

Agenda Item	6.
Report No	CC/09/22

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Caithness Committee

Date: 22 August 2022

Report Title: Winter Service Plan for 2022/23

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report details the 2022/23 Winter Service Plan for Caithness.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to approve the Winter Service Plan for 2022/23.

2.2 Members are asked to note that Covid-19 and driver's hours regulations will potentially have an impact on the winter service provided.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – The winter service has to be provided in line with the relevant budget and resources (plant, materials and labour) available.

3.2 **Legal** – Under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 The Highland Council has a duty to keep roads reasonably free of snow and ice.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** – No impact.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – None, however, routes are planned to provide efficient working practices and operatives have been trained in efficient driving practices.

3.5 **Risk** – There are no risks associated with this report.

3.6 **Gaelic** – This report has no impact on Gaelic considerations.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Council's Scheme of Delegation to Area Committees gives them the power to approve the winter maintenance plan within the strategy and budget allocated by Community Services Committee.
- 4.2 Under Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, a Roads Authority shall take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads.
- 4.3 The Transport, Environmental and Community Service Committee agreed a number of enhancements to the winter maintenance service at its meeting on 16 May 2013 (Report TEC-41-13). These enhancements were included in the approved revised Winter Maintenance Policy approved on 19 September 2013 (Report TEC-67-13). Community Services Committee reviewed the winter maintenance policy on the 28 April 2016 (Report COM23/16) which benchmarked winter maintenance against other Scottish Local Authorities.

The Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee agreed on the 16 August 2018 to provide the same level of treatment on Saturdays and Sundays. As the winter maintenance budget remains the same, the Saturday service is reduced and the Sunday service increased. This represents the changing retail, work and leisure patterns and the associated travel requirements. There were no changes to winter maintenance from Monday to Friday.

- 4.4 The Council's Winter Service Policy is in place to ensure a consistent level of service between areas and to ensure, as far as possible, the safety of drivers and pedestrians. However, the operation of that Policy does not, and cannot, ensure that every road and footway will be free of ice or snow at all times.
- 4.5 Caithness Area has its own Winter Service Plan which sets out the operational details required to deliver a service and comply with the Council's policy. The Caithness Plan takes full account of the current policy.

5 Winter Service Policy

- 5.1 The Council's Winter Service Policy sets out the hierarchy of priorities for treatment, target times for treatment and the hours of operation. The current Winter Service Policy is contained in **Appendix A**.
- 5.2 Primary routes are treated first, thereafter secondary routes and then all other routes being treated as resources permit. Exception to this will be where a gritter has to travel across a secondary or other route to treat a higher priority road.
- 5.3 The total lengths of each Priority in Caithness are:-

Primary	135km	33 %
Secondary	222 km	55%
Other	49 km	12%

5.4 The Council publishes “Winter Services” leaflets for each operational area providing the public with information on snow clearing and gritting of Council roads along with maps showing the priority attributed to individual roads.

5.5 The leaflets and Policy information are provided on the “Winter Road Maintenance” pages on the Council’s web site at:-

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20005/roads_and_pavements/107/winter_road_maintenance/2

Route maps for the Area are included in **Appendix B**.

5.6 Secondary routes may vary from year to year to reflect school transportation routes.

Subsequently, after reviewing routes, resources and school transport information, there are no changes to secondary routes in the Caithness Area.

The Community Services Committee also approved any that future contracts for school transport services include the requirement that vehicles be fitted with all weather (mud and snow) tyres.

6 Forecast / Decision Making

6.1 The Council employs a professional forecast provider who provides daily and 5-day weather forecasts. Separate forecasts are received for the 7 climatic zones across Highland to support local decision making.

6.2 The daily forecast is received by noon and covers the following 24 hours. This forecast is used to plan treatment for the evening and following morning. The forecast is checked by the provider overnight. If there is any adverse deterioration in the forecast during the forecast period, an update is provided directly to the duty officer(s) by telephone.

6.3 Across the Highland Council, real time data is obtained from weather stations (including those located on the Trunk Road). These sensors provide information on the road surface temperature, surface condition (wet, dry, ice), and the presence of salt, graded 1, 2 or 3. A Salt 1 level will prevent freezing down to about minus 2 and Salt 3 down to minus 8 degrees Celsius.

6.4 Caithness operates a “Duty Officer” rota to ensure that there is always a suitably qualified and experienced member of staff available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to take decisions on the deployment of appropriate resources to deal with the prevailing weather conditions.

6.5 Duty officers have all had training from the weather forecast provider. Training is refreshed every three years.

7 Staff Establishment

7.1 The numbers of manual workers allocated to road maintenance is determined by the number of routes required to deliver the winter maintenance policy. The current staff establishment is shown in table 6.4 below with the majority of operatives holding an LGV driving licence.

Where possible, in order to optimise available resources, the number of drivers is supplemented by amenities drivers, for example, who may be available for evening pre-grit routes.

Staff Establishment	
1 Roads Operations Manager	<u>Caithness</u> 1 Roads Officer 1 Operational Support Officer
<u>Technical Staff</u> <u>Caithness/Sutherland</u> 1 Senior Engineer 1 Senior Technician 2 Technicians 1 Structural Technician 2 Roads Inspectors	<u>Wick Depot</u> 1 Foreperson 1 Assistant Foreperson 9 Operatives
	<u>Thurso Depot</u> 1 Foreperson 1 Assistant Foreperson 10 Operatives

- 7.2 Operatives normally allocated to grounds maintenance and street sweeping are used to provide resources for treating footpaths. The majority of these operatives hold ordinary driving licences, which generally restrict their involvement to the operating of mini tractors and vehicles of 3.5 tonnes or less.
- 7.3 A standby system is put in place over the winter period to ensure sufficient drivers are available to cover weekends. An operative is also put on standby during the week which allows an initial response to emergencies out of hours.
- 7.4 Due to the introduction of additional driver's hours regulations, the Council is currently considering the impact on staff levels required to maintain services. If amendments are required to accommodate these, a future report will be taken to committee.

8 Vehicles and Plant

- 8.1 There are 10 front-line gritters available and 4 footpath tractors. There are a limited number of spare gritters available across Highland.
- 8.2 Each vehicle treats, on average, 35.7km of primary and secondary routes followed by 5km of other routes. Routes that are not classified as 'primary', 'secondary' or 'other' are treated as a last priority if conditions dictate.
- 8.3 Some footway tractors treat several villages, which involve travel time between routes, and this will impact on the length they can treat in a day.

9 Treatments

- 9.1 Winter service treatments consist of morning routes, evening precautionary treatment routes and, during extreme/poor conditions, continuous or all-day treatments.

- 9.2 All operations begin at 06.00hrs and can continue to 21.00hrs. Saturday and Sunday operations begin at 06.00hrs and treat primary routes and secondary routes excluding school transport routes. The routes covered on a weekend may be extended during snow conditions.
- 9.3 Treatments consist of the application of pure salt or occasionally salt/sand mix and where required blading or ploughing snow from the road surface. A spread rate for salt application has been agreed by Council, dependant on weather conditions.

10 Salt

- 10.1 The average annual usage of salt for Caithness Area is approximately 6,000 tonnes. Although the occurrence of snow lying on the roads has reduced, ice and frost remain prevalent especially on the higher routes. In the current year there is sufficient salt in stock or on order spread across our depot locations.

11 Provision of Grit/Salt Bins

- 11.1 Grit/salt bins are generally placed at locations with steep gradients where we are not providing a regular road or footway gritting service.
- 11.2 The bins are filled before the winter period. They are replenished regularly over defined routes as well as on an ad-hoc basis as required subject to availability of resources.
- 11.3 Requests for additional bins are considered taking into account the following factors:-
- the elevation and steepness of the road/footway;
 - whether a regular road or footway gritting service is already provided;
 - the needs and numbers of the regular users of the footway/road; and
 - the resources available to service the bins

12 Co-ordination and Support for Other Services

- 12.1 There is on-going co-ordination between Council Services including with Communities and Place, Health and Social Care, Education and Learning and the NHS to close any local gaps in the winter maintenance service at the schools, care homes and housing estates. For example, Communities and Place Service supplies schools with salt suitable for facilities management staff to spread on the paths and roads within school grounds.
- 12.2 At times of extreme weather, Council Services meet as a group to coordinate action to address issues of access to schools, health services and care services. Representatives from the Council's Emergency Planning section, Police, HIFRS, NHS, Transport Scotland, Trunk Road Operating Companies and other key agencies are involved if there is a requirement to consider the wider implications of a winter emergency. The meetings are normally chaired by a representative from the Chief Executive's Service. The Council's Press Office is kept informed to enable appropriate communication with the public through media and social networking channels.

13 Exceptional Conditions

- 13.1 While the resources set out above will deal with the majority of winter events, there may be occasions, for example periods of heavy prolonged snowfall, when additional resources are required.
- 13.2 To help deal with these exceptional situations, a framework contract is in place which allows us to bring in additional resources at short notice. Local contractors are available who can supply equipment and operators to assist in clearing deep snow at short notice.
- 13.3 Communities and Place Service resources are also available to assist with the treatment of footways.
- 13.4 Covid-19 is likely to still have an impact on resource availability going forward and therefore Members should be aware that some routes may require to be amended on a daily basis for operational reasons during the season. This is 'normal' practice for these types of eventualities, including for exceptional weather conditions, and is delegated to managers to decide on.

14 Community Self-Help

- 14.1 The Council also encourages communities to "self-help" as much as possible and to generate awareness of people within their community that may need assistance from neighbours in clearing snow and ice or possibly shopping or accessing health and social services during extreme weather conditions.
- 14.2 Community self-help is also being encouraged under the Councils "Winter Resilience" scheme whereby communities can submit an application via their community council to carry out footway gritting operations within an agreed area. The Council will provide the community with salt/grit, bins, scrapers and reflective waistcoats. It is important to note that this does not replace the service provided by the Council but allows the community to provide an enhanced level of service.
- 14.3 Guidance is also published on the Council web site and by the Scottish Government on their web site (<https://ready.scot/>) urging people to be prepared for emergencies and extreme weather.
- 14.4 The Council also provides (on request) salt/gritting services for key strategic local service providers, including hospitals, health centres, fires stations, airports and train stations etc.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 2 August 2022

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The Highland Council

Community Services

Winter Service Policy

August 2018

Winter Service Policy

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THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Community Services

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1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Under Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, a Roads Authority shall take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads.
- 1.2 This Winter Maintenance Policy relates to the Council's responsibilities as Roads Authority for adopted roads, cycle ways, footways and footpaths.
- 1.3 Cross Service Working arrangements exist between Services to ensure that Council properties receive an appropriate winter maintenance service. The appropriate Service Director will determine the appropriate level of winter maintenance service for footpaths, car parks and other areas that are the responsibility of the Council but are not on the list of public Roads.

2.0 GENERAL

- 2.1 With the operational management devolved to the Areas it is essential that a common Winter Maintenance Policy is in place to ensure a consistent service for drivers passing between local Areas.
- 2.2 It is the aim of Highland Council in respect of its winter maintenance service to:-
- 2.2.1 Provide a winter gritting and snow clearing service which, as far as is reasonably practical, using the resources available, permits the safe movement of vehicles and pedestrians on the adopted road and footway network and seeks to minimise delays attributable to weather conditions.
- 2.2.2 Conduct operations having regard to the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and EU and Domestic Driver Hours Regulations.
- 2.3 The Council as Roads Authority is not responsible for Winter Maintenance on unadopted roads and will not provide a Winter Maintenance service for unadopted roads. It will however make every effort to provide assistance for emergency and medical services during severe weather conditions where there is an urgent need for safe access.
- 2.4 The responsibility for Winter Maintenance on Trunk Roads lies with Transport Scotland.
- 2.5 The Council will source Winter Weather Forecasting Services from recognised Meteorological Service Providers during the period 14th October to 14th April.

3.0 TREATMENT OF ROADS

The Council will endeavour to provide the highest level of service possible within the resource available. During winter, especially during severe weather, it may not be possible to keep every road free from ice and snow at all times.

The treatment of roads will be carried out based on a hierarchical system dependant on route priority. The time taken to complete the treatment of routes will vary from day to day depending on actual weather conditions and can be expected to increase significantly during periods of snow due to having to plough both sides of the road.

3.1 NETWORK HIERARCHY

The following prioritised hierarchy will be used to determine the order of treatment of roads.

PRIMARY (Highest)	Strategic, Regional, Sub Regional and Link roads which serve the larger communities and permit the majority of road users to travel across the region. Main & Local distributor roads in the larger urban settlements. High frequency service bus routes operating at least 6 days a week and starting prior to 7am with identified hazards.
SECONDARY	Roads connecting smaller communities to the primary network. Link and Service roads within the larger urban settlements. Service bus routes not covered by the Primary network.
OTHER	Minor rural and local access roads. Residential roads in urban settlements.

Gritting may not be completed on all routes before buses start their journeys.

The priority network will be agreed by Local Area Committee. Leaflets with maps showing the Primary and Secondary network will be made available via the Council web site at the start of each winter period.

3.2 TREATMENT OF ROADS

MONDAY TO FRIDAY

The service will be provided to the full road network between 6am and 9pm. Treatment after 6pm will in general be restricted to Primary routes only.

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

A strategic service will be provided at the weekend which covers Primary, strategic Secondary and difficult Other routes between 6am and 9pm. Treatment after 6pm will in general be restricted to Primary routes only.

3.3 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

3.3.1 25th December and 1st January

The service will be provided between 7am and 9pm and will be restricted to the Primary network only. During periods of sustained snow, or where significant snow conditions are forecast, the service may be extended to include difficult Secondary routes.

3.3.2 26th December and 2nd January

The service will be provided between 7am and 9pm and treatment will be restricted to the Primary and Secondary networks only. Where December 26th and January 2nd fall on a Saturday or Sunday then a standard weekend service will be provided.

3.4 PRECAUTIONARY TREATMENT

Precautionary treatment carried out the previous evening, normally before 9pm, in advance of forecasted adverse weather, will in general be restricted to Primary routes only.

3.5 TREATMENT DURING SNOW CONDITIONS

In times of severe weather, resources will be concentrated on keeping the Primary network clear and as a result there may be a delay before it is possible to treat the Secondary and Other road network, including residential streets. In exceptional snow conditions external contractors will be deployed to assist with snow clearance.

3.6 SNOW GATES

For safety reasons Snow Gates are located on routes where drifting snow can make the route impassable very quickly. The closure and subsequent opening of snow gates will only take place with the authority of the Police.

The roads controlled by snow gates within the Highland area are as follows:-

- A939 Bridge of Brown
- A939 Grantown to Dava
- A939 Dava to Ferness
- A832 Braemore to Dundonnell
- B9007 Carrbridge to Ferness
- B9176 Struie Hill Road
- Cairngorm Ski Road
- Bealach na Ba

In severe snow conditions the Council may withdraw resources from these roads and allow the storm to abate. In such circumstances resources may be diverted to assist snow clearing operations on other parts of the network. Additional resources may be employed during such snow conditions.

3.7 TARGET TREATMENT TIMES

The following are the target times for completion of routes during conditions of ice and light snow.

3.7.1 Monday to Friday

PRIMARY ROUTES	8.30am
SECONDARY ROUTES	9.00am
OTHER	As resources and conditions permit.

3.7.2 Saturday and Sunday

PRIMARY ROUTES	8.30am
SECONDARY and OTHER Routes	as resources and conditions permit

3.7.3 25th / 26th December and 1st / 2nd January

PRIMARY ROUTES	9.30am
SECONDARY ROUTES	as resources and conditions permit.

3.8 TREATMENT OF DIVERSION ROUTES

Where a road, including a trunk road, is closed to traffic due to either planned works or an emergency situation then the agreed diversion route will be treated as follows.

Trunk Road Closure

The agreed diversion route will be treated to Primary standard and signs erected at each end of the diversion and any other junctions with trunk roads, stating that there will be no overnight salting.

In an emergency situation and after Transport Scotland or its trunk road management and maintenance agents have notified the Council of the closure, every endeavour will be made to both treat the agreed diversion route appropriately and erect signs before the first overnight period.

Council Road Closure

Any part of the agreed diversion route that is of a lower priority than the closed road will be treated to the same priority as the closed road.

4.0 TREATMENT OF FOOTWAYS, FOOTPATHS AND CYCLE WAYS.

Treatment for ice and light snow conditions on adopted footways, footpaths and cycle ways will be carried out as set out below. Each gritting route will take a significant length of time to complete. The length of time taken will vary from day to day depending on actual weather conditions.

4.1 NETWORK HIERARCHY

The following prioritised hierarchy will be used in determining the order of treatment of footways.

Priority	Description
PRIMARY	Main urban shopping centres. Primary cycleways.
SECONDARY	Footways serving main urban areas, schools, hospitals and minor shopping areas. Sheltered Housing and locations of special need with known identified hazards.
OTHER	Other footways as resources allow.

4.2 FOOTWAY TREATMENT TIMES - MONDAY TO FRIDAY

The service will be provided between 6am and 6pm and footways will be treated on a priority basis as resources permit

4.3 FOOTWAY TREATMENT TIMES – SATURDAY, SUNDAY AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

The service will be provided between 6am and Noon on Primary and strategic secondary footways as resources permit. There will be no service for footways on Christmas Day or New Year's Day.

-- End of Policy Statement --

APPENDIX B – Winter Routes Plans

