

Highway Winter Service Policy East Sussex County Council

Policy Owner: Highway Asset Management Team

Approved By: Lead Member Transport and Environment

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Purpose of Policy

This policy outlines East Sussex County Council's approach to winter service delivery, ensuring the highway network is effectively managed during cold weather to maintain public safety, support essential services and minimise disruption.

Policy Statement

The Council is committed to delivering a risk-based winter service prioritising critical routes such as major roads, public transport corridors, and access to emergency services. The service balances safety with operational costs and complies with relevant legislation and national best practice, maintaining a safe and resilient transport network throughout the winter months.

Delivery Model and Contractor Role

East Sussex County Council commissions the winter service through its term highways maintenance contractor. The contractor is responsible for:

- Preparing and submitting an annual Winter Service Plan & Operational Handbook detailing routes, treatment methods, and resource deployment, for Council review and approval before each winter season.
- Delivering precautionary salting and reactionary treatments including the delivery bulk salt bags for community use, in line with agreed standards and schedules.
- Operating a fleet of gritting vehicles, including additional Operational Reserve Winter Service Vehicles for severe weather events.
- Managing the Community Snow Plough Scheme by allocating Council-owned snow ploughs to trained local stakeholders for use during extreme snow conditions.
- Conducting spot gritting and responding to public reports or site inspections to treat trouble spots.
- Maintaining and refilling grit bins and tubes across the county as per Council-approved criteria.

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The Council monitors the contractor's performance to ensure compliance with the contract and the policy's objectives.

Precautionary Salting Network

Salt treatments are applied preventatively to the carriageway network during the Operational Winter Period (1 October – 30 April).

The network excludes:

- National Highways' Strategic Road Network (SRN) in East Sussex, which includes the:
 - A21 (Hastings to Flimwell)
 - A26 (Newhaven to Beddingham)
 - A27 (Falmer to Pevensey)
 - A259 (Pevensey to Kent boundary via Bexhill, Hastings, and Rye)
- Most footways and cycleways - which are only treated reactively during severe or prolonged conditions and subject to available resources.
- Private roads and land, which remain the responsibility of the owner or occupier.

Routes for salting are determined through a formal risk-based assessment in accordance with national best practice. Selection is based on the following criteria:

1. Resilience and Strategic Importance
 - Roads designated as part of the Resilience Network.
 - Major transport routes essential to emergency services and critical infrastructure.
2. Traffic Volume and Usage
 - Roads with high traffic flows, especially at peak times.
 - Key public transport corridors (e.g., bus routes between towns and villages).
3. Community and Emergency Access
 - Primary routes to and from villages, hamlets, urban estates, hospitals, and schools.
 - Roads that provide essential access for emergency response vehicles.
4. Geographic and Topographic Factors
 - Areas with steep gradients or high risk of ice formation due to microclimates.
 - Locations prone to surface water accumulation and frost pockets.
5. Risk History and Incident Data
 - Routes with a documented history of ice-related incidents.

This policy complies with the principles of Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure (UKRLG, 2016) and guidance from the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG)

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Salting Network Prioritisation

The salting network is categorised into three tiers.

- The Essential Network is prioritised when resources are limited – this includes the highest priority roads as detailed in the Resilience Network Plan.
- The Primary Network is treated as required, using an evidence-based process. The Primary network consists of the Essential network plus all other A and B roads. Other main roads that have higher traffic flows at peak traffic periods and key public transport routes are included to ensure that main access routes into major settlements are maintained.
- The Secondary Network is treated during particularly severe and prolonged hazardous winter weather conditions, (prolonged hazardous conditions shall be experienced for 48 hours before works may commence). This includes primary access routes into villages, hamlets not treated by the Primary network.

Reactionary Treatments

Additional treatments that may be carried out in response to real-time weather conditions, incident reports and contractor feedback as appropriate and where reasonably practicable to do so.

Treatments include:

- Prioritised clearing of snow from all designated routes (Essential, Primary, and Secondary). Including activating the Community Snow Plough Scheme in severe snow events.
- Deploying additional salting vehicles from the operational reserve as needed.
- Targeted spot gritting based on site inspections or public feedback.
- Distributing bulk salt bags in exceptional circumstances to support local self-help efforts.

Grit Bins and Tubes

The Council maintains grit bins at strategic local sites, allowing residents to treat nearby pavements, cul-de-sacs, and minor roads, promoting shared responsibility. Requests for new bins are assessed against a risk matrix. They will only be considered where the gradient is not greater than 1:10 or at junctions with a history of accidents.

Additional grit bins may be provided when they are externally funded. In all cases grit bins will not be installed where:

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- The location is on a current gritting route,
- The location obstructs sight lines,
- The location is within 200m of another grit bin,
- The location will obstruct the passage of pedestrians including wheelchairs or buggies,
- The location is outside the boundary of the public road.

Communication

The Council provides timely, accurate winter service information to the public via its website, social media, local media, and coordination with emergency services. Updates include daily gritting actions, route treatment details, winter driving advice and instructions on accessing services such as grit bin refills. Temporary signage and public notices may be used to warn of ice risks or treatment activity.

Supporting Information

- Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Policy
- Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy
- Highways Network Resilience Plan
- Winter Service Plan

Legal Framework:

- **Highways Act 1980 (Section 41):** Requires the Council to maintain highways and take reasonable steps to keep them safe and passable, including winter maintenance. Section 150 puts a responsibility on the highway authority to clear snow from the highway, but only if it is causing an obstruction.

Best Practice Guidance:

- **Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice (2016):** Encourages a risk-based approach to winter service, prioritising routes, documenting procedures, and effective public communication.
- **National Winter Service Research Group:** Provides oversight and liaison for the development of guidance and new knowledge for the UK public roads sector.
- **Civil Contingencies Act 2004:** Provides guidance for emergency preparedness and coordinated winter responses through Local Winter Service Plans.

Policy Development

New Policy