
HIGHWAY WINTER MAINTENANCE OPERATIONAL PLAN 2007/08

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor David Lyonette, Transport Portfolio

Responsible Director - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Members' approval to the continued use of the existing Highway Winter Maintenance Operational Plan for the coming winter 2007/08.

Information and Analysis

2. The Council has a statutory duty, 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 the Council has in place a Highway Winter Maintenance Operational Plan which details the policies and procedures as well as providing operational and technical service information. This will be the fifth winter that the plan has been used and but for minor alterations it has provided a sound basis for the Council's winter maintenance operations.
3. A very brief non-technical resume of the policy and procedures is set out below.
4. 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'.
5. 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 mini roadwise weather stations, two of which are in the Borough and two on the periphery. This information, along with weather forecasts, is used to help determine the appropriate action.
6. In general precautionary salting takes place at 5.00 am and 7.00 pm but the precise times and extent depends on the prevailing and predicted weather conditions. In snow conditions 24 hour operations are often required.

7. The Borough is divided into eight 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. This will be posted on the Website.
8. The main factors used in drawing up the predetermined routes were to maintain:
 - (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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
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, Community Services deploy gritters 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. Rock Salt is used as the de-icing agent.

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.
15. In recent years greater emphasis and research has been carried out in the winter maintenance field. In addition, the experiences of other countries has become more influential and it is proposed that the current procedures and practices be reviewed accordingly. Listed below are just some of the ideas that could be investigated:
 - (a) Route based forecasting which delivers individual forecasts for each salting route.
 - (b) Use of Brine solution instead of solid rock salt.
 - (c) Use of Pre-wet salt where the rock salt is pre-wet with brine solution.
 - (d) The use of additives.
 - (e) Satellite tracking and monitoring of gritters.

In addition, the individual salting routes and salt bin distribution should be reviewed.

16. It is proposed that the review be carried out at the end of this winter maintenance season.

Financial Implications

17. The operational budget for this winter (2007/08) is £284,410. The budget is monitored on a monthly cycle on the basis of detailed daily action records.

Outcome of Consultation

18. Since this year's Plan is substantially the same as the Approved Plan, detailed consultation has not been carried out. However, as mentioned in paragraph 15 above, it is proposed to carry out a review of the Plan next Summer and this will include public consultation as an integral part of the review process.

Legal Implications

19. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

20. 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

21. The Highway Winter Service Operational Plan 2007/08 does not represent new Council policy or a significant departure from existing policy.

Decision Deadline

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

Key Decisions

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

Recommendation

24. It is recommended that Members approve the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan 2007/08.

Reason

25. 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

Background Papers

- (i) Highway Winter Maintenance Operational Plan 2004/05

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