

Report to Cabinet

13 November 2024

Subject:	Highway Winter Maintenance Operational Plan 2024-2025
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Keith Allcock – Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways
Director:	Alan Lunt – Executive Director - Place
Key Decision:	Yes Impacts all Wards across the Borough
Contact Officer:	Barry Ridgway – Group Manager Assets and Maintenance – Highway Services Mathew Burling – Senior Engineer – Maintenance

1 Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that:-

- 1.1 approval is given to the Highway Winter Maintenance Operational Plan 2024-25, as set out in Appendix A.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Road users and the wider community place a high value on keeping traffic moving safely during periods of snow and freezing winter weather. Failure to do so can result in adverse economic and social impacts, public dissatisfaction and significant reputational damage.
- 2.2 The Council has a statutory duty within the Highway Act ‘to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice’. The duty is not absolute, but decisions must be taken on reasonable grounds with due care and regard to relevant considerations set out in best practice guidance, such as the Well Managed Highways code of practice.

- 2.3 To meet this duty, winter service operations are carried out to prevent ice forming (precautionary salting), melt ice already formed (post salting) and remove snow accumulations by using ground rock salt which is stored at Taylors Lane Depot in Oldbury.

The Borough's highways (both carriageways and pavements) are the arteries of our communities. They connect our residents to employment, education, local services and indeed the wider world. They enable economic growth, social mobility and are vital in ensuring good health outcomes, in particular from the positive opportunities that they can bring from social inclusion and interaction.

- 2.4 It is vital to keep Sandwell's highways operating safely and efficiently at all times, and an effective Winter Maintenance Plan is crucial to achieving this aim.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

Growing up in Sandwell	Good, well maintained highway infrastructure will encourage more walking and cycling among our younger people increasing their personal wellbeing, improving road safety, and promoting cleaner air quality.
Living in Sandwell	The highway environment also plays an important role in the life of Sandwell's communities, particularly the positive opportunities that they can bring through improving social inclusion and make our communities feel safe, more protected and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods.
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	An effective Highway Winter Maintenance Operational Plan will mitigate the worst impacts that an episode of severe weather would otherwise have in reducing economic and physical activity as a result of residents being less likely to travel, as well as avoiding costs for all vehicle users of our highway from increased wear and tear and accident damage.
Heathy in Sandwell	Good, well maintained highway infrastructure will encourage more walking and cycling increasing personal wellbeing, improving road safety, and promoting cleaner air quality.
One Council One Team	The Highway Winter Maintenance Operational Plan aims to provide a high quality inclusive services for all of our customers. Engagement and satisfaction will be monitored through the National Highway and Transportation resident satisfaction survey.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Given high service costs it is not 'reasonably practicable' to provide winter treatment on all parts of the network, nor to ensure running surfaces are always kept free of ice or snow. Sandwell therefore apply a risk-based approach that reflects advice and recommendations contained in the relevant approved national Codes of Practice.
- 4.2 Cabinet approval is sought for the application by suitably qualified and experienced Highways officers of the risk-based decision-making process outlined within the Highway Winter Maintenance Operational Plan 2024-25.
- 4.3 There are only minor changes to the plan approved last year reflecting changes in budget and resources.
- 4.4 Treatment of our road network is prioritised as follows:
- Priority 1: classified A roads being strategic and main distributor roads carrying long distance traffic, or routes linking urban centres.
- Priority 2: classified B and C heavily trafficked roads, all bus routes and roads serving key locations and important buildings e.g. hospitals, commercial centres.
- 4.5 Priority 1 and 2 roads are 47% of the total carriageway lane length across Sandwell of 889.7 km.
- 4.6 Our key service standard is to complete precautionary treatment of Priority 1 and 2 roads within 4 hours from when the decision is made to treat at typical spread rates.
- 4.7 Resources and practicability mean that only pavements defined in our Category 1(a) Prestige Areas, being major shopping streets in town and district centres, are prioritised for treatment. No other pavements receive planned treatment. Prioritised pavements may receive precautionary treatment when the forecast indicates that hoarfrost or snow is likely.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 There is no recommended affordable alternative to mitigate the safety risks addressed by the Winter Maintenance Operational Plan 2024-25.
- 5.2 There is no 'do nothing' option that will deliver the Councils Statutory Duty.
- 5.3 The Winter Maintenance Operational Plan 2024-25 aims to strike a balance between affordability and provision of an effective service.

To plan resources on the assumption of a long hard winter is not recommended. Similarly to plan on the assumption of a short, mild winter would lead to a deficient service at times.

- 5.4 The Winter Maintenance Plan also considers the appropriate placement of salt bins.

Highway Services receive more requests for grit bins than can be reasonably afforded, consequently, this recommended plan seeks to balance the number and cost of providing salt bins through the application of risk-based criteria. The criteria used are listed in Appendix F.

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>The Winter Service is funded from the Highways Maintenance revenue budget with a 'target' annual allocation of £265,500 based on an 'average' winter.</p> <p>There are both fixed and variable elements to the service cost.</p> <p>Fixed costs incurred, irrespective of winter severity, include plant (gritters), labour (stand-by), management and duty staff, weather forecasting, salt bins, annual service charges, training etc.</p> <p>The variable costs depend on winter severity. The budgeted cost for an 'average' winter season based on</p>
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	<p>55 precautionary treatments is £165,500 and includes labour (call outs), salt consumed, fuel, plant repairs etc.</p> <p>The cost of providing and filling grit bins is £45,000.</p> <p>Whilst the severity of the winter does impact on the actual level of expenditure incurred, any costs associated with the winter maintenance service will be met from within Highways Services target budget.</p> <p>A key service risk relates to third party liability claims arising from accident and injury due to condition of the highway or non-compliance with statutory obligations. The duty is not absolute, but decisions must be taken on reasonable grounds with due care and with regard to relevant considerations, as set out in the approved national best practice guidance 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure'. The Winter Maintenance Operational Plan 2024-25 sets out the council's arrangements for delivery of the winter service to meet its legal obligations to mitigate this risk, which requires the use of ground rock salt.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The principal statutory duty imposed on highway authorities to maintain the highway maintainable at public expense is set out in Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980.</p> <p>Section 41 (1) of the Highways Act, as modified by the Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003, imposes a duty on a highway authority 'to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice'.</p> <p>The duty is qualified by 'reasonable practicability'. So, therefore, it would not be reasonable to expect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide the service on all parts of the network; <p>or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure roads are kept free of ice or snow at all times.

	<p>The Traffic Management Act 2004 imposes a network management duty on a council to manage day-to-day operational use of its highways to ‘keep traffic moving’. This duty extends to periods of severe winter weather.</p>
Risk:	<p>Highway maintainable at public expense. This will help deliver the aims and objectives as set out in both the Corporate Plan and The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan aimed at ensuring a safe and accessible highway network.</p> <p>The Council has a duty to meet its legal obligations to mitigate service risks related to third party liability claims arising from accident and injury due to condition of the highway, the cabinet approved Winter Maintenance Operational Plan sets out the Council’s proposed arrangements for delivery of the winter service for which rock salt is required for effective and efficient use on the public highway.</p>
Equality:	<p>An equality impact assessment has not been carried as maintaining the highway infrastructure maintainable at public expense is not believed to impact significantly against any of the protected characteristics.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The cabinet approval of the Winter Maintenance as set out in Operational plan for 2024-25 will support Sandwell’s objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan in keeping the roads operating safely and efficiently during freezing conditions.</p>
Social Value	<p>Highways are the arteries of our communities. They connect our residents to employment, education, local services and indeed the wider world. They enable economic growth, social mobility and are vital in ensuring good health outcomes.</p> <p>The recent Enventure survey was conducted to gain insight from residents to support Sandwell Council in the development of the budget proposals and future spending priorities. The survey found that “Maintaining Roads and Pavements” was selected as important by high proportions of respondents in both the</p>

	representative survey (72%) and the online survey (79%).
Climate Change	Well maintained highways support climate change objectives through the supporting more active travel choices, delivery of carbon reduction savings and associated benefits outlined in the Corporate Plan.
Corporate Parenting	Good, well maintained highway infrastructure promotes improved physical and mental health and the well-being of children and young people through more walking and cycling, improving road safety and promoting cleaner air quality.

7. Appendices

Appendix A - Sandwell MBC Winter Maintenance Operational Plan 2024-25.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1 Well-managed Highway Infrastructure – Code of Practice Last updated October 2016
- 8.2 Sandwell MBC Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (approved January 2018)