

Name of meeting: Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel

Date:. 7 September 2021, 1pm.

Title of report: Review of winter maintenance and link to planning.

Purpose of report:

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	Not Applicable. If yes give the reason why
Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)?</u>	Key Decision – No Private Report/Private Appendix – No
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	Not Applicable If no give the reason why not
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director:</u> Sue Proctor - Service Director Highways and Street scene Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance? No Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning? No.	Date signed off: Wednesday 25th August 2021.
Cabinet member portfolio	Cllr Naheed Mather.

Electoral wards affected: All.

Ward councillors consulted: None.

Public or private: Public.

Has GDPR been considered? Yes.

1. Summary.

To provide Scrutiny with an update on the provision of winter maintenance services and information on the link with planning.

2. Information required to take a decision.

2.1 Policy background and legal duty.

The Council has a Winter Maintenance Service Policy that was approved by Cabinet in 2018 and effective from October 2018.

There is a legal duty on Highway Authorities (the Highways Act 1980 Section 41.1A) to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along the highway is not endangered by snow or ice.

Section 150 of the Highways Act 1980 also imposes a duty upon authorities to remove any obstruction off the highway resulting from 'accumulation of snow or from the falling down of banks on the side of the highway, or from any other cause'.

In addition, the Traffic Management Act 2004 placed a network management duty on all local traffic authorities in England. It requires authorities to do all that is reasonably practicable to manage the network effectively to keep traffic moving.

The Council works within the guidance provided by the Well Managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice and the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) Practical Guide for Winter Service.

2.2 Winter Maintenance Service budget.

The Council's Highways Revenue budget includes an annual seasonal weather budget in 2021/22 of £1.8 million.

The budget funds all aspects of the impact of weather on the highway network eg. hot weather, high winds, wet weather leading to flooding, etc. The majority of the funding is used to deal with the highway safety and traffic disruption impacts of cold weather from hoar frost, ice and snow.

In 2017/18 the cost of seasonal weather impacts was £3.4 million, in particular due to The Beast from the East in February 2018 and the Mini Beast from the East in March 2018. The budget shortfall was made by Corporate Reserves as this is regarded as a corporate risk.

2.3 Operational Winter Service delivery.

Highway Service usually operates an 'out of hours' standby rota to deliver winter maintenance operations when required (usually a gritting treatment of the highway network at 5am and/or 6pm) for 24 weeks from the end of October each year. This year (2021/2022) the period will be extended to 27 weeks to provide improved service resilience due to historical trends of cold weather outside the usual 24 week period running from 18th October through to mid-April.

in 2021/22 the coldest start to May in history proved challenging to provide winter service delivery outside the usual 24 week period.

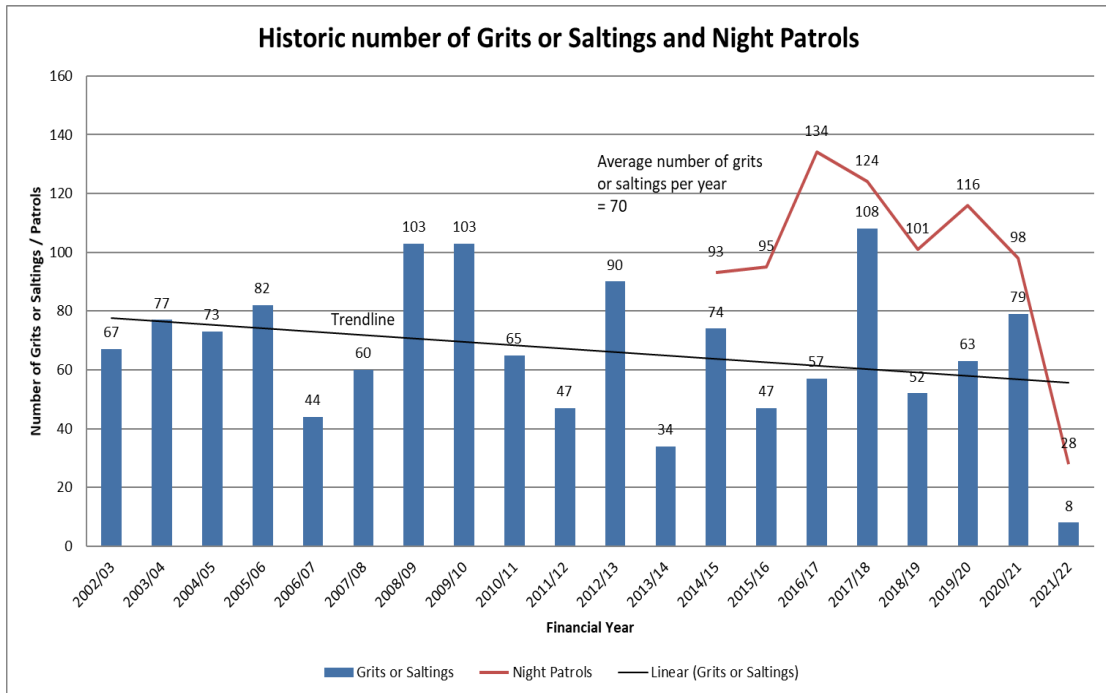
The Council's normal treatment network for gritting comprises 31 routes and treats approximately 53% (about 1000km or 600 miles) of the road highway network.

At the start of each winter season the Council has a total stock holding of 25, 000 tonnes of salt or grit at its Highways operational depots and strategic salt store. The Council's salt stock greatly exceeds the minimum levels of salt for recommended resilience in the Quarmby Report 2010.

Operational service delivery is a hybrid model whereby 17 gritting routes are carried out internally by the Council's Highways' employees and 14 gritting routes are carried out by local contractors. This reflects the operational limits on LGV drivers with the necessary training and the availability of volunteers to take part in the 'out of hours' duty and other physical constraints eg. highways fleet size, parking and storage of vehicles, number of multi use vehicles needed to deliver the operational highway delivery service.

Gritting routes are treated within 2 hours of vehicles being deployed from Highways' operational depots at the usual gritting start times of 5am and 6pm. However, gritting start times are tailored to meet weather conditions, hazards eg. hoar frost on road surfaces, and traffic peak periods. Routine gritting does not take place between 11pm and 5am, recognising the reduced usage of the highway and the impact on operational employees eg. adequate rest.

An 'average' winter in Kirklees has been established as about 70 grits from historical data but can vary from less than 40 grits to more than 100 grits per year:



There are a small number of footways in Huddersfield and Dewsbury town centres that are 'hand' gritted in advance of substantial snow or freezing rain.

2.4 Weather stations and weather forecasting.

Highways Service have four weather stations in Kirklees that are used to establish forecast weather conditions and monitor actual weather conditions. These are:

- Aldams Road, Dewsbury – Altitude 42m AOD.
- A640/Junction Inn, Huddersfield – Altitude 146m AOD.
- B6118 Grange Moor – Altitude 220m AOD.
- A635 Wessenden Moor – Altitude 450m AOD.

Weather conditions can be challenging in Kirklees as it has a topography that varies from greater than 550m AOD (eg. Holme Moss) to less than 50m AOD (eg. Dewsbury).

In terms of gritting, the whole of Kirklees is treated as one weather domain. So, all routes are gritted together with no distinction on locality or altitude if a gritting treatment is required.

Highways Service uses a specialist weather forecasting service procured with other West Yorkshire authorities and provided by DTN (previously MeteoGroup). This service provides a wide range of weather data for each weather station (and beyond including the UK and Europe) to enable our winter operational decision making. It's a misconception that the Service uses the typical weather forecast that citizens can access (eg. BBC weather, Accuweather) as they fall far short of the detailed information needed eg. road surface temperature, dew point temperature, hazard identification, snow altitude, etc.

2.5 Night patrol.

Kirklees has a varied topography and altitude so depending on forecast conditions the Council can operate a 'Night Patrol' to deal with conditions on higher ground or if the decision to carry out a precautionary grit is marginal. This involves a 'gritter' vehicle travelling a higher ground route across Kirklees throughout the evening/night/early morning. The route is approximately 218 km (135 miles) long, can be 'spot treated' with salt/grit as necessary and road surface temperatures (RSTs) are measured at a number of locations. Information about RSTs and weather conditions are communicated to a Senior Standby Officer during the night to inform the need for any additional operational action eg. a network grit at 5am.

2.6 Community Gritting.

Grit Bins.

The Council provides 1450 grit bins throughout the district to support the community in gritting and clearing pavements during winter weather.

Grit bins are checked and filled with salt:

- At the beginning of the winter season
- After periods of severe weather
- Prior to the Christmas and New Year holiday

Facilitating this part of the service delivery is a considerable resource commitment taking approximately 3 weeks and costs about £50k for every round of 1450 grit bin checks and fills.

Community gritting groups.

The Council currently supports a number of groups who undertake snow clearing for more vulnerable people in their communities. These groups operate where larger numbers of elderly/disabled residents reside or where community facilities are used to support these residents eg. lunch or community clubs. There are currently 24 active groups but this has been as high as 50 groups in the past.

The Council provides a limited amount of grit in piles, working in close liaison with community group leaders. This service helps vulnerable people access support services be it formal, family or neighbours more easily so are able to stay in their homes with less risk of having to call on greater support eg. through injury, or not able to receive care at home with snow and ice presenting a risk. This arrangement was established as a result of prolonged winter weather when local residents were increasing calling on health and social services because they were becoming more vulnerable and their usual arrangement for self-help was pressured through access problems.

Requests for these groups comes from Ward Councillors who provide officers with the details and contacts. Officers arrange to meet with the group as a whole, discuss the process and where to hand grit. Groups receive a risk assessment to understand the health and safety implications. The Council provides grit to a designated location for the group. Each year Officers make contact with the group to check on their salt supply to see if more is needed, confirm their willingness to continue to volunteer and go through the risk assessment.

Third party insurance aspects of volunteers gritting and snow clearing are provided by the Council's insurer.

National Farmers Union (NFU) volunteer farmers scheme.

The Council has worked with the NFU to enlist volunteer farmers in the more outlying areas of Kirklees (currently only south Kirklees despite efforts to establish this in north Kirklees) to assist in the snow clearing effort. Currently 22 farmers are signed up to this scheme and supplied with grit piles at the start of the winter season. The farmers clear local lanes close to the farm which assists the local outlying small communities and the farmers in milk collection and animal welfare when the winter weather strikes. These outlying and more exposed high level roads are not part of the normal gritting route and lack of access can have a major impact on their small businesses and animal welfare. This facility enables the Council to concentrate on other winter operations as outlying farms and communities are more able to help themselves.

Requests for these groups comes from the NFU office in Honley, where they provide Officers with the details and contacts for the farm. Officers arrange to meet with the farmer, discuss the process and where to grit. Farmers receive a risk assessment to understand the health and safety implications. The Council provides grit to a designated location, usually about ½ tonne. Each year Officers make contact with the farm to check on their salt supply to see if more is needed, confirm their willingness to continue to volunteer and go through the risk assessment.

This is a successful scheme. Farmers understand their duties during severe winter weather, “just get on and do it” and have the right equipment (tractors & spreaders) to deliver salt to their designated area quickly. The volunteer route is primarily managed by the NFU and great relationships have been established with not only the NFU but also the farmers that assist every winter. The NFU advertise the scheme in their newsletters leading up to the winter period and its generally a well practiced arrangement.

Insurance for these activities is provided for farmers by the National Farmers Union.

2.7 Severe weather response -communication and work with Partners.

The Council and Highway Service recognises the importance of winter service and winter weather on the community, businesses and people travelling in and through Kirklees.

Information on the Council's winter service, policy and gritting routes is available on the Council's website.

Information encouraging citizens, the community, partners and drivers to be winter and severe weather ready is shared via social media and internet/intranet channels in October and November.

The primary channel for severe weather communication is ‘Gritter Twitter’ (established 2009) @kirkleeswinter. This channel has over 8000 followers and in the month of November 2020 the Tweets were seen by nearly 80,000 Twitter users.

The Service's plans for winter weather are shared with partners on a yearly basis. Telephone numbers are available for Kirklees Direct to take calls 01484 414700 8am to 6pm and for emergency adverse weather issues on 01484 414888. Partners have a separate telephone number to call for help.

When heavy snow is falling, the priority is to keep main roads open with continual ploughing and gritting. Once the situation is stable and in response to the weather forecast the service will return to the normal gritting routes.

Highways Service has a track record of ‘pulling out the stops’ to help people during severe weather eg. helping access for ambulances, clearing roads for funeral hearses, escorting funeral corteges, recovering stranded home shopping delivery vehicles from the roadside, etc.

2.8 Link to Planning.

When planning applications are submitted, officers (Development Management, Highways Development Control and Highways) do not specifically give consideration to winter maintenance per se. However, all adoptable layouts are assessed to ensure waste collection vehicles can access developments. This assessment is based on vehicle swept path analysis for an 11.85m long waste collection vehicle, which is the largest vehicle in Kirklees fleet. This is considered to be the largest service vehicle which would regularly have need to access a development.

It should be recognised that winter maintenance vehicles are unlikely to enter new housing developments as they will not form part of the normal gritting treatment network ie. 53% of the network. Highways have smaller vehicles (with a narrower snow plough) that are for use in tighter residential estates and layouts if gritting or snow clearance is needed. Highways also regularly deploy 'hand' teams into residential areas to treat with grit or clear snow.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Working with People

N/A - no decision to be made.

3.2 Working with Partners

N/A – no decision to be made.

3.3 Place Based Working

N/A – no decision to be made.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

N/A – no decision to be made.

3.5 Improving outcomes for children

N/A – no decision to be made.

3.6 Other (eg Legal/Financial or Human Resources) Consultees and their opinions

N/A – no decision to be made.

4. Next steps and timelines

Scrutiny Panel to note and consider the content of this Report.

5. Officer recommendations and reasons

Officers ask Scrutiny Panel to note and consider the content of this Report.

6. Cabinet Portfolio Holder's recommendations

Not applicable.

7. Contact officer

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Kathryn Broadbent, Operational Manager, Highways Service. 01484 221000.
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8. Background Papers and History of Decisions

Cabinet 18/09/2018 – Revised Winter Maintenance Policy.

9. Service Director responsible

Sue Procter, Director of Highways and Streetscene.