

WINTER SERVICE POLICY 2024/25

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Each year Members consider for approval, the Council's Winter Service Policy. The format and general content of the Winter Service Policy 2024/25 remains similar to that of the 2023/24 Policy and is unchanged in general.
- 1.2 The policy sets out priorities for treatment and routes, which will be 'pre-treated' in advance of winter hazards. In prolonged winter conditions, the Policy provides for all roads to be treated, with resources being allocated to focus on the hierarchy of priorities (i.e. the lower priorities will only be cleared once the higher priorities have been treated and remain clear of any recurring hazards).
- 1.3 The Policy is a comprehensive document setting out the management, governance and operational requirements for the winter service. The Policy sets out signing provision to warn the travelling public of roads which are unsuitable for use during extreme winter conditions. The Policy also provides a protocol for the reduction in use of salt and preservation of remaining stocks in the event of salt stock replenishment operations being disrupted. This was introduced following the severe winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11 when national salt supplies were interrupted.

RECOMMENDATIONS:-

It is recommended that the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee:-

- i. Approves the 2024/25 Winter Maintenance Policy Document at Appendix 1;
- ii. Approves the Salt Use Reduction and Preservation of Stocks Protocol at Appendix 2;
- iii. Notes the Advisory signing, routes unsuitable in severe conditions at Appendix 3;
- iv. Notes the Frontline Treatment Vehicle Fleet 2024-25 at Appendix 4;
- v. Notes the Salt Stocks monitoring and resilience record at Appendix 5;
- vi. Notes weather summary from season 2023-24 at Appendix 6.

WINTER SERVICE POLICY 2024/25

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report presents the Winter Service Policy 2024/25 which remains in a similar format and covers a similar network to the Policy approved by this Committee in previous years. This generally remains based on the network and times of the public bus service with additional priority and resources allocated to strategic highspeed roads.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee:-

- i. Approves the 2024/25 Winter Maintenance Policy Document at Appendix 1;
- ii. Approves the Salt Use Reduction and Preservation of Stocks Protocol at Appendix 2;
- iii. Notes the Advisory signing, routes unsuitable in severe conditions at Appendix 3;
- iv. Notes the Frontline Treatment Vehicle Fleet 2024-25 at Appendix 4;
- v. Notes the Salt Stocks monitoring and resilience record at Appendix 5;
- vi. Notes weather summary from season 2023-24 at Appendix 6.

4.0 DETAIL

Maintenance Policy 2024/25

4.1 The proposed Winter Maintenance Policy for 2024/25, in terms of treatment standards and routes, remains largely unchanged from last year. The current hierarchy of routes in section 4 of the Policy, allows for 54.24% of the adopted road network to be subject to pre-treatment. This is the highest proportion within the seven authorities in the SCOTS Project Group1(Rural) and 10% above the average for all Scottish Authorities.

4.2 The changes brought in over the previous 18 months have been subject to review as part of the annual process of end of season assessment and future planning.

- The first year of the new Weather Forecast contract with Metdesk Ltd was reviewed at a West of Scotland Group meeting in June 2024. The out-turn performance figures for forecast accuracy were above the industry norm with between 94% - 96% per month, achieving 100% accuracy in March.
 - The Kintyre routes K1-K3, were revised after the Generation 6 Trunk Road contract, they have delivered treatments as planned, within the parameters of the policy.
 - The additional L7 Lorn Arc treatment route has been operated successfully and there is scope for this to extend should this be required.
 - The addition of the road C07 Ardlamont section onto the C6 pre-treatment route in Cowal was also delivered as planned, within the parameters of the policy.
 - In the aftermath of the 7th October severe weather incidents, temporary arrangements were put in place to provide the winter service October – December until such time as roads affected, were re-opened to through traffic.
- 4.3 A late season issue related to the reduction in available drivers on Mull to operate treatment routes MU1-MU3, necessitated temporary arrangements to maintain the service. Adjustments in start times, sequencing and route coverage allowed two vehicles to deliver treatments during March and April, within the parameters of the policy. The provision of a full driver pool, who are able to resume the full service of the three Priority 2 pre-treatment routes on Mull, is a requirement and part of the tasks 'in progress' during this summer towards providing the resources to deliver the policy as planned, this coming winter season.
- 4.4 The advisory signs for alternative routes in severe snow conditions remain similar for the four routes proposed in previous years. Details on sign configuration and locations are contained in Appendix 3 of this report.
- 4.5 Winter stand-by arrangements will commence on Friday 1st November 2024 and will continue until Friday 18th April 2025. There are a total of 32 treatment routes detailed in the policy's operational planning web-based management tool. Should weather conditions dictate, it may be necessary to bring forward the start date and/or push back the finish date. This would be determined operationally depending on forecast or observed weather conditions.
- 4.6 The Winter Treatment Fleet for 2025/25 will be similar to last winter. This will consist of 17 hired gritters from Econ Ltd. 8 of 26t 9cu.m capacity and 9 of 18t 6cu.m capacity, retained on a further one year extension. 1 contractor vehicle on Jura and 13 Council vehicles. The Council element consists of the updated frontline winter capable fleet of Quick Change Body (QCB) demountable, multipurpose vehicles procured during 2021. This provides 32 main frontline vehicles with 3 spare 18t 6cu.m capacity multipurpose vehicles and 3 back-up 12t 3.5cu.m multipurpose vehicles to cover breakdowns. In addition, a further 4 x 7.5 tonne tippers can accommodate ploughs, giving a total of 10 extra vehicles that can be deployed together with tractors and 'V' ploughs if conditions demand.
- 4.7 A further review of overall winter capable fleet was carried out after concerns

raised in 2023-24 season on the limited ability to react to the occasional severe frosts on Tiree and Coll. Additional trailer gritters for use in conjunction with transit pick-up sized vehicles, are being procured for Tiree, Coll, Colonsay and Lismore.

- 4.8 The requirement to manage drivers' hours within the delivery of all Council Services directly impacts on the retention of the Council's Operator Licence. Drivers from across the operational teams (grounds, waste, roads) deliver the pre-treatment service, in conjunction with external contractor assistance on the island of Jura. In extended periods of extreme winter conditions consideration will be given, at an operational level, to prioritising services to ensure that winter treatments can be delivered. This may result, for example, in refuse collections and other services being temporarily suspended in order to prioritise the clearing of ice and snow. Such measures are only likely in prolonged periods of extreme weather.
- 4.9 Steps are taken each year to increase the available driver "pool" by utilising other council drivers including grounds and waste disposal operatives. Discussions are ongoing to resource additional resilience by engaging assistance from external contractors on some mainland routes where in-house coverage is limited. The age demographic of operatives within the service, coupled with limitations on recruitment at local levels, **indicates that a deficit in the driver pool may further develop in several districts, making the delivery of the current policy difficult to maintain in future years.**
- 4.10 In extreme and prolonged weather events and where other priority tasks occur (such as responses to road traffic collisions, collapsed culverts, fallen trees etc) resources may need to be allocated based on a risk-based priority.
- 4.11 **Table 1** below indicates the statistical variations in operational activities over the last seven winter seasons. Weather patterns vary with some years experiencing hazards more widespread and in others more concentrated on inland and higher routes. The equivalent Full Fleet runs statistic is used to indicate an approximation to the budget allowance. The application of salt varies between 10gm² and 40gm² depending on a number of factors including road surface temperature, forecast and residual salt. In parallel with these methods, grit and sand are applied in snow conditions. The route with the individual highest number of turn-outs, remains consistently the A819 East Lorn Strategic Route, due to its North Eastern inland, high level sections. Last season A815 Dunoon – Cairndow strategic route was mobilised a similar number of times.

Table 1

Winter Season	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Equivalent Full Fleet Runs	110nr	62nr	78nr	79nr	65nr	66nr	71nr
Salt used in all treatments tonnes	22,992t	13,059t	12,280t	15,753t	11,030t	12,535t	12,070t

Most turned out Treatment route. Mobilisations = nr	A819 = 162nr	A819 = 109nr	A819 = 139nr	A819 = 114nr	A819 = 107nr	A819 = 94nr	A819 =103nr A815 =103nr
---	-----------------	-----------------	-----------------	-----------------	-----------------	----------------	----------------------------

4.12 It remains a considerable time since we have experienced a large scale snow event. Even the “Beast from the East” in 2017 only affected the Eastern domains of Lomond, Bute and Cowal with the rest of Argyll largely untouched. It is likely that should a longer spell of snow affect the whole of Argyll, a considerable escalation in resources and hence budget spend will be required to maintain lifeline accesses to communities. Appendix 6 to this report provides a summary of the 2023/24 winter conditions.

4.13 Footways and footpaths will only be treated, in periods of lasting hazard, when it is considered by the winter management team that the physical condition of the footways and footpaths makes it necessary and treatments will be effective. Footways and footpaths will usually only be treated during normal working hours. Staffing levels are such that we generally do not have sufficient operatives available to deal with footways and footpaths in parallel with treatments of the carriageway. The mobilisation of external resources to assist in footway treatments, is a balance of cost benefit against potential thaw conditions rendering treatments un-necessary. This winter maintenance policy applies to the public road network and a limited number of emergency service and public transport routes. Public car parks, access to council offices, schools etc all being subject to local arrangements out with the scope of this policy.

4.14 In specific locations additional information and diversion signing will be erected to further inform drivers of the hazardous conditions on some routes and advise them of alternative routes where available resources will concentrate on maintaining treatments. There are four roads where signing to indicate specific alternative routes are available. The signs deployed for these road closures are detailed in Appendix 3.

1. A817 “Haul Rd”, Lomond.
Snow gates at A82 and A814 “central” roundabout
Diversion via A818 Arden - A814 Garelochhead
2. C46 Glen Aros / Glenbellart road , Mull
Signs at Aros Bridge and Dervaig Primary School
Diversion via A848 Tobermory
3. C9 Glenfinart Road (The Larach) , Cowal
Signs at Whistlefield Hotel and Sligrachan Bus turning head;
Diversion via A880 Cot House
4. C11 Otter Hill road (Bealach an Drain) , Cowal
Signs at Glendaruel A886 and Otter Ferry B8000;
Diversion via A8003 Tighnabraich and Kames.

4.15 The Council’s Winter Maintenance budget was increased by £500k in

Financial Year 2019/20 to an operational budget of £2.12M. allowing a capability to deliver the equivalent of approximately 62 full runs over the winter season. Due to operating cost increases, this was re-adjusted back closer to the previous level of 56 equivalent fleet runs for winter 2022-23. Despite a further budget increase to £2.304M for 2023-24, the equivalent runs remained at 56nr, due to further unit cost increases. The actual cost of winter maintenance is dependent upon the severity of winter conditions and is a financial risk in that the service responds in accordance with set policy to variable weather events, which are not predictable. The amount of salt used per year will vary, depending on the grams per sq.m instructed in the individual route plans, for each mobilisation. Table 1 above confirms that this indicator of budget capability has been consistently exceeded year on year. The budget for the coming season 2024-25 has been increased further to £2.67M, as detailed in 4.21 below.

- 4.16 Overall the financial out-turn cost for winter 2023/24 was recorded as £2,663,324 against a budget of £2,304,942 an excess of £358,382 equivalent to 16%. This indicates a continuation of the general increase in the unit costs of winter and hence the average cost of a full fleet mobilisation.
- 4.17 Salt prices are accepted through the Scotland Excel contract from our term supplier Irish Salt Mining and Exploration Ltd. As intimated last year, salt prices increased substantially in 2022. However, the price increases agreed in May 2023 were a return to a more a modest 5% to 6% per tonne overall. These prices were held for the whole of last winter, with the average price now £55.29 / tonne, delivered to depots. The unit prices for 2024-25 were expected through Scotland Excel in August.
- 4.18 The 2021-23 Gritter Hire Contract with Econ Ltd., estimated to cost £916,864.00 ex VAT, in total over the two-year period, has been extended for a further year, retaining the current fleet of PMGs for 2024-25. The review of current multipurpose vehicle fleet availability, revision and amendment of treatment routes to comply with current policy and overall efficiency of a mixed economy model for winter service vehicles, is still in progress towards confirming a future strategy on vehicle purchase / lease vs hired PMGs towards implementing a new Hire Contract for winter 2025-26 onwards.
- 4.19 Due to the continued unit cost increases detailed above, there has been an increase in the budget for winter 2024-25 to £2,673,368 This allows the equivalent fleet runs monitoring figure to be increased to 70nr runs for the coming season.
- 4.20 As of July 2024, the Council held a stock of approximately 7,498 tonnes of salt. Provisional orders are in place for a further 3,500tonnes. Deliveries will be called forward in October to top up capacity in storage facilities to the target starting stock of +11,000 tonnes. Salt deliveries will continue to be ordered throughout the winter period to keep reserves stocked and preserve resilience. Weekly salt reserve stock lists are submitted to Scottish Government as part of a Scotland wide winter resilience plan. - Appendix 5

- 4.21 The Salt Use Reduction and Preservation of Stocks protocol was introduced in December 2010 in light of severe shipping and material shortages. This was reviewed and updated in 2020 and is attached at Appendix 2.
- 4.22 The assessment of school routes subject to pre-treatment before 08:00hrs, is covered under Priority 3b of the route hierarchy, in section 4 of the Policy. This is reviewed each year once the pupil intake for August is confirmed. The policy remains similar to previous years, where sections of routes, not already included under Priority 1 & 2 or P3a Service bus and added the pre-treatment routes when at least 12 pupils are carried on transport provided by the council.

Transport Scotland

- 4.23 Following the decision to trunk the southern section of the A83 in 2014, Transport Scotland are the roads authority for this section of road Kennacraig – Campbeltown. The G6 trunk road contract for NW area had a commencement date of 16th August 2022 and was retained by BEAR Scotland Ltd as the Operating Company.
- 4.24 BEAR Scotland Ltd confirmed the establishment of their own operational depot at Machrihanish, for winter 2023-24. There was no further requirement for A&BC to provide resources to BEAR for winter maintenance on A83 Kintyre.
- 4.25 Due to the isolated nature of some sections of the Council network, directly connected to the trunk road, BEAR Scotland provides assistance in compliance with the A&BC policy with regards to transport interfaces under Priority 2. Treatments are delivered by trunk road vehicles on return journeys, after completing their routes.
- Bridge of Orchy Rail Station road (and Fire station) – Off A82
 - Furnace Village Bus Loop - Off A83

Winter Policy Review

- 4.26 Whilst the budget has been increased again this year, the governing factor is related to driver resources. with pressures on the current capability. This trend will eventually become unsustainable given the age demographic of drivers. For the purpose of this report, Officers are not requesting any further increase **to this years** budget.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This report details the Council's Winter Maintenance Policy for 2024/25 and highlights the pressures on resources and operational effectiveness due to the constraints of future funding levels and best practice advice.
- 5.2 Committee is asked to approve the Winter Service Policy 2024/25 and note

the details in Appendices 1 – 6.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – It is considered to be good practice for Committee to confirm policy for winter maintenance activity on an annual basis. This report seeks to achieve the above.
- 6.2 Financial – The Council's Winter Maintenance budget is increased to £2.673million (from £2.304 million) for this financial year, to cater for previous and anticipated unit cost pressures. This provides the capability to deliver the equivalent of approximately 70 full runs of the treatment fleet over the coming season. The actual cost of winter maintenance is dependent upon the severity of winter conditions and is a financial risk in that the service responds to weather events that are not predictable. Should the criteria for school bus routes change this will affect the budget required.
- 6.3 Legal – The Winter Maintenance Policy sets out the Council's level of service provision for winter maintenance, with reference to Section 34 of Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.
- 6.4 HR – Staffing levels have reduced over recent years, this can make it challenging to have sufficient staff to deal with a severe winter event. Processes are in place for external suppliers to assist in geographic specific locations with additional support called forward through framework contracts should severe weather persist.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty
- 6.5.1 Equalities – protected characteristics – None.
- 6.5.2 Socio-Economic Duty – None.
- 6.5.3 Islands – Island road network hierarchy assessed and included in this policy.
- 6.6 Climate Change – In recent years, weather patterns are trending to intermittent storm events with shorter duration periods of traditional "winter" hazards of snow and ice. Frequent thaws / wash-off events result in an increase of repeat salting treatments in marginal conditions. Therefor increasing cost and resource commitments, rather than reducing them.
- 6.7 Risk – The proposed policy, is designed to reduce the exposure of the Council to risk.
- 6.8 Customer Services – The winter policy has been designed to maintain access to the Council's Strategic Road network and other "lifeline" routes within the confines of the available resources.
- 6.9 Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – The proposed policy, considers the requirement to treat routes to schools, within the confines of available resources.

Executive Director with responsibility for Roads and Infrastructure Services – Kirsty Flanagan

Policy Lead – Roads, Transport and Amenity Services - Councillor John Armour

August 2024

For further information contact:

Jim Smith Head of Roads and Infrastructure Services
jim.smith@argyll-bute.gov.uk

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 – 2024/25 Winter Service Policy Document
- Appendix 2 – Salt use reduction and preservation of stocks protocol (2020 revised)
- Appendix 3 – Advisory signing – road closures in severe conditions
- Appendix 4 – Frontline treatment vehicle fleet 2024/25
- Appendix 5 – Current salt stocks – July 2024 – monitoring and resilience record
- Appendix 6 – Summary of 2023/24 weather conditions