

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	<b>6.</b>
Report No	<b>CC/14/23</b>

**Committee:** Caithness

**Date:** 21 August 2023

**Report Title:** Winter Service Plan for 2023/24

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment

## **1 Purpose/Executive Summary**

1.1 This report details the 2023/24 Winter Service Plan for Caithness

## **2 Recommendations**

2.1 Members are asked to **approve** the Winter Service Plan for 2023/24.

## **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 implications.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - All Roads activities use resources; however, routes are planned to provide efficient working practices and operatives have been trained in efficient driving practices.

3.5 **Risk** - If a Winter Service is not provided then there is the potential risk to life. There are no particular risks associated with this report.

3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - Any risks are mitigated through training.

3.7 **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 Service Plan within the strategy and budget allocated by Economy and Infrastructure 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 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.
- 4.4 Each operational area has their own Winter Service Plan which sets out the operational details required to deliver a service and comply with the Council's policy. The plan takes account of the current policy.
- 4.5 The winter service for the area is provided from the following depots:-
- Wick
  - Thurso

## 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 available on the Council website at:-  
[https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/713/winter\\_maintenance\\_policy](https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/713/winter_maintenance_policy)
- 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 the operational area are:-

Route Type	Length (km)	Percentage (%)
Primary	135	33
Secondary	222	55
Other	49	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](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20005/roads_and_pavements/107/winter_road_maintenance/2)

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

## 6 Forecast / Decision Making

- 6.1 The Council employs a professional forecast provider who provides weather forecasts. Separate forecasts are received for the 8 climatic zones across Highland to support local decision making.

- 6.2 The daily forecast is received by noon and covers the following 36 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 (3 is the maximum).
- 6.4 A “Duty Officer” rota is operated 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 service policy. The current staff establishment is shown in the table below with the majority of operatives holding an LGV driving licence. Where necessary, staff from other services such as Amenities may be used to supplement the existing resources.

Staff Establishment	
1 Roads Operations Manager  <u>Technical Staff</u> <u>Caithness/Sutherland</u> 1 Senior Engineer 1 Senior Technician 2 Technicians 1 Structural Technician 2 Roads Inspectors	<u>Caithness</u> 1 Roads Officer 1 Operational Support Officer  <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 (Amenities and Waste staff) 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.

## **8 Vehicles and Plant**

- 8.1 The number of frontline gritting vehicles and footpath tractors is shown in the table below. Vehicles may be based in various depots across the area. There are a limited number of spare gritters available across Highland.

<b>Vehicle</b>	<b>Number</b>
Gritter	10
Footpath Tractor	6

- 8.2 Each vehicle treats, on average, 35.7km of primary and secondary routes followed by 5km of other routes.
- 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 also begin at 06.00hrs and treat primary routes, strategic secondary routes excluding school transport routes and difficult other routes. The routes covered during snow conditions may be restricted to the primary network.
- 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 the 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. Before the start of the winter season, 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 service at e.g., 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, 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 For operational reasons during the season, some routes may require to be amended on a daily basis. 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, fire stations, airports, train stations etc.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment

Date: 13 July 2023

Author: Joanne Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager  
(Caithness & Sutherland)

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix A – Winter Route Plans

# Appendix A - Winter Route Plans

