
WINTER SERVICE PLAN FOR YEAR 2022/23

Report by Director of Infrastructure & Environment

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

13 September 2022

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides a review of the performance of Scottish Borders Council's Winter Service during 2021/22 and presents, at Appendix A, SBC's proposed Winter Service Plan for 2022/23.**
- 1.2 SBC provides a winter service on almost 3,000km of roads and 800 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, within available resources, that the road and footway network is safe 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 2021/22 was not significant in terms of snowfall, which was limited to a few occasions. Incidents of ice and prolonged frost were also less than the previous five year average and significantly down on those experienced the previous winter. In particular, this led to a reduced need to treat primary and secondary routes as frequently and resulted in lower than average salt usage.
- 1.5 The Winter Service Plan for 2022/23 is on similar lines to the previous 2021/22 Plan in terms of policy, priorities, routes, call out arrangements and resource planning. Section 5 of the report provides details on a revised salt spread rate regime that is being trialled on approximately half of the primary precautionary salting routes this winter.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Executive Committee:-

- (a) Notes the performance of the SBC Winter Service during 2021/22;**

- (b) Endorses the Winter Service Plan for 2022/23;**
- (c) Notes the continuation of a trial in relation to the salting spread rates applied on 50% of the primary precautionary salting routes.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council undertakes a Winter Service on almost 3,000km of local road network and 787 km of footway. 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 its legal requirements, the Infrastructure and Environment Service produces an annual Winter Service Plan. This 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 that it is fit for purpose. It provides information about the hierarchy of routes, and details the network, which will benefit from winter maintenance activities, within the framework of that hierarchy.. Route hierarchies are long established and have been determined based on factors including traffic volumes, bus routes and access to critical infrastructure including schools, shops and medical centres. Operational capacity and delivery is structured around the hierarchy, including the locating of critical infrastructure in which salt is stored.
- 3.3 The Council adopts two approaches to safely maintaining the network during the winter:
- 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 winter hazards will continue to present a risk. The Tertiary network will only be treated when hazardous 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. This, by its nature, is taken forward on more of an as required basis; due to the severity of snow fall, the decision to undertake snow clearance is considered within the context of the Councils emergency planning structure and may also involve community resilience partners.
- 3.4 Delivery of the winter service, depending on the severity of the winter, can lead to concerns being escalated to members where the public may feel that their particular circumstances deserve a greater response from the Council than they may have received. In creating the winter service plan the Council is communicating its approach to delivery of what it can and cannot

or will not do, depending on the winter weather. Critical success factors include having a reliable fleet and staff/contractor network to be able to deliver our stated plan, access to quality and sufficient quantity of salt, considering the role that resilient community partners can willingly play and how best to support that and maintaining a flexible approach where it is possible to do so, depending on issues such as the duration that the winter weather has been impacting Borders communities and the nature of that impact, ie perma frost or significant volumes of snow. The winter service must also meet the financial constraints in which the Council is operating, therefore it is not within the scope of this report to propose review of or redesign of the hierarchy and delivery model.

- 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 2021/22

- 4.1 The Winter of 2021/22 was not significant in terms of snowfall; any snowfalls were moderate to mild and limited to a few occasions that did not lead to any significant impacts on travel. There were some isolated instances of disruption and this was primarily as a result of vehicle breakdowns rather than a lack of willingness or foresight to provide services. Incidents of ice and prolonged frost were also lower in 2021/22 in comparison to the previous five year average and significantly down on those experienced the previous winter when there was an unprecedented spell of prolonged frosts from December through to late February. In particular this led to a reduced need to treat primary and secondary routes and resulted in a much lower than average salt usage.

The following key parameters illustrate this:

Years	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	Comment
Planned Actions	196	243	168	198	192	154	Call outs to undertake preventative actions (previous 5-year annual average = 199)
Salt Usage (,000T)	22.3	37.5	17.6	23.5	30.5	18.2	Used on local (non-Trunk) roads (previous 5-year annual average = 26.3)

- 4.2 Winter treatments did extend into April, but this was much less pronounced than in the previous winter.
- 4.3 As in the previous year the potential impact of a harsh winter on the NHS was considered 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 on the Health Service through slips, trips and falls in wintry weather. Community self-help remained a significant tool to assist the Council in its commitments. Although not as high as in the previous winter, salt bin usage was above average with additional refills being undertaken throughout the winter period.

- 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 again 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 TRIAL OF AMENDED SPREAD RATE FOR PRECAUTIONARY SALTING

- 5.1 The service continues to look at innovative, more efficient and environmentally friendly ways of delivering the Council's winter service.
- 5.2 The current salt spread rate matrix (see section 5.5 of the Winter Service Plan) was established in line with industry good practice and guidance in consultation with ELBF (Edinburgh, Lothian, Borders & Fife Councils) a number of years ago.
- 5.3 The code of practice for well maintained highways was revised in 2016 and provided updated guidance including reference to more recent research by the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG). This has led to more detailed guidance on the spread rates for precautionary salting operations undertaken in response to predictions of frost and ice formation in normal winter conditions on the UK road network. The majority of Scottish Councils are yet to adopt the revised guidance but it is felt that coupled with technological development and greater flexibility of incremental adjustments to spread rates it offers significant potential benefits for winter operations. .
- 5.4 The guidance is determined on the basis of research carried out by NWSRG, TRL (Transport Research Lab), Highways England and Transport Scotland over a number of years and is designed to assist authorities in providing good service levels while complying with their legal obligations and duties in respect to winter weather conditions.
- 5.5 In addition to traditional factors such as the salting technology utilised; the type and condition of the salt; performance and serviceability of the

spreader; road surface temperature the revised guidelines consider wider factors such as traffic levels before, during and after application and residual salt levels on the network in determining the spread rate at which salt should be supplied. The full NWSRG chapter on spread rates for precautionary salting is provided as Appendix B to this report with section 8.6.7 of that document being the relevant section for application rates.

- 5.6 The revised spread rates put forward by NWSRG require greater input and thought from officers in determining the appropriate rates for routes and sections of route. Critically, however, they also offers both environmental benefits and significant potential savings through reduced salt usage. This can be up to 20% in certain conditions.
- 5.7 Following an initial self-assessment undertaken by officers to determine the potential benefits of adopting the NWSRG guidance a number of meetings between representatives of NWSRG and SBC Infrastructure and Environment a short trial was undertaken in March 2022. This took place on two of the Councils 28 Primary Priority Routes to determine if the revised guidance would be appropriate in the Scottish Borders (noting that previous authorities to implement this had been based south of the Border).
- 5.8 As a result of the process outlined at 5.7 above officers are now recommending that the NWSRG regime offers both environmental benefits and significant potential savings through reduced salt usage and as there was no discernible downturn in performance on the two trial routes it is proposed to extend the trial in the coming winter over 14 routes (50% of primary routes). It should be noted that at present only about half of the salt spreading machines that SBC operate are capable of adjusting their spreading rates by the 1g/square metre increments required by this regime.
- 5.9 The comparative performance under the two spread rate regimes will be monitored during the winter through feedback from operators and any comments received from Members and the general public.

6 WINTER SERVICE PLAN FOR 2022/23

- 6.1 The Winter Service Plan is always challenging to deliver given the conditions, but by implementing our plan, along with the significant work undertaken by Officers and frontline staff and the support of external contractors, disruption was contained in the previous winter. Planned treatments were undertaken as scheduled, salt stocks were maintained throughout the period and the continued more regular re-stocking of salt-bins was again well received. In these regards the Winter Service Plan can be demonstrated to have worked well in 2021/22 and no significant changes to policy are proposed for the coming Winter, other than the salt spread rate trial described in section 5.
- 6.2 To support resilience communities more effectively, more flexibility is now available through the introduction of resilient community salt bins. These enable more community self-help in a structured manner, more expediently at minimal cost whilst providing improved community safety and wellbeing outcomes. Salt usage and replenishment rates will continue to be monitored to gauge performance.

- 6.3 The updated Winter Service Plan, at Appendix A, is proposed for adoption for winter 2022/23. 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) An approved winter maintenance budget of £3.4M exists within Infrastructure & Environment. In addition a £1M provision within reserves exists for adverse winter weather, for events beyond average conditions.
- (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) Winter and winter hazards for the travelling public present a risk of personal injury, damage to property vehicles and potentially a risk of fatal accidents taking place on the road and footway network. 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 roads and footways and sets out the principles employed in reaching decisions and deploying resources. 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) There is a risk that the WSP does not reflect and address adequately the experiences and or appropriately plan to manage winter hazards each year. Whilst officers remain satisfied that the WSP is a demonstrably effective plan which has high levels of compliance in its delivery. The Infrastructure and Environment Service, in conjunction with officers across SBC and partners, monitor and review the delivery of the WSP annually, noting any deficiencies in service provision, with a view to developing solutions and proposing those to members in the autumn for the 2023/24 Winter Plan.
- (b) The continuing impact of Covid 19 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 two years 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 encourage 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

- (c) There is a risk in adopting an updated approach to salt spread rates that on carriageways that the travelling public may have trouble whilst travelling on the network during wintry. This is being mitigated by, adopting rigorous testing of the quality of salt supplies, ensuring that up to date information around road traffic volumes at sensitive times is up to date, ensuring that gritters are able to deliver the spread rates as specified, ensuring the pre and mid winter calibration of spreaders is undertaken, and monitoring the process of salting roads as well as the effects of salt on the road condition during winter events. The decision makers have also all been trained and familiarised with the new updated approach and will be supported to ensure that decisions on salt spread rates throughout winter are taken in a way which does not increase the risks to travelling public during winter weather events.

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 issues arising 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 & Corporate Governance), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Name
John Curry

Title
Director of Infrastructure & Environment

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Brian Young	Infrastructure Manager
Jason Hedley	Chief Officer Roads

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.

Contact us at Jacqueline Whitelaw, PLACE, Business Support, Scottish Borders Council, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose, TD6 0SA, Tel 0300 100 1800, email JWhitelaw@scotborders.gov.uk.