

WINTER SERVICE POLICY



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Document History

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Purpose and Aim of the Policy

The Council's vision is to make the Borough a place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm, a place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed and a place that is clean, vibrant and attractive.

The Council recognises that the businesses and people of Stockton-on-Tees are part of a thriving and productive Tees Valley economy; a City Region that is driving economic growth across northern and national economies.

In line with this vision and awareness, particularly with reference to economy, education and employment, the Council's winter service policy is a key component in maintaining a safe transport network to ensure reliable access to many places of work and learning during wintry conditions. It also supports the Council's work with the Tees Valley Combined Authority on improving regional economic and transport infrastructure.

The objective of the Winter Service provided by the Council is to maintain transport links, minimise the risk of accidents and endeavour to enable everyday life to continue during wintry conditions. In doing so it addresses the issues of safety, highway availability, sustainability and ensures that delays to the travelling public are kept to a minimum on the treated network to the benefit of the community and the economy.

Policy Statement

The Winter Service provided by the Council on public highways aims to minimise delays and accidents caused by frost, ice and snow. To this end, the Council attempts to ensure that all major roads are treated with salt prior to the onset of wintry conditions as a precaution against the formation of frost and ice or the accumulation of snow.

It is impractical to treat every road in Stockton Borough and the policy of the Council reflects this fact. The policy is to ensure that main routes are kept clear in order that free passage of transport is maintained and there is minimum disruption to people travelling to and from home and work.

Treatment is determined on a network priority and resources will be concentrated on keeping the more important routes open.

Policy Detail

This policy will be reviewed and updated if necessary, on a 2-yearly basis unless changes in statutory regulations or best practice require an interim review.

The policy is in line the Authority's statutory duties and with the principles laid down in *Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: a Code of Practice* published by the UK Roads Liaison Group in October 2016 and the *Practical Guide for Winter Service*, a guidance on practical issues and the delivery of winter service published by the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG).

The Authority has statutory duties in respect of the risks to road users posed by snow and ice:

- The Council has a statutory obligation under Section 41 (1A) of the Highways Act 1980 (modified on 31st October 2003 by Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003) that states:
 - *In particular, 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.*
- Section 150 of the Highways Act 1980 also imposes a duty upon authorities to remove any obstruction of the highway resulting from '*accumulation of snow or from the falling down of banks on the side of the highway, or from any other cause*'.
- The Traffic Management Act 2004 placed a network management duty on all local traffic authorities in England. It requires authorities to do all that is reasonably practicable to manage the network effectively to keep traffic moving.

Winter service deals with regular, frequent and reasonably predictable occurrences like low temperatures, ice and snow, as well as with exceptional events. Whilst the effects of climate change are likely to result in an increased frequency and intensity of severe winter events, these are taken into account in our winter service planning.

The Council is aware of the implications of climate change and the dangers of becoming complacent should a series of mild winters occur and as such its winter service policy, resilience, operational procedures and standards are based on planning for reasonably typical winter weather conditions but also paying regard to unusual and exceptional situations when network resilience issues are of high importance, whilst balancing this against real and ever present economic strictures.

In adopting a risk management and evidence-based approach to the delivery of winter service, we will implement a methodology which includes:

- Defining treatment routes for pre-salting and snow conditions based upon the general maintenance hierarchy but adapted to take into account the factors identified in the Code of Practice.

All roads within Stockton Borough have been given a priority status:

- **Priority 1** roads will be pre-salted at any time, 24/7, in response to receipt of daily winter weather road forecasts. In total, approximately 46% of the adopted highway network is included on these routes.
- **Priority 2** roads will only be salted during extreme and prolonged icy conditions, only during the normal working day, only when all Priority 1 routes are clear, resources are available and if access is practicable. They will be treated at the discretion of the Winter Service Duty Officer and approximately 19% of the adopted highway network is included on these routes.
- **Priority 3** roads (all roads not designated Priority 1 or 2) will only be salted in the most exceptional circumstances and this will generally be during extreme and prolonged icy conditions and in the aftermath of heavy snow. They will be treated at the discretion of the Winter Service Duty Officer and only if access is practicable.
- Defining a Minimum Winter Network which has a close relationship to the Resilient Network and is a sub-set of the normal treated network. This reduced network will provide a minimum essential service to the public for possible use in times of extreme weather conditions and/or if resources are at a critical level.
- Setting service levels which define the Overall Winter Period, Core Winter Period, Response Times and Treatment Times:
 - **Overall Winter Period** - 1 October to 30 April, also known as the winter service season
 - **Core Winter Period** - The months of December, January and February when severe conditions might reasonably be expected.
 - **Response Time** - the period of time between the instruction being given to commence winter service operations and the gritting vehicles leaving the depot. The target time for this response is one hour, applying both within and outside normal working hours.
 - **Treatment Time** - the period of time between the gritting vehicle leaving the depot and the completion of treatment on the route. Note that time taken running dead mileage at end of a salting run is **not** included in treatment time. The target for treatment time is to be no more than 2½ hours on any given route when that route is treated under normal winter conditions and outside of peak traffic times.

- A Winter Service Operational Plan which details procedures and provides operational and technical service information.
- A Snow Plan which provides a contingency plan to come into force during times of severe winter conditions.
- Adopting service levels for number of days' resilience in terms of pre-season salt stocks for treating the normally salted network in severe weather and salt stocks for treating the defined Minimum Winter Network in severe weather during the Core Winter Period.
- Continuously monitoring salt stocks throughout the winter season and replenishing as necessary.
- Providing and stocking salt bins in approved locations for use by members of the public for application of salt on Council maintained carriageways and footways.
- Providing the Department for Transport with the information they require for their year-round salt stock monitoring system.
- Entering into cross boundary agreements with neighbouring authorities to treat sections of each other's highway network. These agreements are expedient and practicable for all concerned and ensure efficiency in service delivery.
- Liaising routinely with neighbouring authorities throughout the winter season and communicating treatment decisions.
- Communicating effectively with the public, key public services, stakeholders and other Highway Authorities as well as departments within the authority by:
 - delivering key, up-to-date winter service information to residents, businesses, elected members, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council employees and the media.
 - answering common winter service complaints and/or clearing up common misunderstandings.
 - ensuring the largest possible target audience is reached by effective use of all forms of media.
 - Providing a dedicated page on the Council's website linking to gritting and weather forecast details. This section will also include wider winter service information and is the 'One-Stop-Shop' to which the public will be directed: <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/our-places/roads-and-pavements/gritting-and-snow-clearing/>

- Using social media (Facebook, Twitter) to issue regular winter service updates and include weblinks to reinforce the messages.
- Using, where appropriate, the Council's intranet to ensure effective internal communications.
- Training all personnel involved in winter service, including temporary contractors, to the required levels of competence, both in respect of the overall job requirements and particularly the special Health and Safety considerations applying.
- Keeping comprehensive and accurate records of winter service activity including timing and nature of all decisions, the information on which they were based and the nature and timing of all treatments.
- Monitoring performance on winter service as part of the overall Highway Services function by setting appropriate performance indicators. Performance will be monitored against these indicators and action plans developed for any results that do not meet acceptable service levels.

All the above actions, when taken as a whole, will provide a resilient winter service based on effective planning in order to reduce the risk in the delivery of the service during normal and severe winter conditions. It also provides the potential to deliver the service in a more efficient way including the management of salt stocks and other resources such as fuel, plant and labour whilst ensuring safety and highway availability for the travelling public on the treated network are maintained to the benefit of the community and the economy.