

From: Roger Wilkin, Director of Highways, Transportation and Waste
To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 21 September
Subject: Winter Service Policy for 2017/18

Decision Number: 17/00085

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: For Cabinet Member Decision

Divisions Affected: All

Summary: Each year officers in Highways, Transportation and Waste 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.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste on the proposed decisions as shown at Appendix A and to agree the proposed changes to the Winter Service Policy for 2017/18 as shown below and at paragraph 7.1:

- (s.1.3.2) - Medway Council winter service on behalf of KCC to be formalised;
- (s. 3.3.2) - Brine only trial to be extended;
- (s. 4.4.1) - Bureau Maintenance service for weather stations contract to be procured; and
- (s 5.5.1) - instructions for precautionary slating of primary routes to be carried out in line with KCC winter treatment instruction matrix contained in the Winter Service Plan 2017/18.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Last winter (2016/17) could be considered an average winter with most of the colder weather occurring in December and January. The number of primary route runs undertaken was 66 with an additional 4 secondary route runs. This compares to 52 primary runs and no secondary runs in 2015/16.
- 1.2 There was one snow day on 12th January 2017. This was not a county wide event and mainly affected areas from Ashford going west to Maidstone. At low levels, typical snow depths were in the region of 1-2cm in northern and western Kent but, locally, and particularly over the hills, 3-5cm was reported. Despite the sudden onset of the snow,

melting took place fairly quickly going into the following day. A total of 8 farmers cleared snow on their pre-planned ploughing routes.

2. Financial implications

2.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2017/8 is £3,328,600. The budget is broken down as follows:

- £1,277,071 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.
- £83,000 pays for the Kent bespoke weather forecast and ice prediction services (NB. The ice prediction Bureau maintenance service is out to tender at the point of preparing this report – see paragraph 3.3 below)
- The balance of the budget, £1,948,529 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. The cost during the last snow emergency in 2012/13 was £52,371. Costs will vary depending on the severity of the weather. The costs for farmers last season was £2,457. The costs for deploying the farmers during a snow emergency are paid for from the Council's reserve revenue budget.

3. National guidance and winter planning

3.1 In recent years the Highways winter service team has been working to implement the National guidance for winter service issued by the Department for Transport and detailed in the recently updated Code of Practice for highway authorities – Well Managed Highways and the relevant section on Winter Service.

3.2 During the summer work was done to further refine and improve the winter service. This work focused on:

- Procurement of the Bureau Maintenance of the Road Weather stations (ice prediction service)
- Evaluation of the brine only treatment
- Formalising arrangements with Medway Council for the work they do on treating sections of the Kent road networks

3.3 A network of road weather stations are in place across the county. The weather stations are supported and monitored by the provision of a Bureau and Maintenance service which provides data that is utilised by the road weather forecast providers to produce the daily Kent Road Weather Forecast during the winter service season. The contract also covers the maintenance and repair of the road weather stations. The contract was previously held by Vaisala plc and came to an end in April 2017. At the time of writing this report a procurement process is in

place for a new contract for 5 years with an option to extend for an additional 3 years.

- 3.4 Last winter season a specialist gritter lorry was equipped with a brine solution to treat designated routes in the Maidstone area as part of a brine only pre-cautionary treatment trial. The trial was subject to weather conditions when brine would be a suitable treatment. (Winter Service Policy para: 3.3.2). The adapted gritter lorry was not available until mid-January 2017 and there were insufficiently low road surface temperatures to use the brine for more than a few treatments. Therefore it was not possible to collect sufficient data for evaluation by Transport Research Laboratories to produce a report on the outcomes. It is therefore proposed that the trial continues for the 2017/18 winter service season.
- 3.5 For a number of years Medway Council Highways department has carried out gritting on behalf of KCC on some of our adjacent roads during the winter season. These roads are principally in the north and west of the county in the borough areas of Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling and Gravesham and are the responsibility of KCC. These roads are adjacent and adjoining the Medway network and over many years there has been an informal agreement with Medway do this work. In consideration of this gritting of our network KCC has provided Medway Council with the daily road weather forecast during the winter season, access to our road weather stations and bureau system and annual winter service training. This has worked very well and has proven effective. To formalise this arrangement for the future KCC and Medway officers are working to put in place a contractual arrangement to ensure that both authorities formally recognise their respective obligations and service commitments. An agreed contract will be in place by the start of the 2017/18 winter service season.

4. Winter resilience

- 4.1 The Code of Practice for Well Managed 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, that is, all A and B roads and some other locally important roads as detailed in the highway network hierarchy and amended in the policy accordingly. Essentially, these equate to the current primary routes minus the local roads and roads that go through estates etc. KCC Highways 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 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) are shown at Appendix B. We maintain a salt stock of 20,500 tonnes (including 2000 tonnes of a 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 us topped up during winter.

5. Collaboration with neighbouring authorities

- 5.1 In previous years good relationships have been established with Highways England (HE) 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. Arrangements are being put in place for KCC to access stocks of HE salt at Stanford and Coldharbour depots. In the event of a snow emergency we 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 (see para. 3.5 above). 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. We will continue to contribute toward national guidance, being a member of the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG).

6. Media and communication

- 6.1 Following the successful winter service campaign titled '*We're prepared are/have you?*' which was run across the county in 2016/17 a similar campaign is planned for 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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

7. Winter Service Policy and Plan 2017/18

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

Section 1.3.2 – Medway Council winter service on behalf of KCC to be formalised (see para. 3.5 above)

Section 3.3.2 – Brine only trial to be extended (see para 3.4 above)

Section 4.4.1 – Bureau Maintenance service for weather stations contract to be procured (see para 3.3 above)

Section 5.5.1 – instructions for precautionary slating of primary routes to be carried out in line with KCC winter treatment instruction matrix contained in the Winter Service Plan 2017/18

- 7.2 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.

- 7.3 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.

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. Equality Impact Assessment

- 9.1 An equality impact assessment (EQIA) 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. The EQIA undertaken last year did not identify any factors that required mitigation or changes to the policy.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 The Winter Service Policy sets out the Council's 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.

11. Recommendation(s)

11.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste on the proposed decisions as shown at Appendix A and to agree the proposed changes to the Winter Service Policy for 2017/18 as shown below and at paragraph 7.1:

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12. Background documents and appendices

- Well Managed Highways 2016; Appendix H winter service guidance NWSRG - <http://www.ukroadsliasongroup.org/en/utilities/document-summary.cfm?docid=C7214A5B-66E1-4994-AA7FBAC360DC5CC7>
- Appendix A – Record of Decision
- Appendix B - Minimum Salt Stock Levels
- Appendix C – Winter Service Policy - http://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/18977/Winter-service-policy-2016-17.pdf

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