

From: Neil Baker, Cabinet Member Highways and Transport
Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport.

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 19 September 2024

Subject: Winter Service Policy for 2024/25

Classification: Unrestricted

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. Due to the work undertaken previously, there are no key revisions to this year's policy. This report sets out an overview of this year's policy.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Committee is asked to note and make comments to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport on the proposed Winter Service Policy for 2024/25.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 2023/24 winter season was mild when compared to previous years. The weather through the season was a mixture between prolonged periods of persistent rainfall and isolated cold periods where we had to undertake preventative salting of the network.
- 1.2 The overall winter season was below average for the number of salting runs undertaken when compared against previous years. We undertook a total of 40 primary salting shouts, compared with the budgeted 66 runs and used 6,694 tonnes of salt.
- 1.3 Operation Performance Measure 17 (OPM17) across the season for Salting Runs completed within the specified timeframe was 99.2%.

2. Financial implications

- 2.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2024/25 is £4,324,100. The budget is broken down as follows:

Pre-salting gritting operation	1,661,500
Plant & equipment	2,457,700
Maintenance of farmers ploughs	50,000
Weather forecasting	20,700
Ice prediction	36,300
Supply & maintain salt bins	82,700
Supply of salt to districts	10,200
Publicity campaign	5,000
TOTAL	£4,324,100

3. Winter planning

3.1 Over the 2024 summer period work has been undertaken to further refine and improve the winter service; this focused on:

- Reviewing winter service provision ready for the new HTMC
- Review of snow routes
- Salt bin replacement and filling, along with analysing usage.
- Salt storage at depots – Swanley salt barn completed and operational.
- Review of our district plans and existing routes
- Review of local farmers snow plough agreements

3.2 Winter route optimisation

3.2.1 Our gritting routes are organised within specific climate areas making our gritting decisions more effective. We now only treat roads that need it, based on their climate area. Before, routes would cross different climate areas, leading us to grit roads that did not need it because we could not separate the routes at the boundaries.

4.0 Salt bins

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

4.2 Once again, following on from last season, all reports received regarding empty and damaged salt bins were actioned. For this coming winter season, we will continue using individual reports from the highways team and customer enquiries, to ensure salt bins are full prior to the start of the core winter period. 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.

4.3 Salt bins will be filled once during the season, however in the event of snowfall 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 appropriately located on the network.

5. Snow routes

5.1 The winter service is focused on keeping open the network of primary routes comprising 1,597 miles, (2,571 km) which are the main A and B roads and locally important roads in the county. During snowfall 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 snowfall. 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, KCC continues to hold 5,000t of salt, as an operational contingency, in the event of an emergency being declared or if supplies nationally become frustrated.

7. Collaboration with neighbouring authorities

7.1 Mutual aid arrangements are in place with national highway Area 4 and Medway Council. The annual winter meeting with all southeast highway authorities to finalise arrangements is scheduled for late September 2024.

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 2024/25

- 9.1 The Winter Service Policy is presented at Appendix A. Please note, no additions or amendments have been made to the policy for this coming winter season.
- 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 our 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 the Policy to deliver the winter service.

10. Strategic Statement

- 10.1 Winter service is essential to “Framing Kent’s Future - Infrastructure for Communities - Priority 2”. To ensure residents have access to viable and attractive travel options that allow them to make safe, efficient, and more sustainable journeys throughout Kent. 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.

11. Equality Impact Assessment

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

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.

13. Recommendations

<p>13.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to note and make comments to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport on the proposed Winter Service Policy for 2024/25.</p>
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14. Appendices and Background documents

- 14.1 Appendix A – Winter Service Policy
- 14.2 Well Managed Highways 2016; NWSRG Best Practice Guidance - Planning Section

15. Contact details

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