

PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

DATE	23 October 2023
REPORT OF	Councillor Stewart Swinburn – Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Carolina Borgstrom - Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure
SUBJECT	Highway Winter Service Review – Highway Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan (2023-24)
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	PHET 10/23/02

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The highway winter service policy and operational plan contributes to strengthening the local economy, providing the framework for delivery of the Council's highway winter service to ensure the safety of the travelling public and commercial transportation throughout the Borough during the winter season.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report deals with the annual review of the Council's highway winter service policy and operational plan. The policy and operational plan establish the framework for the provision of service to the travelling public on the highway network in North East Lincolnshire during the winter season.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the highway winter service policy and operational plan (2023-24) be approved.

REASONS FOR DECISION

As a highway authority the Council is required to review its policy and operational plan for highway winter service on an annual basis.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the winter service review is to ensure that the Council fulfils its statutory duties with regard to winter service provision. Moreover, by engaging with other bodies, the review seeks to complement Council led actions with those of others to deliver a coordinated response to adverse weather for the benefit of residents, visitors and businesses.

Summary of Weather 2022- 23

- 1.2 The Council's existing policy and operational plan approved in 2022 for the 2022/23 winter season, provided the basis for the provision of highway winter service during last winter.
- 1.3 The following paragraphs provide an assessment of the weather experienced across the UK during winter 2022/23, based upon MET Office Statistics.
 - The winter season of 2022/23 was slightly milder than average, with winter sunshine the dominating theme, with the winter season resulting in the third sunniest winter on record. However, this disguises the alternation between the cold, settled spells and milder, wetter weather experienced throughout the 2022/23 winter season. The mean temperature for the winter season in North East Lincolnshire was 0.5°C above the 1991 to 2020 average.
 - The winter season began in late October 2022, a month that saw temperatures trending around 1.5°C above average resulting in Road Surface Temperatures (RST's) remaining well above zero throughout October 2022.
 - The first precautionary salting for North East Lincolnshire was undertaken on the 04 November 2022. However, November was mainly mild and unsettled with 105% more rainfall than average.
 - December 2022 was the coldest month throughout the last winter season and the coldest December since 2010. Temperatures were around 0.5 - 1.5°C below average. From the 05 December cold air from the north arrived over the UK, resulting in RST's falling below zero throughout the middle of the month. Snow showers moved in at times, bringing some small accumulations, but overall, it was a relatively dry period. From the 18 December low pressure moved in from the Atlantic bringing a milder tropical maritime airmass, resulting in wetter conditions and RSTs remaining above zero. This unsettled and milder westerly flow continued through to the end of the month and Christmas. However, there was a few clearer and colder nights where RSTs fell marginal between the Christmas and New Year period. The night of Boxing Day was particularly cold during this period, with RSTs dropping below zero overnight. A total of seventeen precautionary salting treatments were undertaken throughout December 2022.
 - January 2023 was a milder month, with temperatures 0.5 - 1.5°C above average. It was drier too across North East Lincolnshire, with just 50 -75 % of the average monthly rainfall. Despite the milder monthly average temperatures, January was the busiest month in terms of precautionary salting treatment with nineteen treatments undertaken, as a deep low pressure weather pattern developed midway through the month bringing a return of colder air from the north.

- February 2023 was dominated by low pressure and a westerly flow resulting in another milder and drier month, with temperatures 1.5 – 2.5°C above average, and only 20-50% of the expected monthly rainfall. It was a quite month in terms of precautionary salting treatments, with only five treatments undertaken in February 2023.
- March 2023 was the third wettest March on record in England. Temperatures were around 0.5 -1.5°C above average. However, in the first half of the month a strong upper trough from the Arctic brought another cold spell over the region, with temperatures becoming below average. RSTs fell below 0C, and towards the middle of the month spells of sleet and snow moved in bringing accumulations in places. The end of the month saw a return to a more westerly flow with low pressure systems moving in from the Atlantic, bringing further rainfall and causing temperatures to rise to just above seasonal average. RSTs then remained largely above zero for the rest of the month, aside from one colder night on the 26 March where they fell below zero in places under clear skies.
- April 2023 saw temperatures trend around the seasonal average, but rainfall amounts were around 150% of the expected monthly rainfall. For much of the month, RSTs generally remained above zero, but a few clear and chilly nights saw them drop below zero or become marginal in places. The final precautionary treatment of the 2022/23 winter season was undertaken on 03 April 2023.

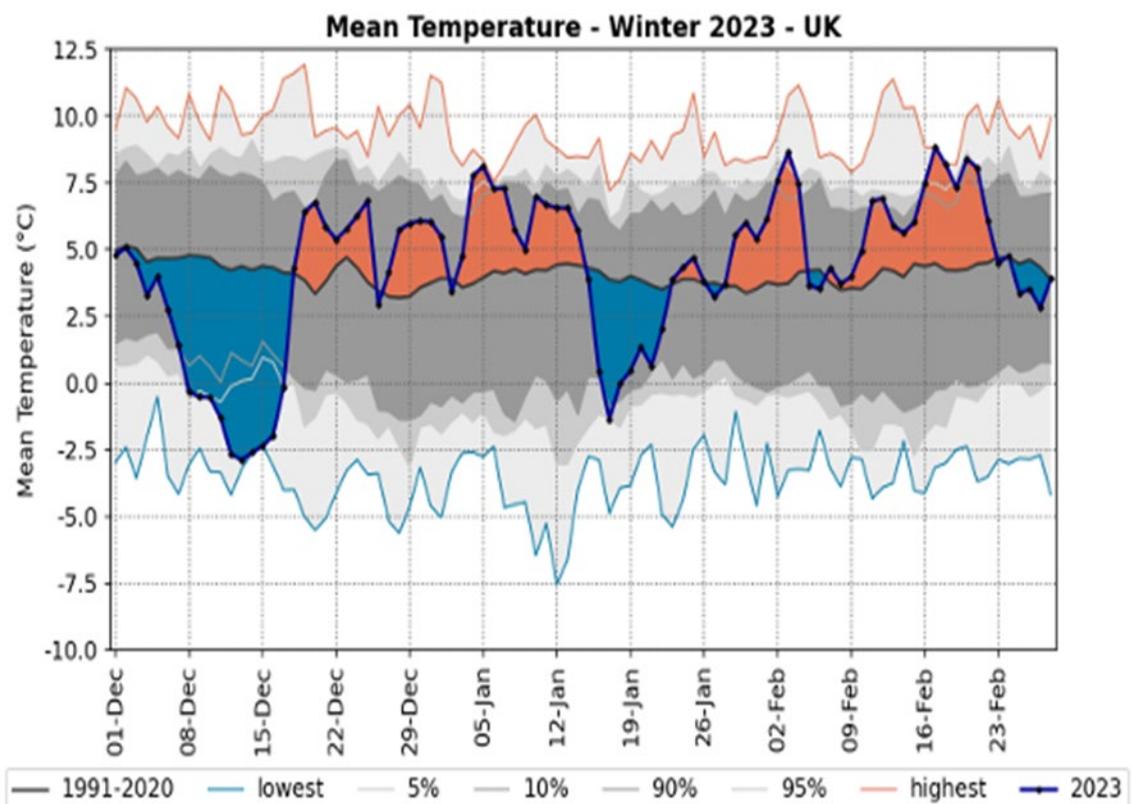


Figure 1- Met Office Winter Mean Temperature Graph

Treatment

- 1.4 During the winter season period (October – April) 2022/23, North East Lincolnshire Highways undertook 55 precautionary salting treatments. During the 2022/23 season 100% of the precautionary salting routes were completed within the target time of 3 hours from leaving the operational centre.
- 1.5 A total of 1,246 tonnes of rock salt was used during winter service operations 2022/23, compared to 1,410 tonnes in the previous winter season. The decrease in use of rock salt is a result of the recorded temperature average for the winter season being around 0.5°C higher than the 1981 - 2010 average.

Arrangements for 2023-24

- 1.6 The weather forecast provider and ice prediction service are procured jointly with the Humber Unitary authorities (North Lincolnshire Council and Hull City Council). The contracts for both the weather forecasting service and ice prediction system were renewed in September 2023. This put arrangements in place until autumn 2025; the service providers are MeteoGroup (forecasting) and Vaisala (Ice Prediction).
- 1.7 Reciprocal cross boundary salting agreements have been reviewed and renewed with North Lincolnshire Council and Lincolnshire County Council prior to the start of the 2023/24 winter season. Additionally, Information regarding weather forecasts and winter service treatment plans are to be shared with all neighbouring authorities, including National Highways ensuring the travelling public experience a consistent level of service throughout the region.
- 1.8 The salt barn at Gilbey Road will be re-stocked prior to the winter season and arrangements maintained for replenishment of stocks during the season as necessary in accordance with the policy.
- 1.9 The policy and operational plan, contained in **Appendix 1** to this report, has been reviewed in light of the guidance in the national code of practice “Well Managed Highway Infrastructure” (2016), available information on best practice in other authorities, experience of operations during last winter season and also taking account the results of consultation referred to within this report.
- 1.10 Minor textual changes to the policy and operational plan to reflect current information sources and to remove potential ambiguities have been necessary for the 2023/24 season. Amendments to treatment routes and the salt bin inventory for the 2023/24 winter season are detailed in the following sections of this report.

Treated Routes

- 1.11 The total network length within North East Lincolnshire is 607 km of road and 869 km of footway. There are four routes defined for precautionary treatment: two routes covering Cleethorpes and Grimsby, one covering the rural villages and one covering Healing, Stallingborough and Immingham.
- 1.12 As part of the annual review, changes are proposed to the treatment of the main treated routes for precautionary salting as follows:
- Grimsby Area
 - Extension of treatment length for precautionary salting on Matthew Telford Park to include the section of road between Wren Crescent and Caspian Crescent junction. This is having regard to the bus route which travels up to Caspian Crescent.
 - Cleethorpes Area
 - Following review of the streets included within the main treated routes, Princes Road and Grant Street, Cleethorpes are proposed to be removed from the main routes for precautionary salting for the 2023/24 winter season. This is having regard to the police station on Princes Road no longer being in use as an operational station. Grant Street was used as the link back to the main treated network. As a result, these roads no longer meet the criteria for precautionary salting. Following review of feedback reporting operational difficulties for treatment and following consultation with Humberside Police, both streets will be included within secondary salting routes for the forthcoming season.
- 1.13 These changes reduce the total treated network by 0.2 km, taking the total treated network to 285.35 km (177 miles), this length includes the treatment of both carriageways on wide roads and dual carriageways. **Appendix 2** of this report contains maps (1-1 & 1-2) showing the defined routes for precautionary treatment, and the strategic route network.
- 1.14 In extreme weather conditions treatment is focussed on clearing the 112 km of strategic route network ('A' Roads and key links).
- 1.15 Once the strategic route network is available, then the treatment of other main routes will be resumed in priority order having regard to maintaining access to key local facilities.

Grit Bins

- 1.16 There is one proposed addition to the grit bin inventory across the network due to gradients observed on location, taking the total of grit bins within North East Lincolnshire to 91, including 3 Ward Funded bins and 6 Parish Council owned bins, requiring around 30 tonnes of salt / sharp sand mix for complete refill. Bins are routinely checked and filled each month during the winter season.

- 1.17 The new salt bin is proposed to be installed on Grant Street, Cleethorpes on the junction with Princes Road. Both Grant Street and Princes Road have also been included within the secondary routes for treatment during the 2023/24 winter season.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1 **Crime and Disorder** – The highway winter service plan provides the framework for delivery of the highway winter service which ensures, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. The engagement process for the annual review of the Plan has included the emergency services.
- 2.2 **Human Rights** – The highway winter service plan does not contravene any Human Rights principles.
- 2.3 **Equality and Diversity** – The highway winter service plan is non-discriminatory and does not disproportionately affect any individual or minority group. The Council is aware that it must in the exercise of its functions have due regard to its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and person who do not share it. This would include persons that have issues with mobility e.g., elderly, disabled, pregnant, those with young children all of whom may be particularly affected by adverse winter weather conditions. The highway winter policy and plan provide the framework for service delivery to ensure as far as reasonably practicable the safety of highway users during adverse weather conditions with the optimum use of available resources. In this context it is not practicable to make provision for the particular needs of any individual or minority group. However, it is considered that persons with mobility issues will be served by the prioritised provision of highway winter service across the network and specific requests for service will be prioritised on a risk assessed basis having regard to prevailing weather conditions and available resources at the time.
- 2.4 **Value for Money** – The highway winter service plan provides the framework for delivery of the highway winter service and enables the authority to demonstrate effective and efficient management of service, in line with best practice.
- 2.5 **The impact on the social, economic and environmental well-being of the Borough** – The highway winter service plan sets out the framework for delivery of the service which provides for the safety of the travelling public and commercial transportation throughout the Borough during the winter season.
- 2.6 **Environmental Sustainability Implications** - Highway winter service is planned to ensure the safety of highway users during adverse weather conditions, with the optimum use of available resources. This is facilitated by the use of modern weather forecasting and ice prediction systems which are monitored throughout the winter season.

- 2.7 Winter service vehicles and plant are prepared for the season and maintained to ensure reliability and fuel efficiency. Treatment routes for winter service are planned to ensure effective and timely service delivery, minimising double running, and reducing fuel consumption.
- 2.8 Rock salt is the primary material for dealing with snow and ice on the highway but has potential environmental consequences. It can pollute watercourses and adversely affect vegetation. It can also damage highway infrastructure, including bridges and structures. In the interests of sustainability, the rates of spread for salt, which are in accordance with national guidance, ensure that the minimum of salt is used appropriate to the prevailing conditions.
- 2.9 The highway winter service policy identifies that in extreme weather conditions a decision may be made to provide grit heaps containing salt at controlled / managed locations. However, in this eventuality it is recognised that appropriate management will be required having regard to the potential environmental impact from leachates polluting water courses, and causing damage to verges, hedgerows and trees. It is considered that this damage far outweighs any benefits that may be attributed to the versatility of uncovered grit heaps containing salt. In addition, salt left in small heaps naturally exposed to the elements quickly deteriorates and ceases to be useful for its intended purpose.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1. The report sets out minor changes and given the role is a statutory one, it is not considered that there are any other reasonable options. The Council could engage less but that would only reduce potential effectiveness with no material counter benefits.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The engagement process during 2023 included the emergency services, public transport companies, parish and town councils, and neighbouring highway authorities, as well as other operational services within the Council.
- 4.2 It is important for the travelling public to experience a consistent level of service throughout the region. Thus, the consultation with neighbouring authorities is intended to achieve a degree of continuity of treatment across authority boundaries, and identify sections where it would be beneficial, to both parties, for one authority to provide a service to the other.
- 4.3 It is also important that the general public is aware of and understands the Council's approach to the highway winter service. Details are given before the start of the winter season by appropriate publicity and the information posted on the Council's web site.
- 4.4 Having reviewed the policy and plan, no fundamental issues have been identified that would require amendment of the policy.

4.5 Feedback from the engagement process and a summary of the comments and service responses are included as Appendix 3 to this report. Any further feedback received from the engagement process will be provided at the meeting.

4.6 There are potential positive reputational implications for the Council resulting from the decision. The highway winter service plan establishes a framework for delivery of the service, which provides for the safety of the travelling public and commercial transportation throughout the Borough during the winter season. An action plan has been agreed with the Council's communications service, covering the following issues: statutory communications requirements, information requirements and communication channels to be utilised.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 The proposed service outlined within the report supports the Council's key financial objective to shift our financial resource to support delivery of the Council's vision. The proposed service is financed through the Council's Regeneration partnership arrangement with Equans and requires no capital expenditure. On an ongoing basis the proposed service will lead to no change in revenue spend as it is covered as part of the Equans annual contract price. The proposed service is consistent with the Council's Highway Winter Service policy and will help to contribute to improved value for money within the service.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

6.1. This report does not include any implications specifically related to children and young people.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Through the effects of climate change, it is possible that the borough will experience an increased frequency and intensity of severe winter events, the impact of this will be managed through delivery of the winter service.

7.2. The highway winter service policy is not expected to have any significant impact on climate change and / or the environment other than those previously reported in sections 2.6 to 2.9 of this report.

8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

8.1. There has been no consultation with scrutiny.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The service outlined above is the delivery responsibility of Equans in accordance with the Council's Regeneration partnership arrangement with them. As a result, there is no additional financial consequence in respect of the above as this service is covered as part of the annual contract price.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The Policy and Operational Plan has been reviewed taking into consideration the Council's statutory duties pursuant to Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980.

In particular Section 41(1A) of the Act which was inserted by section 111 of the Railways & Transport Safety Act 2003 provides that the Council, as a highway authority, is under a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.

10.2. Regard also needs to be had of those matters listed in Section 58 Highways Act 1980 and the Council's general equality duty under Section 149 Equality Act 2010.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

11.1. There are no direct human resources implications arising directly from this report.

12. WARD IMPLICATIONS

12.1. The provision of highway winter service affects all wards.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 - Highway Winter Service 2023/24 – Policy and Operational Plan

Appendix 2 – Defined routes for precautionary treatment, and the strategic route network

Appendix 3 – Feedback from Engagement Process

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