requirement.
- 5.6 At the end of the season we will review all our routes, to ensure that any changes to the network are considered and altered, as deemed necessary in-line with our Winter Service Policy.
- 5.7 Where we are unable to include extra sections of network on our primary routes or snow routes and we have identified that at certain times it may benefit the community as a whole if treated, then these may be considered for inclusion in the Highway District plans for local action, should the need arise during an event. These will be subject to the primary routes and snow routes being clear along with the available resources. Highway District Plans are agreements that we have with District and Borough Councils to provide resources for local snow clearance and gritting during extreme conditions and especially when they are unable to provide their services due to conditions.
- 5.8 A common request we receive is that the road is a bus route, so it should be treated. Unfortunately, it is not possible to treat every route a bus takes, we do however cover many routes, as they form part of the primary routes or snow routes.

## 6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2025/26 is £4,364,600  
The budget is broken down as follows:

Winter Service	Budget	Forecast Spend to 31/03/26
Pre-Salting Gritting Operation	1,676,100	1,689,789
Plant & Equipment	2,481,400	2,387,033
Maintenance Of Farmers Ploughs	50,000	2,262
Weather Forecasting	21,300	24,086
Ice Prediction	37,300	77,473
Maintain Salt Bins And Jumbo Salt Bags For Both Parish And Unparished Areas	83,200	25,710
Supply Of Salt To Districts	10,300	9,247
Publicity Campaign	5,000	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£4,364,600</b>	<b>£4,215,600</b>

- 6.2 Following the end of the 2025/26 winter season (post April), we will produce a final end of season report, with lessons learnt and the next steps for the 2026/27 winter season. A previous decision has been taken to allocate any in year Winter Service underspends to the Highways Soft Landscaping Service for the following financial year to address exceptional seasonal growth.

## 7.0 Winter Service Improvements

- 7.1 As of May 1st this year, Ringway is the Kent Highway Termed Maintenance Contractor (HTMC). As part of the contract, we will have a new gritting fleet with full telematics and reporting facilities.
- 7.2 After year one, we will work with Ringway to further optimise our salting routes for greater efficiency and route optimisation.
- 7.3 Ringway will also increase the number of directly employed operatives within the HTMC contract to increase resilience for Winter Service delivery, and Provide full monitoring and routing service via telematics, including auto-salting, GPS tracking, and compliance auditing.
- 7.4 Real time data will be able to be shared from the new telematics together with full compliance monitoring.

## 8.0 Legal implications

- 8.1 N/A

## 9.0 Equalities implications

- 9.1 Not applicable, as this report is for information and has no effect on policy or service standards.

## 10.0 Background Documents

10.1 Link to KCC web site for Winter Service <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/what-we-look-after/winter-service>

**11.0. Recommendation:**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the details of this report and actions being taken regarding Winter Service.

**12.0. Contact details**

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