

From: David Brazier, Cabinet Member Highways and Transport
Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport.

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 8th September 2022

Subject: Winter Service Policy for 2022/23

Classification: Unrestricted

Past pathway of paper: N/A

Future pathway of paper: N/A

Divisions Affected: County-wide

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 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 2022/23 as set out in para 9.1.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 2021/22 winter was a slightly milder than average winter season, with 60 primary salting routes completed compared with the budgeted 66 runs and 9160 tonnes of salt was used.
- 1.2 Additionally, dedicated gritters continued to be assigned to treat sites associated with the EU exit / inland border facility at Ashford.

2. Financial implications

- 2.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2022/23 is £3,641,000
The budget is broken down as follows:

Pre-salting gritting operation	1,394,000
Plant & equipment	2,040,000
Maintenance of farmers ploughs	50,000
Weather forecasting	26,000
Ice prediction	35,000
Supply & maintain salt bins	81,000
Supply of salt to districts	10,000

Publicity campaign	5,000
TOTAL	£3,641,000

3. Winter planning

3.1 Over the 2022 summer period work has been undertaken to further refine and improve the winter service; this focused on:

- Reviewing of snow routes
- Smart winter route optimisation
- Salt bin replacement and filling
- Salt storage at depots
- Analysing of Route based forecasting results
- Review of District plans and existing routes

3.2 Smart Winter route optimisation

3.2.1 During phase 2 of the Smart Winter Programme, Amey Strategic Consulting developed a machine learning model to predict road surface temperatures using sensor and contextual data. This model was used to define new gritting domains with more consistent temperature profiles, improving the effectiveness of gritting decisions made on domains during the past winter season. Work will be done in the next year to further optimise the existing winter routes within the new domains.

4.0 Salt bins

4.1 There are just 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 Fund to purchase salt bins.

4.2 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.

4.3 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.

4.4 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.

5. 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 of 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 Navtrak 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. Winter resilience

- 6.1 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 Quarmby review 2012) is 16,800 tonnes. We maintain a salt stock of 23,000 tonnes (including 2,000 tonnes of a salt/grit mix which is held in a strategic stockpile at Faversham Highway depot) ensuring the recommended minimum levels are achieved. Arrangements are in place for salt deliveries during the winter to ensure we have the recommended resilience stock levels.
- 6.1.1 In addition, we also hold 5000t as an operational contingency, in the event of an emergency being declared or if supplies nationally become frustrated.
- 6.2 Our service provider Amey continues to indicate the national issue of a shortage of HGV drivers, which may impact on their ability to maintain driver levels for the coming winter season. There is no measurable impact at this stage. Amey senior management are in communications with their supply chain sub-contractors and support drivers to understand if there will be a resource issue. The issue of some UK companies offering cash incentives for drivers to join their organisations does cause concern for this type of local resource and has the potential to increase costs for the service moving forward.

7. Collaboration with neighbouring authorities

- 7.1 Mutual aid arrangements are in place with Highways England Area 4 and Medway Council. The annual winter meeting with all southeast

highway authorities to finalise arrangements is scheduled for late September 2022.

8. Media and communication

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 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.

9. Winter Service Policy and Plan 2022/23

- 9.1 The Winter Service Policy is presented at Appendix A. The following addition have been made to this year's policy:
 - (3.4.1) In addition, KCC also hold 5000 tonnes of rock salt as an operational contingency, in the event of an emergency being declared or if supplies nationally become frustrated.
 - (8.1.4) 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
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 The Plan is available for Members to view on request. In addition, district plans have been 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. Local district plans will be reported to the next round of Joint Transportation Boards.

10. Strategic Statement: Framing Kent's Future

- 10.1 The Winter Policy supports Priority 2: Infrastructure for communities by exploring innovation to enhance our highways maintenance and responsiveness.

11. Equality Impact Assessment

- 11.1 An equality impact assessment (EQIA) has been carried out on the Policy and is still current.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The Winter Service Policy sets out the Council's arrangements to deliver a winter service across Kent. There are limited revisions that have been made to this year's policy, due to the excellent progress made over the last few years, to ensure our winter service policy is robust and deliverable. Please note the revisions made, as set out above and detailed in the recommendations below.

13. Recommendation

- 13.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport on the proposed revisions to the Winter Service Policy for 2022/23 as set out in para 9.1

14. Background documents

- 14.1 Well Managed Highways 2016; NWSRG Best Practice Guidance - Planning Section:
[Practical Guidance Documents – NWSRG](#)
- 14.2 Appendix A Winter Service Policy:
<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s113354/202223WinterServicePolicy.docx.pdf>

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