



ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Monday, 23 October 2023

REPORT TITLE:	WINTER SERVICE PLAN
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to notify Committee that the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan, detailing the manner in which the Council's highway winter service operations will be carried out during the winter period 2023/24 has been approved, and to provide details of the plan.

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.

RECOMMENDATION

The Environment Climate Emergency and Transport Committee is recommended to:

Note the contents of this report and that the Director of Neighbourhood Services has made a decision to approve the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan for 2023/24 which is included at Appendix A.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The Highway Winter Service Operational Plan included at Appendix A to this report details proposals for the manner in which the Council's highway winter service operations will be carried out during the winter period 2023/24 for the treatment of carriageways, footways and other areas where required in order that the council can meet its statutory duty. A decision to approve the Plan has been taken by the Director of Neighbourhood Services under the Scheme of Delegation but Members of Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee are asked to note that the Council has a robust plan, together with the necessary resource allocation, capacity and professional officer expertise to be able to respond dynamically and deliver an effective winter maintenance service.

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 (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 Council'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 (October 2016).
- 3.2 A brief overview of the proposed 2023/24 Highway Winter Service Operational Plan detailed in Appendix A is set out below:
- The Winter Service Period will be nominally from Monday 13 November 2023 until Monday 8 April 2024. 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.
 - An annual Dry Run Training Day will take place Saturday 4 November 2023 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 one mini (3.5 tonne) gritter which are used for day-to-day gritting operations, with snow ploughs fitted on each of the main gritters. Currently 10 full size gritters and one mini gritter are hired with the remaining one vehicle owned by the council. The fleet is 'garaged' at the Cleveland Street transport depot. Hired vehicles are maintained by Econ Engineering supported by the Transport Division fleet maintenance staff.
- 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 twelfth 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 2,000 tonnes of rock salt 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 38 pre-grit treatments using 50 tonnes of rock salt per treatment at the minimum spread rate of 10g/m², 1,900 tonnes of rock salt will be used.
- Approximately 42 tonnes of rock salt will be used to fill and refill approx. 100 grit bins. These are provided at locations around Wirral 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 total length of the Council's highway network is 1,180km and approximately 427km of the highway network is treated as part of a routine pre-grit operation. All the gritting routes have been 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 arrangements associated with the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan may be revised as necessary during the course of the 2023/24 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 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 was £416,000 and 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, recent years has seen a steady increase in the call out numbers and during 2022/23, 40 call outs were in fact recorded. Additionally 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 around £200,000 to £300,000 over the allocated budget.

- 4.2 The section 151 Officer has accepted a service pressure statement and the service budget allocation has been further increased by Council by £270,000 for 2023/24, following decision at P&R Committee on 12 July 2023. The total budget allocation for 2023/24 will be £784,000. Any underspend of this service budget will be transferred into a reserve for future winter service budget allocation.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980 provides: “a highway authority are under a duty 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 exposes the council to reputational, financial, and legal risks and could compromise public safety.
- 7.2 There is a risk that an extremely severe winter will result in a requirement for additional rock salt to be purchased at additional unbudgeted cost. 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.
- 7.3 There are risks of staff, plant, equipment, and grit resources availability affecting service delivery. These risks have been considered under service business continuity plans and where practicable are mitigated by the Council’s service support supply contracts.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Consultation has taken place across council directorates and with a range of partner organisations, including Wirral NHS, Merseytravel, the other Merseyside local authorities, Cheshire West and Chester Council 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 all the 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 of the Well-Managed 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 £64,350 for the 2023/24 winter season, based upon 13 staff working 38 number 8-hour shifts at a proxy value of £30,353 p.a. and 233 working days p.a.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Highway Winter Service Operational Plan 2023-2024

(including Appendices 1 to 5)

The PDF file may not be suitable to view for people with disabilities, users of assistive technology or mobile phone devices. Please contact highwaycommercial@wirral.gov.uk if you would like this document in an accessible format.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Well-managed Highway Infrastructure, Code of Practice published by DfT (October 2016).

Officer Decision Notice 13 October 2023

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in accordance with Section 5.2(b) of its Terms of Reference.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

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