

From: Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member - Environment & Transport
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To: Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee - 16 September 2015

Subject: Winter Service Policy for 2015/16

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: None

Electoral Division: All

Summary:

Each year Highway Operations reviews the Council's Winter Service Policy and the operational plan that supports it in light of changes in national guidance and lessons learnt from the previous winter. This report sets out revisions to this year's policy and details of arrangements for delivering the winter service including procurement of the weather forecast service and farmer snow ploughing contracts.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport on proposed changes to the Winter Service Policy for 2015/16

1. Introduction

1.1 During the winter of 2014/15 Kent experienced what can be described as an average winter with no snow days. However there were still many days and nights where there were marginal temperatures hovering around zero degrees and also nights where the temperature was below zero. This led to 91 primary salting runs being undertaken; 69 full runs covering all of Kent and 22 part runs. The 55 runs set out in the policy are based on a 16g pre wet spread rate. The salt usage for each run varies according the weather conditions. Therefore the number of runs completed last season is in excess of the 55 stated in the policy as some runs were done at a lower spread rate e.g. 8g pre wet. There were no secondary runs.

2. Financial implications

2.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2015/16 is £3,230,800. The budget is broken down as follows:

- £1,162,800 for 66 pre-cautionary salting runs on the primary network.

- £20,000 for the purchase of additional salt bins.
- £32,000 was spent on the weather forecast contract last season.
- £700 was spent last year on the liquid de-icer.
- The balance of the budget is for plant, equipment, salt and other resources necessary to deliver the service
- The costs for the farmers contract for snow ploughing are unknown as the farmers are only used at times when there is a snow event. The cost during the last snow emergency in 2012/13 was £52,371. Costs will vary depending on the severity of the weather. There were no costs in the past two years as we did not have snow. The costs for the farmers are paid for from the Council's reserve revenue budget

3. National guidance and winter planning

- 3.1 In recent years the Highway Operations winter service team have been working to implement the National guidance for winter service issued by the Department for Transport and detailed in the Code of Practice for highway authorities, Well Maintained Highways, Section 13 Winter Service. The appendix to this section of the guidance, Appendix H, has been updated and amended as a result of lessons being learnt in the industry over four successive cold and snowy winters.
- 3.2 During the summer work was done to further refine and improve the winter service. This work focused on:
- assessing areas of Appendix H to implement this coming winter ;
 - the procurement of the weather forecast contract ; and
 - the procurement of the farmers contract for snow ploughing
- 3.3 Appendix H sets out guidance in relation to salt usage and alternative products that can be used to de-ice carriageways and footways. The use of rock salt is the primary material used by Highway Operations and this will continue to be the case. However trials are being carried out by other authorities across the country using liquid treatments. The most extensive trial has been undertaken by Transport Scotland, working with Highways England (HE) and the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) who have promoted an initiative to further investigate the potential merit of using brine on the Scottish and English trunk road network. Transport Scotland selected two trial sites; the A1 at East Linton (near Dunbar) and the A9 at Aviemore. HE provided a site on the M27 at Parkgate. The results of the trials are being analysed and additional roads will be added to the trial for the coming winter season. In Kent officers are trialling a liquid de-icer on a few bridges in the county. The benefits, cost and environmental factors, will be assessed during and at the end of the season. (Winter Service Policy para 3.3.1.)
- 3.4 In order to deliver a high quality winter service, a bespoke winter road weather forecast is required to enable decision makers to have accurate information to instruct salting action around the county. The current contract for the weather forecast service expired in May 2015 and a procurement process was undertaken for a new supplier. The business cases for the weather forecast

contract and the farmers' snow clearance contracts were signed off in May 2015. The weather forecast contract was put out to tender on 13 July 2015. 20 days were programmed for the tenders to be returned and 10 days for evaluation of the returned tenders. Two tenders were received and are currently being evaluated with the intention to award a five-year contract with an option to extend for a further two years starting on 1 October 2015.

- 3.5 For many years farmers around the county have been invaluable in clearing snow and ice in their local community. The contracts for their services expired in May 2014 and were extended for a further year up to May 2015. As this service requires farmers with local knowledge of the rural areas of Kent who provided with snow ploughs by KCC to deliver, it is a highly specialised service. The procurement process has therefore been considered by the Corporate Procurement team, and officers are currently considering their advice and putting plans in place to secure the contracts by the end of October 2015.

4. Winter resilience

- 4.1 The Code of Practice for Well Maintained Highways recommends that local authorities identify a minimum network that would be treated continuously for a period of six days in a severe winter event. The minimum network for Kent has been identified as being the main strategic network, i.e. all A and B roads and some other locally important roads as detailed in the highway network hierarchy and amended the policy accordingly. Essentially, these equate to the current primary routes minus the local roads and roads that go through estates etc. Highway Operations will always endeavour to treat the entire primary network as identified in the policy. However we recognise that there may be times as experienced in previous years where it will be necessary to reduce the network as stated above to maintain our salt stock levels and keep the main roads in Kent moving during protracted winter weather events.
- 4.2 Additionally, officers have identified an Operational Winter Period which is October to April and a Core Winter Period which is December to February and the stocks of salt needed during those periods to effectively treat the network in line with recommended resilience levels. The resilience levels are shown at Appendix A. KCC maintains a salt stock of 23,000 tonnes which is within the recommended resilience level. Arrangements are in place for winter deliveries to keep stocks topped up during winter and 2,000 tonnes are held in a strategic stockpile at Faversham Highway depot.

5. Collaboration with neighbouring authorities

- 5.1 In previous years good relationships have been established with the Highways England MAC Area 4 who manage the trunk roads and motorways in Kent. KCC shares one depot at Stanford in east Kent with Highways England and there has been a reciprocal salt sharing arrangement for some time which has worked very well. Additionally there is an arrangement with Medway Council in respect of the weather forecast and treating areas on the borders of Kent and Medway. KCC also has good working relationships with

adjacent local authorities to provide mutual aid during a snow emergency. Additionally Highway Operations continues to contribute toward national guidance, being a member of the National Winter Research Group (NWSRG) Steering Group.

6. Media and communication

- 6.1 Following the successful winter service campaign, 'We're prepared are/have you?' which was run across the county in 2014/15, a similar campaign is planned for this year. Work is ongoing to continue this for the coming season and again the website and radio advertising will be key in getting the winter message across the county as well as Twitter which proved to be very popular in the past. The campaign will increase awareness of the service and also to encourage people to be prepared and undertake self-help when possible. This year the media – radio, television and press – will be provided with media briefs in advance of the winter season detailing the essentials of the winter service. Key staff in Highway Operations 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

7. Winter Service Policy and Plan 2015/16

- 7.1 The Winter Service Policy is presented at Appendix B. The Winter Service Policy is supported by an operational Plan which has been updated in line with the Policy and discussions have been had with KCC's contractor, Amey to ensure that plans are aligned. The Plan is available for Members to view on request. In addition district plans have been developed in conjunction with district councils across the county and these will be used together with the Policy and Plan to deliver the winter service. Local district plans will be reported to the next round of Joint Transportation Boards.

8. Strategic Statement

- 8.1 Winter service is essential to keep Kent moving for social and economic development reasons. It also contributes towards Kent residents having a good quality of life in all weathers through local district winter plans, the provision of salt bins and the communication strategy that complements the winter service policy

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2015/16 is £3,230,800. £1,162,800 of this budget is allocated for 66 pre-cautionary salting runs on the primary network. £20,000 is allocated for the purchase of additional salt bins. The balance of the budget is for plant, equipment, salt and other resources necessary to deliver the service, including the weather forecast service. This sum does not include an allowance for a snow emergency. Risk - in the event of a prolonged period(s) of snow the cost to KCC could rise significantly.

10. Legal Implications

- 10.1 The statutory basis for Winter Service in England and Wales is Section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980, modified on 31st October 2003 by Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003.

11. Equalities Implications

- 11.1 The Winter Service policy prioritizes ice and snow clearance on the major roads in the County to enable as many people as possible to continue to go about their daily business. Additionally local winter service plans have been developed for local more rural areas utilizing local farmers to clear snow when necessary. Within these plans there is provision for clearing areas that are used by vulnerable people including the elderly and young people. Local communities, principally parish councils, are also provided with a salt/sand mix for use in their area during snow days.

13. Conclusions

- 13.1 The Winter Service Policy sets out the Council's arrangements to deliver a winter service across Kent. The following revisions have been made this year:

(a) weather forecast contract procurement process has been followed and a five year contract will be awarded to the successful Company;

(b) Farmers contracts will be procured for the next ten years; and

(c) Liquid de-icer products to be used on selected bridges around the county.

14. Recommendations

- 14.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport on proposed changes to the Winter Service Policy for 2015/16

15. Background documents

The UK Road Liaison Group's Well Maintained Highways - Section 13 Winter Service

<http://www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org/en/news/index.cfm/appendix-h-winter-service-practical-guidance>

16. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Minimum Salt Stock Levels

Appendix 2 – Winter Service Policy

Appendix 3 – Proposed Record of Decision

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Minimum Salt Stock

Minimum Stock					
Routes	Normal salting network	Minimum Winter Network (tonnes/run	Full Pre season stock (12 days/48 runs)	Core winter period 6 days/36 runs	Overall winter period Minimum Network(3 days/18 runs)
Primary	350	350	16,800	12,600	6,300
Secondary	300	0	0	1800	5400
Total			16,800	14,400	11,700

Overall winter period - 16th October to 22nd April

Core winter period - 1st November to 1st March

Days resilience (overall winter period) 3 days

Days resilience (core winter period) 6 days

The minimum in season stocks are the minimum to which stocks should be allowed to fall, i.e. restocking should take place well before the minimum is likely to be reached