

To: Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member Environment and Transport

From: Roger Wilkin, Director of Highways, Transportation and Waste

Subject: Winter Service Policy for 2016/17

Decision No: 16/00076

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: Decision by Cabinet Member

Electoral Division: All

Summary: Each year officers review 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. In addition to the policy revisions, recommendations are made for any underspend from the winter service budget to be identified as a committed roll forward to be spent on highway soft landscaping maintenance.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport is asked to agree the following changes to the Winter Service Policy

(s. 3.3.2) Brine trial for selected routes to be implemented, supported by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL)

(s. 4.3.2) Kent Road Weather forecast to be sent out via the winter weather forecast provider, Met Desk

(s. 6.2.1) Additional routes added to snow clearance priorities

(s. 9.1.2) The proposal for any future winter service budget underspend to be treated as a committed roll forward, so that any additional funding is available in the following financial year for highway soft landscaping maintenance.

1. Introduction

1.1 The past three winters have been relatively mild with no snow days. Last winter was characterised by damp, mild weather. The number of primary salt runs was 52 compared to 91 in 2015/16. There were no secondary runs.

2. Financial implications

2.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2016/17 is £3,261,100. The budget is broken down as follows:

- £1,249,571 is allocated for 66 precautionary salting runs on the primary network
- £20,000 is allocated for the purchase of additional salt bins.
- £83,000 pays for the Kent bespoke weather forecast and ice prediction services
- The balance of the budget, £1,908,529 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 and as such are paid from the Council's reserve revenue budget. The cost during the last snow emergency in 2012/13 was £52,371 and there were no costs in the past three years.

Winter service budget underspend

- 2.2 When there is a mild winter the allocated budget for winter gritting runs can be underspent. The winter service base budgets are designed to cope with typical winter weather conditions, and whilst this can be easily exceeded in a cold and snowy winter, mild winters such as 2015/16 do result in an underspend. As an example, the 2015/16 winter service underspend was used to supplement existing priorities on pot hole repair and highway drainage / flooding (highway drainage maintenance and cleansing is always under exceptional pressure in a mild and wet winter).
- 2.3 Mild winters also lead to increased highway soft landscaping growth (including grass and weeds) and the current policy and level of funding for weed spraying across the county is limited to one weed spray per season. A second weed spray would limit potential trip hazards, reduce the potential for established growth and mitigate negative customer feedback. Additionally it would reduce early problems going into the next year's growing season as weeds would be less established.

3. Risk and dependencies

- 3.1 The proposal for a committed roll forward of any underspend on the winter service budget is dependent upon there being an overall underspend in the Growth Environment and Transport Directorate. If this is not the case then there can be no roll forward commitment.

4. National guidance and winter planning

- 4.1 In recent years the Highways 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.

- 4.2 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
 - introducing a more efficient way of communicating the treatment decision to gritter drivers, other authorities and the media and public.
- 4.3 “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. Last year this Cabinet Committee was informed of trials using brine being carried out by Transport for Scotland and Highways England. The results of these trials have been evaluated and benefits found in relation to treatment times, efficacy and environmental matters. Plans to trial a de-icer in Kent on selected bridges have been limited due to the mild weather last winter. The material is however available and will be used if the weather conditions allow for it.
- 4.4 Plans are also in place to equip a small specialist vehicle with a brine solution to treat a few town centre areas. This is also subject to weather conditions (Winter Service Policy para 3.3.2.). Discussions are taking place with the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) for them to be involved in assessing the trial and reporting on the outcomes.
- 4.5 For many years farmers around the county have been invaluable in clearing snow and ice in their local community. Following a successful procurement exercise last year 117 farmers covering 208 routes have been signed up for the next eight years.

5. Winter resilience

- 5.1 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.

- 5.2 Additionally we 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 minimum levels of salt needed to maintain the resilient network (as defined in the Quamby Review 2012), are shown at Appendix A. We maintain a salt stock of 20,500 tonnes (including 2,000 tonnes of salt/grit mix which is held in a strategic stockpile at Faversham Highway depot) so we are within the recommended minimum levels. Arrangements are in place for winter deliveries to keep stocks topped up during winter.

6. Collaboration with neighbouring authorities

- 6.1 In previous years good relationships have been established with Highways England MAC Area 4 who manage the motorways and trunk roads in Kent. KCC no longer shares depot facilities with Highways England however when needed mutual aid will continue as in previous years. This includes arrangements being in place for KCC to access stocks of Highways England salt at Stanford and Coldharbour depots. In the event of a snow emergency KCC will also be able to access national strategic salt stocks managed by the Department for Transport. Additionally there is an arrangement with Medway Council in respect of the weather forecast and treating areas on the borders of Kent and Medway. We also have good working relationships with adjacent local authorities who we can work with in the event that mutual aid is required during a snow emergency. Additionally we continue to contribute toward national guidance, being a member of the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG).

7. Media and communication

- 7.1 Following the successful winter service campaign 'We're prepared are/have you?' which was run across the county in 2015/16 a similar campaign is planned for this year. This year 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.
- 7.2 The campaign will increase awareness of the service and also encourage everyone 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.
- 7.3 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.

8. Winter Service Policy and Plan 2016/17

8.1 The Winter Service Policy is presented at Appendix C. In addition to the proposals set out in paragraphs 2.2 and 4.4, the following updates have been added to this year's policy:

- Section 6.2.1 - Additional routes added to snow clearance priorities
- Section 4.3.2 - Kent Road Weather forecast to be sent out via the winter weather forecast provider, Met Desk

8.2 The Winter Service Policy is supported by an operational 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.

8.3 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.

9. Strategic Statement

9.1 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.

10. Equality Impact Assessment

10.1 An equality impact assessment is being carried out on the Policy and in the event that any negative impacts are identified, action will be taken to mitigate or remove them.

11. Conclusion

11.1 The Winter Service Policy sets out the Council's proposed arrangements to deliver a winter service across Kent. A number of revisions have been made as set out above and detailed in the recommendations below.

12. Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport is asked to agree the following changes to the Winter Service Policy for 2016/17:

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- (s. 4.3.2) Kent Road Weather forecast to be sent out via the winter weather forecast provider, Met Desk
- (s. 6.2.1) Additional routes added to snow clearance priorities
- (s. 9.1.2) The proposal for any future winter service budget underspend to be treated as a committed roll forward, so that any additional funding is available in the following financial year for highway soft landscaping maintenance.

13. Background documents

- Appendix A – Minimum Stock Levels
- Appendix B – Proposed Record of Decision
- Appendix C: Winter Service Policy
- The UK Road Liaison Group's Well Maintained Highways - Section 13 Winter Service –
<http://www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org/en/utilities/document-summary.cfm?docid=C7214A5B-66E1-4994-AA7FBAC360DC5CC7>

14. Contact details

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Appendix A

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	1,800	5,400
Total					
Planned Stock Levels by 14 October 2016 (advance orders)			16,800	14,400	11,700

Overall winter period – 14 October 2016 to 21 April 2017

Core winter period - 1November to 1March

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