
HIGHWAY WINTER SERVICE OPERATIONAL PLAN 2004/05

**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) -Councillor Nick Wallis,
Highways and Transport Portfolio**

Responsible Director(s) John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Members approval of the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan 2004/05.

Information and Analysis

2. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. In order to discharge this duty it is essential that the authority has in place an operational plan setting out its policies and actions in respect of winter services. The Highway Winter Service Operational Plan details these policies and procedures as well as providing operational and technical service information. The plan was first introduced last winter and is currently being reviewed and updated. Essentially it is proposed that the operational procedures/practices and gritting routes remain as per 2003/04 apart from minor alterations to gritting routes to accommodate changes in bus routes. This report provides a brief non-technical résumé of the policy and procedures set out in the plan for 2004/05.
3. The objective of the winter maintenance service provided by the Council is to maintain communications and enable every day life to continue during adverse weather conditions. In doing so it addresses the issues of safety, highway availability and ensuring that delays to the travelling public are kept to a minimum on the treated network. This policy is in line with the principles laid down in the code of good practice 'Delivering Best Value in Highway Maintenance' published by the Institution of Highways and Transportation. The Operational Plan has also taken account of 'The Institution of Civil Engineers Design and Practice Guide : Highway Winter Maintenance'.

Operational Matters

4. The winter maintenance season extends from 1 October to 30 April and is a 24/7 operation throughout that period. The Meteorological Office provides weather forecasts every day which includes road surface temperature information. These forecasts are part of a computer based Ice Prediction system that utilises atmospheric and road surface temperature information from four mini roadside weather stations, one of which is in the Borough and three on its periphery. This information along with the weather forecasts is used to help determine the appropriate action.

5. In general precautionary salting takes place at 5.00am and 7.00pm but the precise times and extent depends on the prevailing and predicted weather conditions. In snow conditions 24 hour operations are often required.
6. The Borough is divided into nine predetermined road gritting routes, each taking between 1.5 and 2 hours to complete. In total approximately 66% of the adopted highway network is included on these routes, amounting to in excess of 200 miles (320 Km) of road. In extreme icy conditions a number of additional roads are also salted. Details of the predetermined routes and extreme icy routes are given in the Operational Plan. A publicity leaflet is currently being prepared which will provide a brief guide to winter services in Darlington. It will also show the routes and give general background and useful hints on winter driving. We are currently looking at having this posted on the Website.
7. The main factors used in drawing up the predetermined routes were as follows:
 - (a) Links to the national road network, industry, commercial and business centres.
 - (b) Maintain public transport and access by emergency services.
 - (c) Journeys to and from work and education.
8. In snow conditions the main objective is to maintain and/or restore communications over all or part of the highway network by snow clearance, in the first instance for public transport, emergency services and industrial traffic. This may mean that non-essential routes will not be treated until the essential communication links are restored.
9. In frosty conditions the Action Plan for the Town Centre is implemented. Essentially this comprises a schedule of footways and pedestrian routes, crossing points and accesses to buildings with high pedestrian usage which are treated on a priority basis. In general other footways are not treated during periods of frosty conditions. However, in prolonged extreme conditions where ice/snow is present for in excess of 4-5 days, footways other than those included in the Action Plan for the Town Centre Footways will be treated on a needs basis as resources permit. More details are given in the Operational Plan.
10. In times of snow, footways will be treated in accordance with the Action Plan for the Town Centre.
11. Cycle tracks are not normally treated except in prolonged extreme conditions where ice/snow is present for in excess of 4-5 days.
12. There are three principal winter operations:
 - (a) Pre-treatment, commonly known as 'precautionary salting' to prevent ice forming.
 - (b) Post-Treatment, commonly known as 'post-salting to melt ice and snow that has already formed.
 - (c) Snow clearing to remove significant accumulations of snow by the use of snow

ploughs, other heavy machinery and manual labour.

13. Once the decision to salt has been taken, gritters are deployed to spread salt on the network, either in total or in part, depending upon the prevailing and predicted weather conditions. The need and extent of salting footways and cycle tracks is also determined. The timing of the salting is dictated primarily by these weather conditions but potential traffic conditions are also taken into account. Salt is used as the de-icing agent as it is the most cost effective treatment.
14. Despite the best endeavours of those involved in the winter maintenance service unpredicted severe freak weather conditions such as 'freezing rain' can occur. In these circumstances emergency action will be implemented as rapidly as practicable. It should be borne in mind, however, that ice is very much more difficult to remove once it has formed and prevailing traffic conditions may affect operations.

Outcome of Consultation

15. It is less than 12 months since the first edition [2003/04] of the Winter Service Operational Plan was approved and hence the second edition [2004/05] contains only minor modifications. It is proposed to carry out a more detailed review on a two yearly basis and this will include public consultation as an integral part of the review process. The first two yearly review is scheduled for the 2005/06 edition.

Legal Implications

16. Contrary to popular belief, until last winter there had not been a statutory requirement for highway authorities to provide winter services. However, because of the important role that the highway network assumes in every day life, almost without exception all highway authorities have provided winter services to greater or lesser degrees.
17. However, the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 - Section 111, placed a duty on highway authorities to ensure, so far as it reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow and ice. This is similar to the one that already existed in Scotland by virtue of Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.
18. It is considered that this policy document is a reasonable response to the legislation, especially since it is less than 12 months since the policy was approved by Cabinet in November 2003.
19. The Plan was considered by the Environment Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 2 September 2004.

Financial Implications

20. The operational budget for this winter (2004/05) is £263,000. The budget is monitored on a monthly cycle on the basis of detailed daily records.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

21. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

22. The Highway Winter Service Operational Plan 2004/05 is an update of the Plan for 2003/04 and as such does not represent new Council policy or a significant departure from existing policy.

Decision Deadline

23. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

Key Decisions

24. The adoption of the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan is a key decision as it affects all the residents of Darlington.

Recommendation

25. It is recommended that Members approve the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan 2004/05.

Reason

26. In order to discharge its statutory duty it is essential that the authority has in place an operational plan setting out its policies and actions in respect of winter services.

John Buxton
Director of Development and Environment

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Background Papers

- (i) 'Delivering Best Value in Highway Maintenance'
- (ii) The Institution of Civil Engineers Design and Practice Guide : Highway Winter Maintenance