
WINTER SERVICE PLAN FOR YEAR 2021/22

Report by Director Infrastructure & Environment

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

5 October 2021

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides a review of the performance of Scottish Borders Council's Winter Service during 2020/21, and presents, at Appendix A, SBC's proposed Winter Service Plan for 2021/22. This year it includes in Appendix B, details of the ward members workshops held following last winter, and provides feedback and updates following those meetings.**
- 1.2 SBC provides a winter service on over 3,000km of roads and 1250 km of footway across the Scottish Borders. The Winter Service Plan is reviewed annually and presented to elected members to outline the steps that aim to make sure the road and footway network is safe, within available resources in the upcoming winter.
- 1.3 As part of the Fit for 2024 programme of transformational change, the Council is required to modernise and adapt all of its services to meet present and anticipated future needs in a responsive and agile manner, ensuring that services can continue to be delivered cost effectively and sustainably, while delivering efficiencies and savings where required.
- 1.4 The winter of 2020/21 was not significant in terms of snowfall, which was limited to a few occasions. There was however an almost unprecedented period of prolonged frost from late December into mid-February. This, coupled with increased sensitivity and expectation due to Covid-19, resulted in above average salt usage and a higher than normal number of precautionary treatments being required.
- 1.5 The Winter Service Plan for 2021/22 is on very similar lines to the previous 2020/21 Plan in terms of policy, priorities, routes, call out arrangements and resource planning.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Committee:-

- (a) Notes the performance of the SBC Winter Service during 2020/21;**
- (b) Endorses the Winter Service Plan for 2021/22.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council undertakes a Winter Service on over 3,000km of local road network. The Service is provided by the Infrastructure and Environment Department. Under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, Section 34, all roads authorities are required to *'take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads'*. The safe passage of people on the road network during winter is very important for the social and the economic needs of the area.
- 3.2 To assist in meeting the legal requirements, the Infrastructure and Environment Service produces an annual Winter Service Plan which describes what steps will be taken to maintain the local road network free from ice and snow; as far as it is considered reasonable within the available budget. A Winter Service Plan has been in place in different forms for over 20 years and is reviewed annually to ensure it is fit for purpose. The Winter Service is predicated on a hierarchal basis to ensure, as far as is practicable, that a network of strategic routes is available to travel on. Route hierarchies are determined based on factors including traffic volumes, bus routes and access critical infrastructure including schools, shops and medical centres.
- 3.3 How the Council keeps the road network operating safely and effectively during periods of winter weather can be described in 2 ways:
- a) Prevention – by pre-salting roads to reduce the impact of frost and frozen surfaces on travel conditions, delivered on a routine, planned basis. The road network hierarchy is defined as Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Networks. Planned "pre-salting" is only undertaken on the Primary network. The remaining road network will then come under the "post-treatment" of Secondary and Tertiary networks. The Secondary network is treated after the Primary network, as time and resources permit and it is believed that the freezing conditions will continue. The Tertiary network will only be treated when extended weather conditions persist, all Primary networks have been treated, resources have been committed to treat Secondary routes, and resources have become available.
 - b) Intervention – through large scale snow clearance following extreme winter conditions, taken forward on more of an ad hoc basis, involving emergency actions and community resilience. This is co-ordinated by the Council's Emergency Planning processes.
- 3.4 Best practice requires officers to review update and report on the winter service plan annually to members. This year, in addition to this review process, a series of workshops were undertaken with Elected Members, at Ward level. The purpose of the workshops was to collect feedback on performance last winter and enable Members to raise queries, seek clarifications and challenge officers on the service provided. This resulted in a large number of enquiries and follow up actions, contained within later in this report. It is important to note that there were repeated requests to extend the primary road network. The classification of primary, secondary and tertiary networks were previously presented and endorsed by Council in

2015. In addition to the criteria outlined in paragraph 3.2, this classification was also determined by the available budget and resources (staff and fleet). At this time, those constraints remain and unfortunately the Council are unable to expand the primary road network. However, officers will continue to review operations and activities we undertake seeking opportunities to innovate to improve effectiveness and realise greater efficiency.

- 3.5 Once endorsed by the Executive, the Winter Service Plan is communicated and shared widely with our community. The Plan will be published on the Council’s website and made accessible through other digital platforms. This is further supplemented by publishing treatment routes to improve awareness of the Service Plan with the general public.

4 REVIEW OF 2020/21

- 4.1 The winter of 2020/21 was not significant in terms of snowfall; any snowfalls were moderate to mild and limited to a few occasions and did not lead to any significant impacts on travel. There were some isolated instances of disruption and this was primarily due to vehicle breakdowns rather than lack of willingness or foresight to provide services. There was however an almost unprecedented period of 52 consecutive days prolonged and severe frost from late December right through into mid-February across large areas of the Scottish Borders. The resulted in twice daily treatments being undertaken across almost the entire primary network every day. This restricted any ability to expand treatment to secondary and tertiary routes as frequently or as quickly as would have been hoped. However overall the number of precautionary treatments required throughout the whole of the winter period was not outwith the expected range but the need to post-treat both primary and secondary routes was greater. This resulted in above average salt usage for the financial year.

The following key parameters illustrate this:

Years	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	Comment
Planned Actions	194	196	243	168	198	192	Call outs to undertake preventative actions (previous 5-year annual average = 200)
Salt Usage (,000T)	23.9	22.3	37.5	17.6	23.5	30.5	Used on local (non-Trunk) roads (previous 5-year annual average = 25)

- 4.2 The pattern of overnight frosts continued much later into the year than normal with incidences well into May.

- 4.3 The potential impact of a harsh winter on the NHS was anticipated by CoSLA and other bodies. This Council along with other Scottish Local Authorities committed to undertake as robust a service as possible to minimise any impacts of slips trips and falls in wintry weather. Whilst every effort was applied to achieve this, the conditions last winter meant that community self-help became a significant tool to assist the Council in its commitments. In particular salt bin usage was significantly higher than previously experienced and additional refills were undertaken throughout winter. In some instances up to 12 refills being provided, typically in previous years there would be a maximum of 2 refills. The efforts of our communities during the most challenging of times were really appreciated by the Council and the vast majority of the Borders population.
- 4.4 Along with our strong record of community self-help in winter service, the Council has an extremely loyal and highly skilled workforce which it relies upon to deliver its winter service plan. Having worked closely with our workforce to address payment anomalies during 2019/20 the performance across all areas was exemplary last winter. High praise has been shared with the workforce by many in our community and within the council in recognition of their efforts at what is a difficult time of year for many.
- 4.5 Discussions continue with our workforce in regards to the arrangements for this coming winter and officers remain confident that we will continue to be able to meet the parameters as set out in the Winter Service plan to the best of our ability. And it is only right to also thank the number of private contractors from across the Borders and South East Scotland who also helped the Council maintain its high standards in this area. Their efforts and willingness to help in the most friendly and flexible of ways is to be applauded.

5 2021 Member Briefings

- 5.1 A series of Ward Briefings were undertaken with Members in early summer of this year. The purpose of the briefings was to enable members to provide feedback on the 2020/21 winter service and to consult on what was felt to have gone well and where there might be areas for improvement going forward.
- 5.2 The Ward Briefings also presented an opportunity for Members to raise issues that constituents had raised with them or to pass on concerns that they themselves had. It was emphasised however that the timescale and scope of the current exercise would not allow significant changes to the existing priority networks.
- 5.3 Members were also advised that the requirements of the previous winter had seen a significant overspend in the original budget allocation for winter, particularly in salt usage, and that there was unlikely to be capacity for expanding the service going forward.

- 5.4 A brief action point record was kept of the meetings and is provided in Appendix B to this report. A commentary on specific action points requested, along with other ad-hoc requests from various sources, is provided in Appendix C to this report. Please note that more general points raised at the Ward Briefings, such as improved communications, are not highlighted in Appendix C.
- 5.5 There were two consistent themes that that emerged from the workshops:
- a) the role of resilient communities in supporting the Council to meet its obligations;
 - b) how improved communications could aid when it comes to the community understanding what the council can and can not do, helping the community make an informed choice about whether it is safe for them to leave their house or to delay their planned travel arrangements in light of poor weather conditions;

6 WINTER SERVICE PLAN FOR 2021/22

- 6.1 The Winter Service Plan was challenging to deliver given the conditions, but by implementing our plan, the significant work undertaken by officers and frontline staff and support of external contractor's disruption was contained. Planned treatments were undertaken as scheduled, salt stocks were maintained throughout the period and the more regular re-stocking of salt-bins was well received. In these regards the Winter Service Plan can be demonstrated to have worked well in 2020/21 and no significant changes to policy are proposed for the coming winter.
- 6.2 To support resilience communities more effectively, more flexibility is proposed by introducing a third category of resilient community salt bin. This will enable more community self-help in a structured manner at very minimal cost whilst providing improved community safety and wellbeing outcomes. Salt usage and replenishment rates will be monitored to measure performance.
- 6.3 The updated Winter Service Plan, at Appendix A, is proposed for adoption for winter 2021/22. It remains a robust plan and clearly defines the approach to primary; secondary; and tertiary salting of the Council's adopted road and footway network, following the principles established in best practice terms as well as in previous winter service plans.

7 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

- (a) In 2021/22 the winter service will continue to be delivered as a funded service. The basic cost of all plant and vehicles required to deliver the winter service are also fully funded from within the Infrastructure & Environment budget.

- (b) Due to the continuing financial pressures affecting the Council, there is a need to continue modernisation of our approach to winter delivery and to investigate ways of minimising the financial impact that winter service delivery has.

7.2 Risk and Mitigations

- (a) The Winter Service Plan details how the Council will respond to winter weather events across its network. It does so by clarifying the approach to treatment of carriageways (or is it roads and footways) and sets out the principles employed in reaching decisions and deploying resources. There is a risk that the travelling public may come to harm when commuting in and around the Borders during winter weather events. As well as promoting the potential for travel disruption arising from winter weather, the production and public scrutiny of the Winter Service Plan ensures that the Council is being clear about what it can and cannot reasonably address, within its available resources.
- (b) The last few winters have been relatively mild but, as illustrated in the key parameters table above, it is still not uncommon to encounter a much more severe winter as occurred in 2017/18 (and in 2011/12 and 2010/11 before that). This emphasises the need to keep resources to a level that can cope with unexpected, unusually inclement and/or sustained weather conditions in the future. The Roads and Infrastructure Service, in conjunction with officers across SBC and partners, will monitor and review arrangements throughout this winter, noting any deficiencies in service provision, with a view to bring forward any further amendments in the autumn for the 2022/23 Winter Plan.
- (c) The continuing impact of CV19 remains a concern on the ability to deliver a winter service. In particular loss of personnel through contracting of the virus or being required to self-isolate is an obvious considerable concern. As in the previous year this is being mitigated against through the use of local contractors that can be called upon to assist in both planned and emergency situations. This is further complimented by other measures which include continuing to promote the workforce to support our winter service voluntarily, promoting increased sign up to contractual standby and encouraging other areas of the workforce to become involved and receive appropriate training and development.

7.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

An Integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken in regards to the content of this report and no adverse findings have been observed requiring a fuller IIA to be undertaken.

7.4 Sustainable Development Goals

It is not envisaged that the revised Winter Service Plan will impact on any of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

7.5 **Climate Change**

There are no significant impacts on the Council's carbon emissions or climate change contribution that are additional to current operation.

7.6 **Rural Proofing**

There are no rural proofing impacts resulting from this report. The Winter Service Plan recognises the rural nature of the Scottish Borders and the importance of maintaining transport links during the winter months.

7.7 **Data Protection Impact Statement**

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

7.8 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

There are no changes which are required to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

8 **CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The Director, Finance & Regulatory, the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director People, Performance and Change, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Name

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Title

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Background Papers: N/A

Previous Minute Reference: N/A

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Jacqueline Whitelaw can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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