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

To: Growth, Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee Meeting – 10 November 2026

Subject: Winter Service Policy 2026/27

Key decision: No

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: All Districts.

Summary: Each year officers review the Council's Winter Service Policy and the operational plan that supports it considering changes in national guidance and lessons learnt from the previous winter. This report sets out any changes or revisions to this year's policy.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Committee is asked to note and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport on the proposed revisions to the Winter Service Policy for 2023/24 as set out in para 9.1.

1. Introduction

1.1 The winter of 2025/26 ran from 17th October 2025 through to 17th April 2026. The first gritting run was 17th November and the last of the season was 25th March.

1.2 Overall there were 44 primary salting routes completed compared with the budgeted 66 runs. January was the busiest month, with a particularly busy period from 2nd to 11th – including the calling of an Ice Emergency.

2.0 Winter Planning

2.1 This will be the first winter under the new Highways Term Maintenance Contract (HTMC), awarded to Ringway Infrastructure Services Ltd.

2.2 In previous HTMC contracts, the winter fleet has been rented from Econ Ltd, whereby after the winter season, the fleet was taken back to Yorkshire where they were serviced, and if necessarily replaced with new equipment, and returned to Kent ready for the next season

2.3 Ringway have been awarded a contract with a minimum term of 14 years and have therefore found it more cost effective to purchase the fleet. 62 brand new lorries have been manufactured by Econ, to the contractor's enhanced specifications – with increased safety features for the driver and other road users.

To further personalise the fleet for Kent, a competition has been held with children from Kent to name the new fleet. From November, the likes of *Sir David Attenburrrr*, *Ctrl-Salt-Delete*, and *Spready Mercury* will be seen on Kent roads.

2.4 Over the 2026 summer period work has been undertaken to further refine and improve the winter service;

- All routes have been driven and reviewed by local Highway Managers to ensure they meet local requirements.
- Route maps and the KCC web site have been updated with the full network of routes.
- Salt bin filling and renewing where required

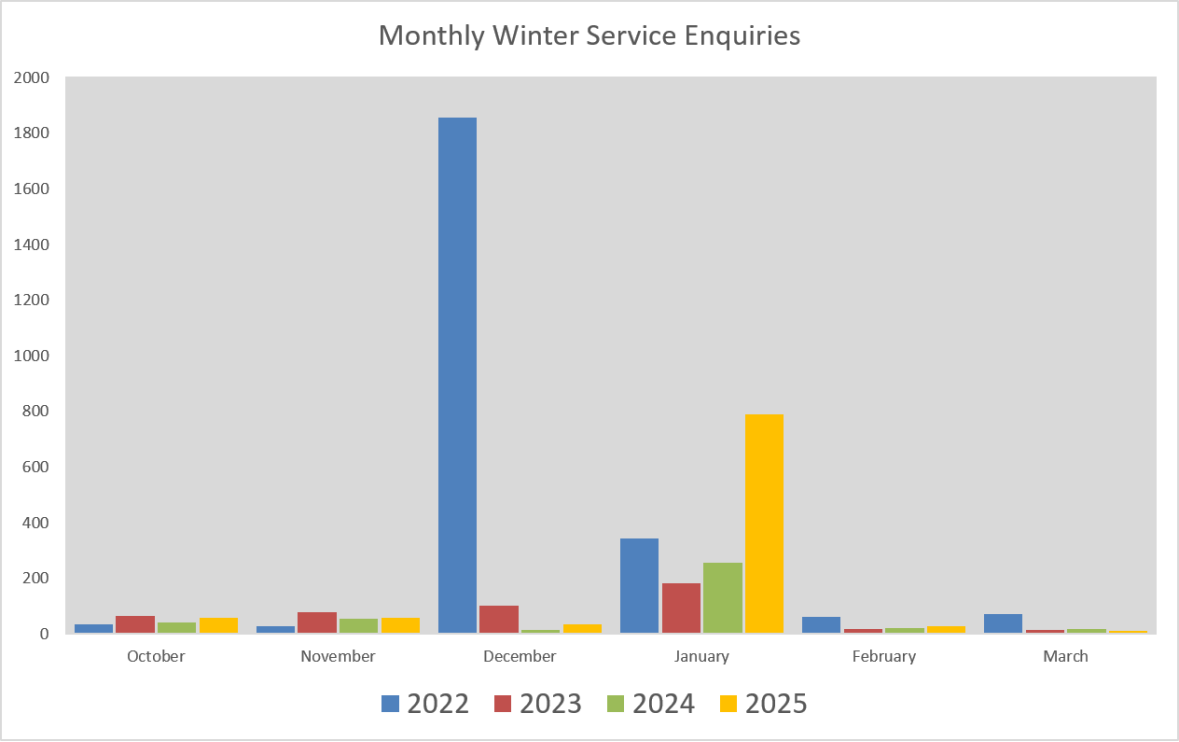
2.5 For the 2026/27 season, there will be little change to processes. However, through the summer of 2027, the Winter Service Manager will work with Ringway to look at proposed innovation to ensure continuous improvement and cost savings. Processes considered for the future include;

- Domain forecasting,
- thermal mapping,
- identification of variations in elevation, road surface temperature and salting needs

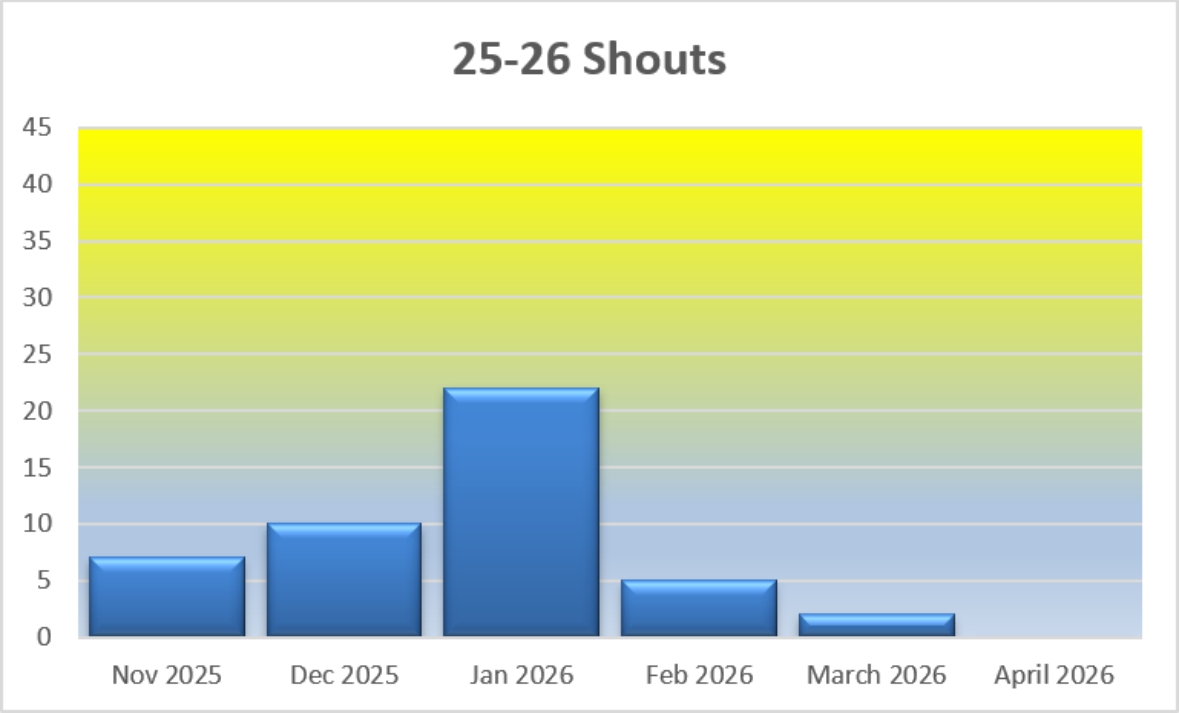
This will allow only areas that need treatment to be treated.

3.0 Winter Service

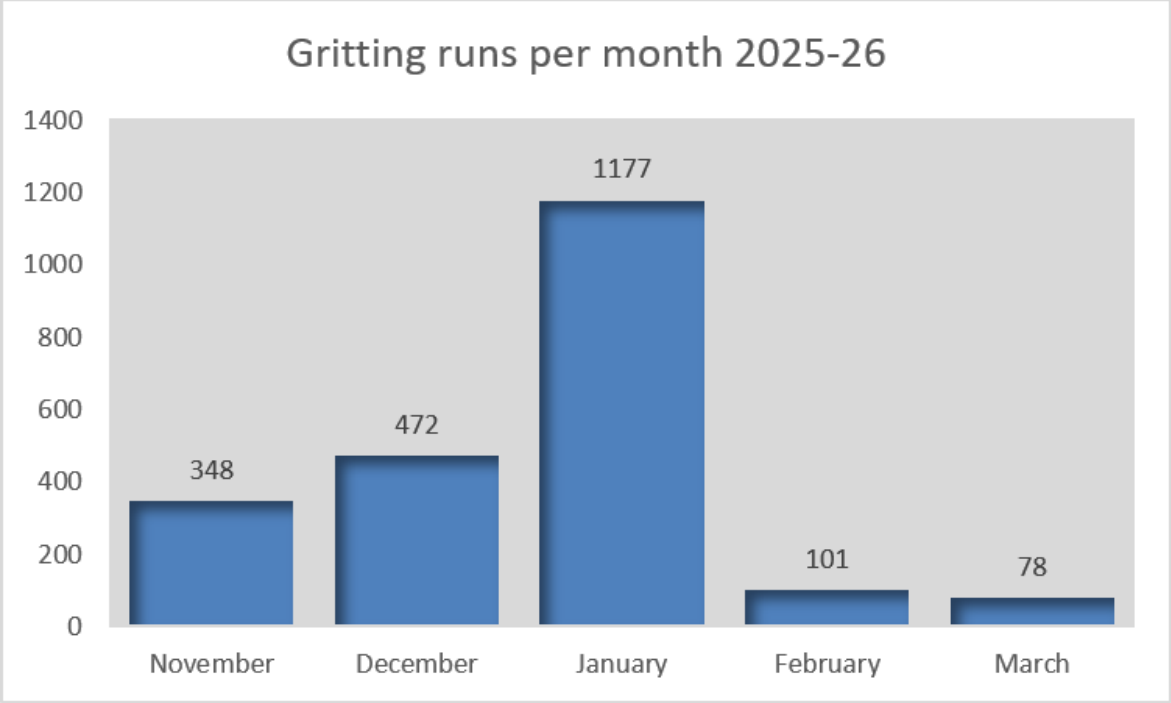
3.1 The graph below shows winter enquiries from 2022-2026.



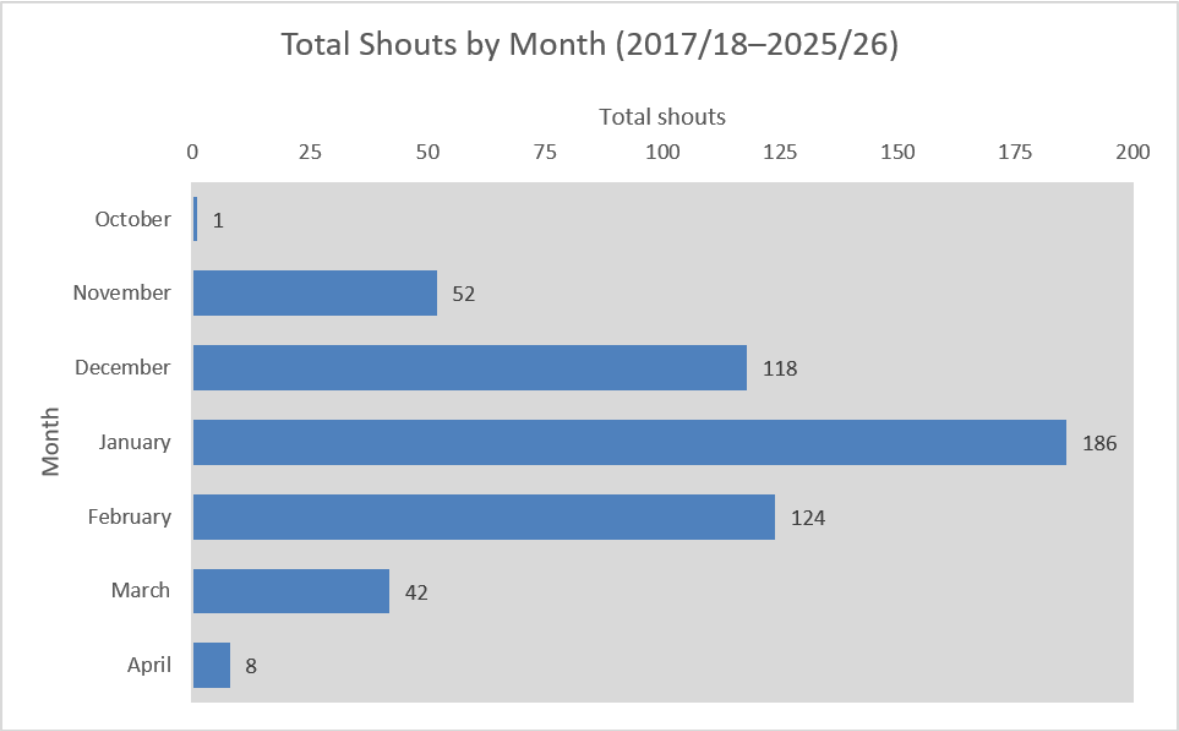
3.2 The graph below shows the overall number gritting instructions



3.3 The graph below highlights the number of individual runs per month. The previous graph shows the overall number of 'shouts' A Shout could include the whole county, or just a few routes in a part of the county affected. The Gritting runs in the graph below is the total number of runs carried out each month – (59 for the whole county)



3.4 The graph below shows total monthly instructions from 2017/18 – 2025/26. From this data, the decision was taken to alter the winter season, whereas previously it started mid-October, it will now start at the beginning of November



3.5 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.

3.6 Salting routes are published online at www.kent.gov.uk/highways, throughout the winter service

3.7 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.

3.8 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.

3.9 As well as the 62 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.

3.10 In addition to our normal highways out-of-hour 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 Salting Routes

4.1 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 the required number of runs can be carried out. 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.

4.2 The salt supply is managed and purchased by the Highways Term Maintenance Contractor.

4.3 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

4.4 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.

4.5 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.

4.6 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.

4.7 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.

5.0 Snow routes

5.1 The winter service is focused on keeping open the network of primary routes comprising 1597 miles, (2571 km) which are the main A and B roads and locally important roads in the county. During snow events these remain the focus or our activity. However, it is recognised that other parts of the highway in the county are adversely affected by snow, and this can have a detrimental impact on communities relying on these roads to get to the main roads. Whilst policy, service levels and resources enable us to meet our statutory duty we are mindful that other parts of the road network do experience difficulties. These include hilly areas, exposed roads subject to drifting and other factors. These have been designated snow routes and will be treated, as resources allow, when there is a snow event. These routes have been digitised and loaded into the in- cab Locatu system. Additionally, we will continue to have the support of our contracted farmers who clear snow from pre-approved areas of the rural network.

6.0 Salt Bins

6.1 There are over 3,000 salt bins in the county and this stock is considered sufficient to meet the needs of local communities. No new salt bins will be placed this winter. County Members can still use their Combined Member Grant to purchase salt bins, subject to meeting our salt bin criteria.

6.2 Following on from last season, all reports received regarding empty and damaged salt bins were actioned. For this coming winter season, we will continue utilising individual reports from the highways team and customer enquiries, to ensure salt bins are full. In addition, we will be producing an article for Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) newsletter to ask Parishes to report empty salt bins in their local area, via our online fault reporting tool.

6.3 Salt bins will be filled once during the season, however in the event of a snow event they may be refilled, subject to available resources. We will continue to monitor salt bin usage over the coming winter season, to ensure bins are located where needed on the network.

6.4 To enable good record keeping over the last few years we have given all our salt bins unique references. This should help both our residents in reporting issues and for us to respond / monitoring usage of individual assets.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2026/27 is £4,364,500
The budget is broken down as follows:

Winter Service	Budget
PRE-SALTING GRITTING OPERATION	£4,164,200.00
MAINTENANCE OF FARMERS PLOUGHS	£50,000.00
WEATHER FORECASTING	£21,800.00
ICE PREDICTION	£38,200.00
MAINTAIN SALT BINS AND JUMBO SALT BAGS FOR BOTH PARISH AND UNPARISHED AREAS	£75,900.00
SUPPLY OF SALT TO DISTRICTS	£9,400.00
PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN	£5,000.00
TOTAL	**£4,364,500.00**

8.0 Collaboration with neighbouring authorities

8.1 Mutual aid arrangements are in place with National Highway Area 4 and Medway Council. Forecasting and planned actions are shared, to ensure a mutual understanding across the road network of Kent.

9.0 Media and communication

9.1 As in previous years a media campaign will be used during the winter season. A series of infographics have been prepared which gives information about the winter service in an engaging manner. These will feature in a range of media, including social media. The H&T Facebook page has a high profile and will include information regarding winter treatment and times of actions.

9.2 The campaign will increase awareness of the service and encourage everyone to be prepared and undertake self-help when possible. This year radio, television and press will be provided with media briefs in advance of the winter season detailing the essentials of the winter service.

9.3 Key staff in Highways are working with the press office to prepare statements and press releases for rapid issue at the onset of winter conditions. These will be pre-approved for use during periods of severe conditions when the winter service delivery team will be busy.

10.0 Winter Service Policy and Plan 2026/27

10.1 The Winter Service Policy is presented at Appendix A.

10.2 The Winter Service Policy is supported by an Winter Service Plan which has been updated in line with the Policy and discussions have taken place with our Highway Maintenance Service Provider to ensure that plans are aligned.

10.3 The Plan is available for Members to view on request. In addition, Highway Managers have prepared local district plans, developed in conjunction with district

and borough councils across the county and these will be used together with this revised Policy to deliver the winter service.

11.0 Equalities implications

11.1 An equality impact assessment (EQIA) has been carried out on the Policy.

12.0 Background Documents

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

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

14.0. Contact details

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Appendix A: KCC Highways Winter Service Policy 2026/27