**From**: Michael Payne, Cabinet Member Highways and Transport

Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport.

**To:** Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 15 September 2020

**Subject:** Winter Service Policy for 2020/21

**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. 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 Highways and Transport on the proposed decisions to agree changes to the Winter Service Policy for 2020/2 as set out in para 8.1

## 1. Introduction

1.1 The 2019/20 winter was another mild winter with 52 primary salting routes completed compared with the budgeted 66 runs and 9368 tonnes of salt was used. There were no snow days.

## 2. Financial implications

2.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2020/21 is £3,501,701. The budget is broken down as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| PRE-SALTING GRITTING OPERATION | 1,316,650 |
| PLANT & EQUIPMENT | 1,809,324 |
| SNOWEX MACHINES | 144,601 |
| MAINTENANCE OF FARMERS PLOUGHS | 50,000 |
| WEATHER FORECASTING | 20,000 |
| ICE PREDICTION | 65,126 |
| SUPPLY & MAINTAIN SALT BINS | 81,100 |
| SUPPLY OF SALT TO DISTRICTS | 10,000 |
| PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN | 5,000 |
| **TOTAL** | **£3,501,701** |

## 3. Winter planning

3.1 Over the 2020 summer period work has been undertaken to further refine and improve the winter service; this focused on:

- Brine trial
- Re-procuring the road weather forecast contract
- Smart winter Phase 2 and 2b/Route optimisation and Navtrak analysis

### 3.2 Brine trial

3.2.1 A brine trial started during the 2016/17 winter service period on a part of a primary route in Maidstone and continued until the 2019/20 season. Analysis of the trial will be carried out in the 2020/21 winter season as a part of the Live Labs programme, linking in with the Smart Winter project. Unfortunately, the analysis has been delayed for two reasons; firstly, in the winter of 2018/19, the equipment used to gather grip data was deployed in January 2019 and due to a mild winter, there were not enough salting treatments to collect a representative sample of data. Secondly, due to organisational issues, our original research partner, TRL, were unable to provide the necessary resources to complete this work. The analysis will now be carried out by our Live Labs partner Amey Strategic Consulting. This analysis will be based on vehicle tracking data, Exactrak road friction measurements, and contextual weather data, to assess the benefits of brine under given weather and road conditions

### 3.3 Re-procuring the weather forecast contract

3.3.1 An effective and efficient winter service is only possible with reliable and accurate information about predicted weather conditions, at the appropriate times in the decision-making process. Following a procurement process in 2019/20, a new road weather forecast provider has been appointed, DTN Meteogroup. The contract is for 4 years with an option for an additional 4-year extension.

### 3.4 Smart Winter Phase 2 and 2b/Route optimisation and Navtrak analysis

3.4.1 Last winter “Navtrak” in-cab technology was installed in gritting lorries treating 23 primary routes. The technology automates the gritting process to ensure that only the critical areas of the primary network are salted and only with the correct spread rates of salt. The following benefits were identified:

- in-cab audio and visual route navigation
- stores all the routes on board
- provide immediate support to drivers

- reduces wrong turns and mileage
- guarantee route adherence

3.4.2 The technology resulted in greater compliance which is critical for the delivery of the service and ensuring that the primary routes are treated in accordance with the instructed actions. Compliance also reduces the Council's exposure to the risk of insurance claims On this basis, along with the other benefits outlined above, the decision has been made to install Navtrak units in the whole winter gritting fleet. Phase 2b of the Smart Winter project has included digitising all primary routes so they are ready to be uploaded to the Navtrak system.

NB. *Without Navtrak, gritters would need to operate approximately 6%* ***longer*** *(i.e. farther) in order to achieve the same level of coverage and compliance. Additionally, without Navtrak there is a higher degree of grit wastage with some grit being laid outside the assigned routes due to the loss of accuracy*

### 3.5 Route optimisation

3.5.1 Over the past two years as a part of the Smart Winter Project, road surface temperature sensors have been installed across the Kent highway network. The data that has been collected over this time period has been processed and analysed and the results have enabled Highway Operations to redefine the winter domains and these new domains will be utilised for the current winter season. Further work will be done in the next year to optimise the existing winter routes within the new domains.

### 3.6 Salt bins

3.6.2 Over the past few years, an assessment process has been in place for the installation of new salt bins across the county. There are now just over 3,000 salt bins in the county. These all must be maintained and filled each year. For the 2020 winter season a review will be carried out to determine the need to provide further salt bins across the county. An exercise will be carried out to identify how the salt bins are utilised and those that are seldom used may be removed and where needed moved to more suitable locations. In view of the review and the widespread availability of salt bins already in place, for the 2020 season no further salt bins will be placed. The existing salt bin stock is considered sufficient to meet the needs of local communities. County Members can still use their Combined Member Fund to purchase salt bins.

## 4. Winter resilience

4.1 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.

## 5. Collaboration with neighbouring authorities

5.1 Mutual aid arrangements are in place with Highways England Area 4 and Medway Council. The annual winter meeting with all south east highway authorities to finalise arrangements is scheduled for late September 2020.

## 6. Media and communication

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

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. EU Exit

7.1 Preparations continue within KCC for the end of Transition on 31st December 2020 and winter service is included in those preparations. Whilst the exact impact on the road network is unknown at this time any additional congestion on the pre-salted routes will impact on the effectiveness of the service.

## 8. Winter Service Policy and Plan 2010/21

8.1 The Winter Service Policy is attached as a background document to this report. The following additions have been made to this year's policy:

(s.3.3.2) A brine trial started during the 2016/17 winter service period and continued until the 2019/20 season. Analysis of the

trial will be carried out in the 2020/21 winter season by Amey Strategic Consulting

(4.1.1) Following a procurement process in 2019/20, a new road weather forecast provider has been appointed, DTN Meteogroup

(5.2.2) Over the past two years as a part of the Smart Winter Project, road surface temperature sensors have been installed across the Kent highway network. The data that has been collected over this time period has been processed and analysed and the results have enabled the winter domains to be redefined and these new domains will be introduced during the current winter season.

(8.1.3-8.1.4) Salt bins – a review to be carried out on salt bin usage across the county and no new bins to be placed in the 2020/21 winter season.

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 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.

9. **Strategic Statement**

9.1 Winter service is essential to "Keep Kent Moving" for both social and economic 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 (EQIA) has been carried out on the Policy.

**11. Conclusion**

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

## 12. Recommendations

12.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport on the proposed decisions to agree changes to the Winter Service Policy for 2020/2 as set out in para 8.1

## 13. Background documents

13.1 Well Managed Highways 2016; NWSRG Best Practice Guidance - Planning Section:
http://www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org/en/codes/index.cfm

13.2 Winter Service Policy:
https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5938&ID=5938&RPID=37470138

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