

Hartlepool Borough Council

Winter Maintenance Plan – Section A Policy and Priorities



Latest Revision – October 2023

Winter Service Policy and Priorities

Introduction

Although a very specialised area, the Winter Service is a significant aspect of highway network management both financially and in terms of its perceived importance to users. It also has significant environmental effects and the organisation of the service has considerable implications for the overall procurement and operational management of other highway services. This document defines the policy and priorities for delivering the Winter Service in Hartlepool.

The Hartlepool Borough Council Winter Service Document has been developed in consultation with key stakeholders and users, and are reviewed annually to take account of changing circumstances.

Objectives and Statutory Basis

The objectives of the Winter Service are:

Safety

Safety is a prime consideration for the Winter Service.

Serviceability

Maintaining availability and reliability of the highway network is a key objective for the Winter Service and one where user judgements of performance will be immediate rather than longer term.

Sustainability

Low temperatures and the formation of ice can cause serious damage to the fabric of running surfaces and the Winter Service can therefore make an important contribution to whole life costs.

The statutory basis for providing a Winter Service was introduced by amendment of Section 41 of the Highways Act on the 10th September 2003. The amendment states that "...in particular, a highway authority is under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice...." The duty however is not simply to clear snow and ice. The wording of the amendment puts a duty on the authority to ensure safe passage is not endangered by snow or ice and therefore preventative gritting falls within this new duty.

The duty is not absolute however as there is a "reasonably practicable" defence.

Development of the Winter Service Policy

The policies and operational planning for the Winter Service were developed within the wider context of transport and other policy integration. In this context, issues for consideration included:

- treatment of car parking facilities

- treatment of “promoted” facilities for walking and cycling
- treatment of facilities for public transport users
- the extent of priority for emergency and other key facilities
- the extent of priority for potentially vulnerable users
- other local circumstances

Limitations

Given the scale of financial resources involved in delivering the Winter Service and difficulties in maintaining high levels of plant utilisation for specialist equipment, it is not practically possible either to:

- provide the service on all parts of the Network
- ensure running surfaces are kept free of ice or snow at all times, even on the treated parts of the network

In these circumstances it is important to:

- define the extent of the service
- detail the policies and operational plans, which are based on the principles of risk assessment,
- ensure that these are widely known and understood especially by users, together with relevant advice on safe use of the network
- continually monitor performance during service delivery and respond effectively to changing conditions or network incidents.

Policy Statement

The objective of this Council is to initiate and manage procedures for dealing with winter conditions, enabling as far as reasonably possible the safe movement of traffic on the important parts of the highway network throughout the Borough of Hartlepool. It is the Council’s policy to ensure that main thoroughfares are kept clear in order to maintain free passage.

It is the Council’s intention that a consistent and co-ordinated service is delivered throughout the Borough and that the available resources are deployed in a cost effective and efficient manner. This will be achieved by restricting winter service activities to a range of defined responses on a hierarchy of pre-planned routes.

It is the Council’s intention that a consistent and co-ordinated service is delivered throughout the region. This will be achieved by liaison and co-ordination with adjacent authorities.

Hartlepool Borough Council annually allocate funding to cover reasonable costs incurred in carrying out the winter maintenance functions details in this plan. The funding will be provided in such a way as to allow for the variable nature of the likely costs.

Network Priorities and Route Plans

The route plans are designed to take into account the need for economic, efficient and effective resource utilisation. They are of crucial importance. They are designed to accommodate:-

- transport and other council policy priorities
- known problems, including significant gradients, exposed areas and other factors
- climatic and thermal differences within the area
- co-ordination and co-operation with other authorities
- overall risk assessment including the need to maintain consistency

To ensure a reasonable response and to meet the objectives of the Best Value Highway Maintenance Code of Good Practice within available resources, the route plans are categorised as follows:

- Carriageway Salting on specified routes (including determined car park areas)
- Carriageway Snow Clearance routes
- Footway Salting on specified routes

All Route Plans are subject to annual review.

Information and Publicity

Information and Publicity will be delivered as follows:-

- 1) **Pro-active Media Relations** - To detail Hartlepool Borough Council's policy, approach and coverage of winter maintenance treatment in an official press release. This publicity is aimed at raising public awareness of the limitations of provision.
- 2) **Re-active Media Relations** - when appropriate, the Public Relations Officer will respond to enquiries from the media

It is not anticipated that there will be a need for media communications under normal operating circumstances.

Hartlepool Borough Council/External Agency Relationships

Highways England is the Authority responsible for the treatment of the Trunk Road A19. Hartlepool Borough Council is the Authority responsible for all other public maintainable roads within the Borough.

Co-ordination and co-operation to ensure effective service integration across the administrative boundary is also carried out with Stockton Borough and Durham County Councils.

Decisions and Management Information

Clear and efficient decision making processes supported by accurate weather prediction and information systems are the foundation for effective winter service delivery. The decision support system includes:-

- Weather forecasts
- Thermal maps
- Ice detection monitoring stations
- Weather radar

Each of the above uses current information and trends in conjunction with relevant software to extrapolate and display predicted conditions over a range of periods.

Winter Service Training and Development

All personnel involved in the Winter Service are trained to required levels of competence, both in respect of the overall job requirements and particularly the special health and safety considerations applying.

Hartlepool Borough Council seeks to ensure that high standards of health and safety are achieved on the Winter Service operations and has specific health and safety policies and guidance. The policies and guidance are issued to and discussed with all personnel and form the basis of the service training. The scope of training is defined in the Winter Service Operational Plan.

Performance Standards and Monitoring

Given the significant costs of providing a Winter Service and the considerable logistical issues involved, monitoring and review are of particular importance to the pursuit of Best Value. Comprehensive and accurate records are kept of the Winter Service activity, including timing and nature of all decisions, the information on which they were based, and the nature and timing of all treatment.