



Winter Service Policy

2025–26

**Sunderland
City Council**

Contents

Introduction	3
Statutory requirements	3
Policy	4
Strategic organisational structure and decision-making process	7



Introduction

The provision of a Winter Service is essential to maintaining transport movement, communications and enabling everyday life to continue.

This document defines the council's policy for the operation of its Winter Service to ensure that the service is planned and provided in an efficient, effective and economic manner as possible.

The overall Winter Period is defined as being 1 October 2025–30 April 2026, with the Core Winter Period being 1 November 2025–31 March 2026. Full 24-hour staff coverage will be from 15 November 2025–7 March 2026.

If weather conditions dictate the 24-hour staff coverage can be commenced earlier and extended beyond 7 March 2026.

Statutory requirements

The statutory basis for Winter Service in England and Wales is Section 41 (1A) of the Highways Act 1980. Section 41 reads:

Sec 41 Duty to maintain highways maintainable at public expense

- (1) The authority who are for the time being the highway authority for a highway maintainable at the public expense are under a duty, subject to the provisions of section 41, to maintain the highway.
- (1A) In particular, a highway authority are under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. (this is also included within Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003).

This is not an absolute duty, given the qualification of "reasonable practicability". Section 150 (1) of the Highways Act 1980 imposes a duty upon authorities to remove any obstruction of 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".

Section 16 (1) of Traffic Management Safety Act 2004 places a network management duty on the Council to "manage their road network with a view to achieving, so far as may be reasonably practicable having regard to their other obligations, policies and objectives:

- a. Securing the expeditious movement of traffic on the authority's road network

Winter Service involves treating the highway to:

- a. Prevent ice from forming, known as “precautionary salting”.
- b. Melt ice and snow already formed known as “post salting”.
- c. Remove snow.

Given the scale of financial and other resources involved in delivering the Winter Service it is not reasonable either to:

- a. Provide the service on all parts of the highway network.
- b. Ensure running surfaces are kept free of ice or snow at all times, even on the treated parts of the network.

Policy

The council aims to maintain the city’s highways in a condition that is safe and efficient for use by vehicles and pedestrians. The council will provide a Winter Service to the highway network and pedestrian areas, which seeks to ensure as far as reasonably practicable, that designated roads and footpaths are treated and snow is removed.

Annual review

All aspects of the Winter Service Policy and associated operational plans will be reviewed annually in consultation with key stakeholders, taking into account any changes to Government policy or guidance.

The review process will be based upon the requirement to deliver an efficient resilient service for the residents of Sunderland and the commuting public, recognised best practice and meeting deliverable expectations.

Where there are legislative changes, the policy will be reviewed immediately, and further approval sought from the council.

All recommendations produced by The Department for Transport and the UK Road Liaison Group along with identifiable best practice will be considered during the annual review.

Service description and standards

The council will:

- a. Endeavour to prevent as far as reasonably practicable the accumulation of ice and snow on the highway and to remove any accumulations during periods of inclement weather. Priority is given to main arterial roads and primary bus routes, with limited treatment being provided to non-priority roads during extended periods of inclement weather.

- b. Endeavour to clear ice and snow from pedestrian areas, footpaths, with specific locations such as sheltered accommodation, health centres, shops and bus stops receiving priority.
- c. Provide Grit Bins at strategic locations where it is considered there is a demonstrable need and meets the criteria within the Grit Bin Policy. During periods of severe weather, it may not be possible to replenish the grit bins due to access difficulties and/or vehicles and staff being utilised to clear snow and ice. Replenishment will take place as weather conditions and resource availability allows both during and following periods of inclement weather.

Salt

At the commencement of the winter period enough salt will be stored, within Sunderland, to deal with the conditions of an anticipated above average winter. Should conditions prove excessively worse than anticipated provisions are in place to replenish salt stocks. Salt stocks will be held at strategic locations within the city boundary.

During extreme and continuous weather events salt resupply may become controlled by the Department for Transport resulting in salt shortages. This will require the council to undertake Winter Resilience Planning to those areas deemed highest priority for winter treatment such as main road network routes.

Clearance priorities

Treatment routes have been devised following consultation with the Highways Team. As the number of treatment vehicles is limited, the treatment of the highway network is undertaken on a hierarchical basis, with main arterial roads and primary bus routes receiving treatment first. Priority hand salting routes are also produced for pedestrian areas, footpaths and other locations. Gritting vehicle treatment gritting routes can be stated in the following terms.

The treatment of carriageways

- a. Priority 1 - Main arterial routes forming the transport infrastructure throughout the city.
- b. Priority 2 - Other arterial roads and secondary routes, including bus routes.

Decision and treatment times

The decision time for the salt treatment of Priority 1 carriageways, which is the period between receipt of a weather forecast warning of inclement conditions and the decision being taken to commence treatment and vehicles leaving the depot, should not exceed one hour.

The target treatment time for the salt treatment of Priority 1 carriageways, which is the period between vehicles leaving the depot and the completion of a particular route, should not exceed two hours.

However, during the treatment process and including heavy snowfall, it is recognised this target time may be exceeded. This may be due to several factors including:

- a. An increase in spread rate resulting in more than one load required to adequately treat a Priority route.
- b. Alteration to a Priority route to ensure inclines are treated as a matter of urgency.
- c. The route being blocked due to increased traffic flow or excessive snowfall.

The salt treatment of carriageways and snow clearance under moderate and heavy snowfall conditions

The aim after heavy snowfall conditions is to restore road communications over the highway network by snow clearance and salt treatment.

This is achieved by restoring all Priority 1 routes first and then once all carriageways on each individual route have been restored, the next action would be to restore all Priority 2 routes.

The salt treatment of non-priority roads

The salt treatment on non-priority roads will only be undertaken when the topography of the area and road dictates that attention must be given to side streets and estate roads with severe gradients.

Any treatment of these non-priority roads will only be undertaken during daytime hours and only after all priority routes are assessed as being safe for passage.

Exemptions can be made, when a request from the emergency services is received or an exceptional event, such as a funeral is taking place.

Snow clearance from other priority areas

In the event of snowfall, Local Services operations may be suspended, and labour deployed onto localised area responses with identified priority areas that include shops, pedestrian crossings, ramps, footbridges and medical and care facilities.

If resources and weather conditions permit wider salt treatment will be applied to wider pedestrian areas.

Strategic organisational structure and decision-making process

The council's Environmental Services Team are the responsible Service for all aspects of Winter Service delivery including the preparation of the Winter Service Operational Plan, updating the carriageway and footpath hierarchy priorities, and the operational management of the service.

Decisions within the service delivery framework shall be taken by designated and experienced officers.

A Duty Manager will manage the Winter Service on a weekly basis during the period with support from a Dayshift Officer.

Outside of normal working hours the Nightshift Duty Officer is responsible for all decisions with support from the Duty Manager. This will include all decisions on the use of additional labour and equipment.

Strategic Organisational Structure



Factors taken into account (not in order of priority) when making any decision will include:

- a. Winter Service Policy.
- b. Weather forecast.
- c. Road sensor data.
- d. Topography, local knowledge and reported conditions.
- e. Previous treatment regimes.
- f. Requirement to preserve resources during extended or prolonged operational periods.
- g. Any special requirements.

The Winter Service Policy is supported by a Winter Service Operational Plan.

**Sunderland
City Council**