



10 NOVEMBER 2022

REPORT TITLE:	HIGHWAY WINTER SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS 2022/23
REPORT OF:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, HIGHWAYS AND INFRASTRUCTURE, NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to the proposed Highway Winter Service Operational Plan and arrangements for 2022/23.

Under Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003, the council, as local highway authority for Wirral, has a duty 'to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice'.

One of the key themes in the Wirral Plan 2021-26 is to provide safe and pleasant communities. By generally making roads safer for road users, this operational plan will contribute to a key theme set out within the current Wirral Plan.

This matter affects all Wards.

This matter does not require a Key Decision.

RECOMMENDATION

The Director of Neighbourhood Services is recommended to approve the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan for 2022/23.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The Highway Winter Service Operational Plan included at Appendix A to this report details proposals for the manner in which Wirral's highway winter service operations will be carried out during the winter period 2022/23 for the treatment of carriageways, footways and other areas where required in order that the council can meet its statutory duty.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 A fully externalised commissioned service was considered but this would not meet the council's preferred overall highway service delivery model approved by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee on 16 March 2021, and may not deliver best value at the present time.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Responsibility for the delivery of an effective highway winter maintenance service rests with the council as the local Highway Authority for Wirral. The Highway Winter Service Operational Plan at Appendix A sets out the proposed standards for the treatment of the borough's highway network as a consequence of winter weather; it sets out a framework of good practice within which the borough's Winter Service provision is managed and takes into account the recommendations and advice set out in the national guidance: Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: Code of Practice, published October 2016.
- 3.2 A brief overview of the proposed 2022/23 Highway Winter Service Operational Plan is set out below:
 - The Winter Service Period will be nominally from Monday 14 November 2022 until Monday 10 April 2023. Council staff will be on standby 24 hours a day, seven days a week during this 21-week period. However, this period may be brought forward or extended depending upon the prevailing weather conditions.
 - A successful Dry Run training day took place on Saturday 5 November 2022 with Council staff and Idverde (gritter drivers) including a number of tool-box talks and radio etiquette training.
 - Winter bureau and weather forecasting services are provided to the council under contracts with Vaisala UK and MetDesk, who have staff available for consultation and advice at all times.
 - The Highway Winter Service vehicle fleet consists of 11 full size (18 tonne) gritters and 1 mini (3.5 tonne) gritters which are used for day-to-day gritting operations, with snow ploughs available for each of the main gritters. The fleet is 'garaged' at the Cleveland Street transport depot where it is maintained by the Transport Division fleet maintenance staff. Currently 9 of the gritting vehicles are hired with the remaining 3 vehicles owned by the council.
 - For this year's Highway Winter Service the council has procured the services of the idverde Group to provide the necessary personnel to drive the gritting fleet. This will

be their fifth winter season working directly for the council. Idverde staff will be on standby 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the agreed Winter Service period.

- At the time of writing this report, there is approximately 1,800 tonnes of rocksalt stockpiled under covered storage at the council's salt dome storage facility at the Cleveland Street transport depot and this will be replenished when necessary. For an average winter season of 33 pre-grit treatments using 50 tonnes of rocksalt per treatment at the minimum spread rate of 10g/m², 1,650 tonnes of rocksalt will be used.
 - Approximately 42 tonnes of rocksalt will be used to fill and refill the 100 grit bins. These are provided at locations around the Borough where there is a need to undertake regular spot salting on roads or footpaths and may be placed at strategic locations on the network where there is a high pedestrian usage.
 - The length of the council's highway network is 1,180km and approximately 427km are treated as part of a routine pre-grit operation. All the gritting routes were amended following a review of the winter maintenance operations following the severe winter weather conditions of 2010/11, and more recently, to reflect the need to adopt priorities for Winter Service, which are coherent with wider objectives for transport, integration, accessibility and network management, including strategies for public transport, walking, cycling and vulnerable people.
- 3.3 The appendices associated with Highway Winter Service Operational Plan may be revised as necessary during the course of the 2022/23 season to reflect changes to operational rotas, schedules and routes in order to deliver the necessary level of service required.
- 3.4 This report is concerned with an operational winter service delivered within Neighbourhoods directorate relating to gritting and clearing the council's network of snow and ice. However, the service links to other operational plans, including: Flood Risk Management Plan and Street Cleansing Autumnal Leaf Removal Programme, demonstrating an holistic approach to service resilience in responding to winter weather conditions.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The service revenue budget allocation for this activity in 2022/23 is £416,000 and is historically based on a hypothetical average winter comprising of 33 call outs and for filling and re-filling grit bins for the duration of the winter season. However, fixed costs have increased in recent years and other costs vary year-on-year depending upon the severity of the winter and amount of grit purchased and utilised. However, despite service, operational and support contract efficiencies having been made, the average spend in the past several years has been consistently around £200,000 over this budget and thus the predicted forecast spend for 2022/23 and future years is £616,000. This also includes additional measures first provided in 2020/21 to maintain a Covid-safe working environment. The Director of Neighbourhoods is working with the Finance Director and finance officers to ensure any in year pressures are found through the service or corporate funding support and the establishment of a reserve fund is being explored.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The council has a statutory duty under Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003 'to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice'.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 The highway winter service operation will be carried out by existing staff as part of their normal duties. There are no additional ICT or assets implications.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 Failure to document and deliver a clear Winter Service Operational Plan potentially exposes the council to reputational and legal risks and could compromise public safety.

7.2 There is a risk that an ongoing national shortage of HGV drivers could impact upon service delivery but this has been mitigated as far as reasonably practicable by obtaining commitments from the council's gritter fleet driver supplier, idverde, that sufficient qualified drivers are contractually committed to Wirral's contract including standby cover.

7.3 There is a risk that an extremely severe winter could result in a requirement for additional rock salt to be purchased at additional unbudgeted cost and global economic factors could affect the price for additional supplies. This may result in an overspend on the service area revenue budget in excess of current forecast and is included in the service area and directorate level risk register.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Consultation has taken place across council directorates and with a range of partner organisations, including: Wirral NHS; Merseytravel; Merseytunnels; the other Merseyside local authorities; Cheshire West and Chester and Highways England to ensure continuity of service and that safe access is maintained on network and non-network facilities, including health care facilities currently delivering national vaccination programmes.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 Equality Impact Assessment review can be found on the following link

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 All the council's transport fleet, including winter service plant, is being reviewed to determine whether non-fossil fuel powered alternatives can be utilised which would contribute to the council's 2030 net carbon neutral target.

- 10.2 The government’s requirement is to minimise the usage of salt on the highway both to restrict the runoff into watercourses and drainage systems and to conserve national stocks and this is taken into account when operational decisions are taken. Salt used for road gritting is a non-renewable resource.
- 10.3 The volume of salt spread by rate on the council’s highway network as part of the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan complies with the recommendations of Appendix H in the Well-Maintained Highways guidance published by the Department for Transport.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The council is committed to a progressive procurement system and generation of community wealth benefits through this process. The contract with idverde includes for provision of HGV drivers and supervision staff, 13 of whom are residents with Wirral postcodes. The direct employment of local residents on the service through an external supplier has an estimated projected total equivalent financial value of £55,900 for the 2022/23 winter season, based upon 13 staff working 33 number 8-hour shifts at a proxy value of £30,353 p.a. and 233 working days p.a.

REPORT AUTHOR: Linda Summers
 (Linda Summers, Highway Asset Manager)
 telephone: Tel: 0151 606 2267
 email: lindasummers@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Highway Winter Service Operational Plan 2022-2023
 (including Appendices 1 to 5)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Commercial tender submission information held within the Highways and Infrastructure service.
 Well-Maintained Highways, a Code of Practice – published by DfT
 Officer Decision Notice 10 November 2022

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee – Highways Service Delivery 2021-26	16 March 2021