

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

**To:** Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 14 September 2023

**Subject:** Winter Service Policy for 2023/24

**Classification:** Unrestricted

Past Pathway of paper: N/A

Future Pathway of paper: N/A

Divisions Affected: Countywide

**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 comment on the operational revisions to the Winter Service Policy for 2023/24 as set out in para 6.1

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 2022/23 winter weather started with heavy rainfall followed by an extreme cold snap before conditions averaged out and was on par with previous years, with 63 primary salting routes completed compared with the budgeted 66 runs and 14,445 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 agreed at County Council in February for 2023/24 is £3,784,500.00.  
The budget is broken down as follows:

Pre-Salting Gritting Operation	1,236,600.00
Plant & Equipment	2,396,900.00
Maintenance Of Farmers Ploughs	50,000
Weather Forecasting	20,000
Ice Prediction	35,000

Supply & Maintain Salt Bins	81,000
Supply Of Salt To Districts	10,000
Publicity Campaign	5,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£3,784,500</b>

2.2 The cost of the winter service will be £800k higher due to higher cost rates for the Highways Term Maintenance Contract, however beneficial streetlight energy summer rate prices has delivered an in-year underspend that will compensate for the 23/24 pressure of the uplift.

### 3. Winter planning

3.1 Over the 2023 summer period work has been undertaken to further refine and improve the winter service; this focused on:

- Review of primary routes
- Review of snow routes
- Considering operational timings for salting
- Consideration for combining evening and morning gritting runs, where possible – subject to application rates and weather conditions.
- Reduction in fleet – through route reviews
- Further winter route optimisation
- Salt bin replacement and filling
- Salt storage at depots – New Swanley salt barn
- Review of District plans and existing routes

#### ***Winter route optimisation***

3.2. All gritting routes are contained within specific climatic domains to improve the effectiveness of gritting decisions made, by only treating those routes that need treatment. Previously, routes often crossed between domains, which would lead to treating parts of the network unnecessarily, as it was not possible to split the routes, where they crossed domains. Further work has been undertaken to optimise the existing winter routes within the new domains, to further improve efficiency.

#### ***Salt bins***

3.3 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.

3.4 Following on from last season, all reports received regarding empty and damaged salt bins were actioned. For this coming winter season, officers will continue utilising individual reports from the highways team and customer enquiries, to ensure salt bins are full. In addition, officers

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.

- 3.5 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. Officers will continue to monitor salt bin usage over the coming winter season, to ensure bins are located where needed on the network.
- 3.6 To enable good record keeping over the last few years all salt bins have been given unique references. This should help ur residents in reporting issues and for officers respond / monitor usage of individual assets.

### ***Snow routes***

- 3.7 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 snow events these remain the focus or our activity.
- 3.8 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.

### ***Winter resilience***

- 3.9 Officers have identified the Operational Winter Period as October to April within this a Core Winter Period 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. KCC maintains 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 recommended resilience stock levels are available.
- 3.10 In addition, 5,000 tonnes of salt are held as an operational contingency, in the event of an emergency being declared or if supplies nationally become frustrated.

#### **4. Collaboration with neighbouring authorities**

- 4.1 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 2023.

#### **5. Media and communication**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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.

#### **6. Winter Service Policy and Plan 2023/24**

- 6.1 The Winter Service Policy is presented at Appendix B. The following additions have been made to this year's policy:

(5.6.6) When the winter duty officer is making a routine decision for precautionary salting, consideration should be given to both evening and morning salting runs, to reduce the number of vehicle movements, by considering combining these to one salting run, with a higher spread rate.

(5.6.7) It will only be possible to consider combining morning and evening salting runs up to 10g /run, giving a total of 20g.

(5.6.8) Consideration will also be given to local weather conditions and possible water runoff, from wet spots that may prohibit combining the evening / morning salting run.

- 6.2 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.

## **7. Strategic Statement**

- 7.1 Winter service is essential Priority 2 in Framing Kent's Future as part of the commitment to a highways maintenance approach that balances efficiency and responsiveness with investment in the condition and safety of the highways network .

## **8. Equality Impact Assessment**

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

## **9. Conclusion**

- 9.1 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.

## **10. Recommendations**

- 10.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to note and comment on the operational revisions to the Winter Service Policy for 2023/24 as set out in para 6.1

## **11. Background documents**

- 11.1 Well Managed Highways 2016; NWSRG Best Practice Guidance - Planning Section

## **12. Contact details**

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