

WINTER SERVICE POLICY 2023/24

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Each year Members consider for approval, the Council's Winter Service Policy. The format and general content of the Winter Service Policy 2023/24 remains similar to that of the 2022/23 Policy.
- 1.2 The policy sets out priorities for treatment and routes, which will be 'pre-treated' in advance of winter hazards. In prolonged winter conditions, the policy provides for all roads to be treated, with resources being allocated to focus on the hierarchy of priorities (i.e. the lower priorities will only be cleared once the higher priorities have been treated and remain clear of any recurring hazards).
- 1.3 The policy is a comprehensive document setting out the management, governance and operational requirements for the winter service. The policy sets out signing provision to warn the travelling public of roads which are unsuitable for use during extreme winter conditions. The policy also provides a protocol for the reduction in use of salt and preservation of remaining stocks in the event of salt stock replenishment operations being disrupted. This was introduced following the severe winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11 when national salt supplies were interrupted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee:-

- Approves the 2023/24 Winter Service Policy Document at Appendix 1.
- Approves the Salt Use Reduction and Preservation of Stocks Protocol at Appendix 2.
- Notes Appendices 3 – 6 of this report.
- Note that a review of the financial position is being carried out and this will be reported to the Policy and Resources Committee in October.

WINTER SERVICE POLICY 2023/24

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report presents the Winter Service Policy 2023/24 which remains in a similar format and covers a similar network to the Policy approved by this Committee in previous years. This generally remains based on the network and times of the public bus service with additional priority and resources allocated to strategic high speed roads.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee:-

- Approves the 2023/24 Winter Service Policy Document at Appendix 1.
- Approves the Salt Use Reduction and Preservation of Stocks Protocol at Appendix 2.
- Notes the Appendices 3 – 6 of this report.
- Note that a review of the financial position is being carried out and this will be reported to the Policy and Resources Committee in October.

4.0 DETAIL

Winter Service Policy 2023/24

4.1 The proposed Winter Service Policy for 2023/24 at Appendix 1, in terms of treatment standards and routes, remains unchanged from last year.

4.2 There have however, been a number of minor operational changes in the past 12 months which are:-

- A new Weather Forecast Service Contract Provider has been appointed, this being a joint procurement with several Councils across the West of Scotland.

- An operational adjustment was made to Lorn pre-treatment routes with a seventh route “L7-Lorn Arc Bus Routes” introduced prior to operations commencing in November 2022.
- Following the new Generation 6 (G6) trunk road contract for the north west region which has been awarded by Transport Scotland to BEAR Scotland the sub contract services previously provided by the Council for winter and reactive out of hours call outs on the trunk road in Kintyre, since August 2014 when the southern section of the A83 was trunked, will now be delivered directly by BEAR who no longer require the services of the Council. A review of the Kintyre local road network routes will now be part of the assessment of overall capability, in the run up to the Winter Service period.

- 4.3 The advisory signs for alternative routes in severe snow conditions remain similar for the four routes proposed in previous years. Details on sign configuration and locations are contained in Appendix 3 of this report.
- 4.4 Winter stand-by arrangements will commence on Friday 3rd November 2023 and will continue until Friday 12th April 2024. There are a total of 32 treatment routes detailed in the policy’s operational planning web-based management tool. Should weather conditions dictate, it may be necessary to bring forward the start date and/or push back the finish date. This would be determined operationally depending on forecast or observed weather conditions.
- 4.5 The Winter Treatment Fleet for 2023/24 will be similar to last winter. This will consist of 17 hired gritters from Econ Ltd. Eight of 26t 9cu.m capacity and 9 of 18t 6cu.m capacity, retained on a one year extension. One contractor vehicle on Jura, one shared route assisted by 1 contractor vehicle in Lochgoilhead and 13 Council vehicles. The Council element consists of the updated frontline winter capable fleet of Quick Change Bodies (QCB) demountable, multipurpose vehicles procured during 2021. This provides 32 main frontline vehicles with 3 spare 18t 6cu.m capacity multipurpose vehicles and 3 back-up 12t 3.5cu.m multipurpose vehicles to cover breakdowns. In addition, a further 4 x 7.5 tonne tippers can accommodate ploughs, giving a total of 10 extra vehicles that can be deployed together with tractors and ‘V’ ploughs if conditions demand.
- 4.6 A review of Hired vs Council fleet treatment vehicles will be carried out as part of a new supply contract tendering process this year, for implementation Winter 2024-25. This will seek to optimise the most cost effective provision of vehicles required to deliver the winter service.
- 4.7 The requirement to manage drivers’ hours within the delivery of all Council Services directly impacts on the retention of the Council’s Operator Licence. Drivers from across the operational teams (grounds, waste, roads) deliver the pre-treatment service, in conjunction with external contractor assistance on the islands of Jura and partly in North Cowal. In extended periods of extreme winter conditions consideration will be given, at an operational level, to prioritising services to ensure that winter treatments can be delivered. This may result, for example, in refuse collections and other services being temporarily suspended

in order to prioritise the clearing of ice and snow. Such operational efficiency measures are only likely in prolonged periods of extreme weather.

- 4.8 Steps are taken each year to increase the available driver “pool” by utilising council drivers from the pool of available drivers including grounds and waste disposal staff. Discussions are ongoing to resource additional resilience by engaging assistance from external contractors on some mainland routes where in-house coverage is limited. In extreme and prolonged weather events and where other priority tasks occur (such as responses to road traffic collisions, collapsed culverts, fallen trees etc.) resources may need to be allocated based on a risk based priority.
- 4.9 Table 1 below indicates the statistical variations in operational activities over the last six winter seasons. Weather patterns vary with some years experiencing hazards more widespread and in others more concentrated on inland and higher routes. The equivalent Full Fleet runs statistic is used to indicate an approximation to the budget allowance. The application of salt varies between 10gm² and 40gm² depending on a number of factors including road surface temperature, forecast and residual salt. In parallel with these methods, grit (small sized stone chips) and sand are applied in snow conditions. The route with the individual highest number of turn-outs, remains consistently the A819 East Lorn Strategic Route, due to its North Eastern inland, high level sections.

Appendix 6 to this report provides a summary of the 2022/23 winter conditions.

Table 1

Winter Season	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Equivalent Full Fleet Runs	110nr	62nr	78nr	79nr	65nr	66nr
Salt used in all treatments tonnes	22,992t	13,059t	12,280t	15,753t	11,030t	12,535t
Most turned out Treatment route	A819 = 162nr	A819 = 109nr	A819 = 139nr	A819 = 114nr	A819 = 107nr	A819 = 94nr

4.10 It remains a considerable time since we have experienced a large scale snow event. Even the “Beast from the East” in 2017 only affected the Eastern domains of Lomond, Bute and Cowal with the rest of Argyll largely untouched. It is likely that should a longer spell of snow affect the whole of Argyll, a considerable escalation in resources and hence budget spend will be required to maintain lifeline accesses to communities. Such an event would very likely require additional external resource to be called in utilising framework contracts where available.

4.11 Footways and footpaths will only be treated, in periods of lasting hazard, when it is considered by the winter management team, having taken cognisance of

weather forecasting etc., that the physical condition of the footways and footpaths makes it necessary and treatments will be effective. Footways and footpaths will usually only be treated during normal working hours. Staffing levels are such that we generally do not have sufficient labour available to deal with footways and footpaths in parallel with treatments of the carriageway. The mobilisation of external resources to assist in footway treatments, is a balance of cost benefit against potential thaw conditions rendering treatments unnecessary. This winter service policy applies to the public road network and a limited number of emergency service and public transport routes. Public car parks, access to council offices, schools etc. all being subject to local arrangements out with the scope of this policy.

4.12 In specific locations additional information and diversion signing will be erected to further inform drivers of the hazardous conditions on some routes and advise them of alternative routes where available resources will concentrate on maintaining treatments. There are four roads where signing to indicate specific alternative routes are available. The signs deployed for these road closures are detailed in Appendix 3.

4.12.1 A817 "Haul Rd", Lomond.
Snow gates at A82 and A814 "central" roundabout
Diversion via A818 Arden - A814 Garelochhead

4.12.2 C46 Glen Aros / Glenbellart road, Mull
Signs at Aros Bridge and Dervaig Primary School
Diversion via A848 Tobermory

4.12.3 C9 Glenfinart Road (The Larach), Cowal
Signs at Whistlefield Hotel and Sligrachan Bus turning head;
Diversion via A880 Cot House

4.12.4 C11 Otter Hill road (Bealach an Drain), Cowal
Signs at Glendaruel A886 and Otter Ferry B8000;
Diversion via A8003 Tighnabruaich and Kames.

Winter Maintenance Budget

4.13 Overall the financial cost for winter 2022/23 was recorded as £2.661 million against a budget of £2.120 million, an excess of £541K equivalent to 26%. The actual cost of winter maintenance is dependent upon the severity of the prevailing weather conditions and is a financial risk each year as we respond in accordance with our current policy to what are effectively variable weather events.

4.14 There has been an overspend of winter maintenance for a number of years and in 2022/23 this overspend was higher due to inflationary increases (particularly for grit and salt) and the change in respect of the use of red diesel. A review of the financial position is being carried out and will be reported to the Policy and Resources Committee in October.

Salt Stocks and School Routes

- 4.15 As of July 2023, the Council held a stock of 9,245 tonnes of salt. This is over 50% more than was available at the same time in 2022, due to a more regular replenishment operation throughout the 2022-23 season. Provisional orders are in place for a further 2,050 tonnes. Deliveries will be called forward in October - Appendix 5 refers. This will top up capacity in storage facilities to the target starting stock of +11,000 tonnes. Salt deliveries will continue to be ordered throughout the winter period, to keep reserves stocked and preserve resilience. Weekly salt reserve stock lists are submitted to Scottish Government as part of a Scotland wide winter resilience plan.
- 4.16 The Salt Use Reduction and Preservation of Stocks protocol was introduced in December 2010 in light of severe shipping and material shortages. This was reviewed and updated in 2020 and is attached at Appendix 2.
- 4.17 The assessment of school routes subject to pre-treatment before 08:00hrs, is covered under Priority 3b of the route hierarchy, in section 4 of the Policy. This is reviewed each year once the pupil intake for August is confirmed. The revised number of both pupil passengers and service bus users in Dunbeg by October 2022, necessitated the formation of another pre-treatment route out of Oban depot – L7 Lorn Arc Bus routes, due to limitations on completion times and vehicle capacity within the previous fleet, to comply with response times contained in the current policy.

Transport Scotland

- 4.18 Following the decision to trunk the southern section of the A83 in 2014, Transport Scotland are roads authority for this section of road Kennacraig – Campbeltown. The G6 trunk road contract for NW area had a commencement date of 16th August 2022 and was retained by BEAR Scotland Ltd as Operating Company.
- 4.19 BEAR Scotland Ltd confirmed that the establishment of their own operational depot at Machrihanish, has been completed. From 7th July 2023, they took over 24hr emergency response and confirmed that they would provide their own driver resource for winter treatment of A83 Campbeltown – Kennacraig from 1st October. There will be no requirement for Argyll and Bute Council to provide resources to BEAR this winter, which effectively increases the resilience of the Campbeltown / Kintyre driver resource for delivery of the Council Winter Service. This may include a review and revision of the current Kintyre routes.
- 4.20 Due to the isolated nature of some sections of the Council network, directly connected to the trunk road, BEAR Scotland provides assistance in compliance with the Argyll and Bute Council policy with regards to transport interfaces under Priority 2. Treatments are delivered by trunk road vehicles on return journeys, after completing their routes.

- Bridge of Orchy Station road (and Fire station) – Off A82

- Furnace Village Bus Loop - Off A83

Winter Policy Review

- 4.21 The appointed Route Optimisation Programme provider, is delivering the refuse collection plans at present but it is anticipated that route optimisation will be a fundamental part of any future Winter. A comprehensive winter review is anticipated in 2025/25.

Climate Change

- 4.22 Whist Road and Infrastructure Services have been very successful in introducing several electric and hybrid cars, vans and minibuses into the council fleet there are still limitations in distance range and affordability for larger vehicles such as the winter maintenance fleet. Whilst some manufactures have units available the range and costs are so far prohibitive. However, it is anticipated that with the ongoing advances in technology there will be alternatives to the Internal Combustion Engines (ICE) available in the near to medium future. Officers continue to monitor the market for opportunities.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This report details the Council's Winter Service Policy for 2023/24 and highlights the pressures on resources and operational effectiveness due to the constraints of future funding levels and best practice advice.
- 5.2 The report asks committee to approve the Winter Service Policy 2023/24 and note the details in Appendices 1 – 6.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy - It is considered to be good practice for Committee to consider and confirm policy for winter maintenance activity on an annual basis. This report seeks to achieve the above.
- 6.2 Financial - The Council's Winter Maintenance budget is increased to (from £2.120 million) for this financial year, to cater for previous and anticipated unit cost pressures. This provides the capability to deliver the equivalent of approximately 56 full runs of the treatment fleet over the coming season. The actual cost of winter maintenance is dependent upon the severity of winter conditions and is a financial risk in that the service responds to weather events that are not predictable. Should the criteria for school bus routes change this will affect the budget required.
- 6.3 Legal - The Winter Service Policy sets out the Council's level of service provision for winter maintenance, with reference to Section 34 of Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

- 6.4 HR - Staffing levels have reduced over recent years, this can make it challenging to have sufficient staff to deal with a severe winter event. Processes are in place for external suppliers to assist in geographic specific locations with additional support called forward through framework contracts should severe weather persist.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty
- 6.5.1 Equalities – protected characteristics – None known.
- 6.5.2 Socio–Economic Duty – None known.
- 6.5.3 Islands – None known.
- 6.6 Climate Change - In recent years, weather patterns are trending to intermittent storm events with shorter duration periods of traditional “winter” hazards of snow and ice. Frequent thaws / wash-off events result in an increase of repeat salting treatments in marginal conditions. Therefore increasing cost and resource commitments, rather than reducing them. As per the detail in the report opportunities continue to be monitored to switch from ICEs vehicles to alternative fuel options.
- 6.7 Risk - The proposed policy is designed to reduce the exposure of the Council to risk.
- 6.8 Customer Service - The winter policy has been designed to maintain access to the Council’s Strategic Road network and other “lifeline” routes within the confines of the available resources.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 - 2023/24 Winter Service Policy Document
- Appendix 2 - Salt Use Reduction and Preservation of Stocks Protocol (2020 revised)
- Appendix 3 - Advisory Signing – Road Closures in Severe Conditions
- Appendix 4 - Frontline Treatment Vehicle Fleet 2023/24
- Appendix 5 - Current Salt stocks – July 2023 – monitoring and resilience record

Appendix 6 - Summary of 2022/23 weather conditions