

Winter Service Plan 2021-22 – 2024-25

To: Highways and Transport Committee

Meeting Date: 7 September 2021

From: Steve Cox; Executive Director, Place and Economy

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2021/036

Outcome: The Committee is asked to approve the Winter Service Plan for 2021-22 to 2024-25, to provide a winter service (gritting) on part of the highway network, to ensure the winter service network is open to traffic during the winter season. Also to support the procurement plan of the gritting fleet to deliver that service.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to

- a) approve the Winter Service Plan for the 2021-2022 to 2024-2025 winter gritting season.
- b) delegate any significant changes to the Plan to the Executive Director in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee.
- c) approve the Winter Gritting Vehicle Procurement Plan for the contract implementation on 1st June 2022.

Officer contact:

Name: Jonathan Clarke
Post: Highway Maintenance Manager
Email: Jonathan.clarke@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 07775 674297

Member contacts:

Names: Councillors Peter McDonald and Gerri Bird
Post: Chair/Vice-Chair
Email: Peter.McDonald@cambridgeshire.gov.uk and Gerri.Bird@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398

1. Background

- 1.1 Cambridgeshire County Council, in its role as Highway Authority has a statutory duty under the Highways Act "to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice".
- 1.2 The winter service operations of Cambridgeshire County Council are jointly provided by Milestone Infrastructure Services Ltd and Cambridgeshire County Council, under the Cambridgeshire Highways umbrella. The operation deals with regular, frequent and reasonably predictable occurrences like low temperatures, ice and snow, as well as exceptional weather events.
- 1.3 Although a specialised area, the Winter Service is as significant as the Highway Authorities obligations under the Highways Act 1980. It can also have significant environmental effects.
- 1.4 The production and adoption of this Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan establishes how the County Council is able to demonstrate that the current legal obligations are being met and carried out in a way which ensures that resources are deployed in the most economic, efficient, effective and environmentally friendly manner.
- 1.5 The winter plan is currently reviewed on an annual basis to ensure changes in network length, new developments, budgetary changes, resource pressures and revised legislation are considered. The plan also provides the county council's defence in the event of claims. However, it is proposed that this 4-year plan is approved, and that any significant changes are delegated to the Executive Director in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee. The plan also provides mitigation in the county council's defence in the event of claims arising from events of this nature.
- 1.6 The 2021/22 budget for delivering the winter service is £2.744m, updates will be provided as part of the business planning process on an annual basis.
- 1.7 The major component of the financial implications of the Winter Service is the cost of lease hire of the gritting vehicle fleet.
- 1.8 The council has a fleet of 37 gritting vehicles that are lease hired from ECON Engineering Ltd as part of a seven-year agreement. The agreement with ECON is currently in its 7th and final year, with the current lease hire arrangements end in May 2022.
- 1.9 The procurement of the new gritting vehicle fleet establishes how the County Council is able to demonstrate that the current legal obligations are being met and being done so in a way which ensures that resources are procured in the most economic, efficient, effective manner.
- 1.10 The procurement of the vehicle gritting fleet is closely connected to the Highway Services contract. The Highway Service contract started on 1st July 2017 and is due to run for 10 years ending on 30th June 2027. However, the contract can be extended (or reduced) by 6 months at a time if the annual performance of the Highway Service contract is sufficiently (good or poor). The maximum length of the contract is 15 years, though that requires 10 years of exceptional performance across the KPIs.

- 1.11 We want the Winter Gritting vehicle fleet to be able to overlap this contract by one year. Therefore, end 30th June 2028 with flexible options to extend. We want the contract to mirror the Highway Services contract length plus one year, so that the new highway services providers do not have to mobilise the fleet as part of the contract as this would involve them having to procure a Winter Fleet in a very short time period and there may be other procurement options available at that time.
- 1.12 It is anticipated that the value of the winter service vehicle fleet contract will be in the region of £5m.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 Cambridgeshire Highways currently grit approximately 44% of the highway network. This comprises primary and secondary routes, the Guided Busway, cycleways and foot bridges. An interactive map is available on the [county council website and maps are included within the plan \(see source documents at the end of this report\)](#). This map will be updated annually in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee.
- 2.2 Primary routes are sections of the network which serve as major connecting routes for communities and allow the majority of users to commute and access essential services across the County. Secondary routes are those gritted in addition to primary routes when there is a forecast of a prolonged cold spell, where road surface temperatures fall below zero or when snowfall is forecast as and when resources allow.
- 2.3 This season the County will be split into five from previous three weather domains and forecasts are received for each domain. The use of domains means that we do not automatically grit across the county if only one domain reaches the trigger point to go gritting. This allows for a much more efficient and cost effective approach. The decision to grit is currently made by a team of County and Milestone staff, who have and are fully certified to the IHE (Institute of Highway Engineers) Winter Service Decision Making Course.
- 2.4 The details of the five domains are shown within the plan, indicating the boundaries with the County. The five domains are Fenland, East, South, Hunts and finally City. As set out above, the agreement with ECON is currently in its 7th and final year, with procurement of a new contract underway.
- 2.5 The Council needs to procure a fleet that is flexible to future challenges and includes the ability to accommodate the increasing length of highway network arising from new infrastructure and developments as part of the growth agenda. The requirements of Cambridgeshire over the next 7 years are flexibility to accommodate changes in routes and areas gritted, enable the up and down scaling of the fleet. Scaling up to include new assets such as the de-trunked A14 (A1307) that will become Cambridgeshire's responsibility. Discussions are currently underway with Highways England to understand when new roads will be handed over to the county council as part of the A14 project. Scaling back should the Cambridgeshire members look for savings in reducing the routes. The contract therefore must enable a fit for purpose fleet for Cambridgeshire.

2.6 Work to procure the new gritting fleet has commenced. Procurement Market Engagement Event took place on the 11/06/2021 with the procurement timetable as follows:

15/09/2021 Publication of ITT and all adverts
08/10/2021 Deadline for potential provider's ITT clarification questions (5pm)
15/10/2021 Deadline for authority's response to clarification questions (5pm)
22/10/2021 Deadline for Tender responses (12 noon)
27/10/2021 Evaluation from this date
22/12/2021 Anticipated award week, commencing
01/06/2022 Implementation date

- 2.7 Milestone are responsible for providing the drivers and generally there are two drivers per gritter. Each gritter is assigned one route and each route is required to be completed within 2.5 hours.
- 2.8 Some cycleways are treated by our quad bikes but also some gritters grit cycle paths which are alongside roads.
- 2.9 Each year during September we write to all the Parish Councils in Cambridgeshire promoting the winter volunteer scheme. Those that sign up to the programme will identify footpaths and dedicated cycleways that they would like gritted in freezing weather, for example, outside a school or a shop, and we support them in this through supplying equipment and training. Once a risk assessment form is completed the volunteers are covered by our insurance for working on the Highway. Currently there are approximately 53 winter volunteers from 19 parishes across the county. We also contact District, City and Towns Councils in Cambridgeshire to clarify what support they are able to offer in the coming season. Salt is typically supplied to the volunteers in strategically placed grit bins. There are approximately 850 grit bins within Cambridgeshire that we replenish every year.
- 2.10 Future challenges include the ability to accommodate the increasing length of highway network arising from new infrastructure and developments as part of the growth agenda. Discussions are currently underway with Highways England to understand when new roads will be handed over to the county council as part of the A14 project and therefore at which point these roads will need to be included in our winter plan, this includes the detrunking of the old A14 to the A1307.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Communities at the heart of everything we do

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 A good quality of life for everyone

Maintaining a safe Highway network during the winter season enables local communities and local businesses to continue their daily activities providing benefits to all local residents.

3.3 Helping our children learn, develop and live life to the full

There are no significant implications for this priority

- 3.4 Cambridgeshire: a well-connected, safe, clean, green environment
Maintaining a safe Highway network during the winter season enables local community and local businesses to continue to be connected. Moving to more domains for decision making will allow us not to travel or apply treatments unnecessarily, decisions to provide the service can be focused only to where it's needed.
- 3.5 Protecting and caring for those who need us
There are no significant implications for this priority

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

The 2021/22 budget for delivering the winter service is £2.744m. However, the service was given a £17k saving target for this financial year in the Business Plan and will be achieving it through increasing the number of weather domains from 3 to 5.

Nationally there is an increasing challenge around the recruitment and retention of qualified drivers and winter decision makers.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

The new winter gritting fleet is currently being procured as set out in the report.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

The Statutory requirements are set out in the Highways Act 1980, specifically:

- Section 41(1A) - duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along the highway is not endangered by snow and ice.
- Section 150 - duty to remove snow, soil, etc. from the highway. If an obstruction arises in a highway from accumulation of snow or from the falling down of banks in the side of the highway, or any other cause, the highway authority shall remove the obstruction.
- National guidance *Well Maintained Highways*, recognises that local circumstances, including financial and other resource constraints, can vary across the country and whilst the aspirations of the guidance should be taken into account in assessment of winter service, it is unrealistic for local authorities to meet high standards right across their networks. It is not possible to define an absolute minimum level of service required to meet statutory duties.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

Equalities impact has been considered. Increasing the robustness of the winter maintenance service can ensure that the priority highway network is available for all to use during periods of adverse weather.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

Cambridgeshire Highways works closely with the Corporate Communications Team. A well-established communications plan is followed that includes press releases and opportunities throughout the season. Preseason engagement with the parishes is carried out to identify new and existing volunteers and training and support given to existing and new volunteers.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

19 parishes consisting of 53 volunteers attended training in 2020/21 and are insured to grit agreed footways in their parish. These volunteers were given the opportunity to confirm contact information, request personal protective and gritting equipment that they did not have available and provide feedback on the volunteer programme.

Further work is planned to build on the community involvement achieved during the last season and officers will continue to engage with district council partners to supplement county gritting operations. However, there will be a need to manage expectations over the ability of the county council to grit additional lengths of footway unless additional budget is allocated, and the focus should be on facilitating local communities to help themselves with the county providing salt supplies and equipment.

Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire District Councils, Cambridge City Council, and Huntingdon Town Council continue to treat areas using equipment and salt provided by the county council during severe weather in the winter period.

4.7 Public Health Implications

- By maintaining the Highway network in a safe condition during the winter period which may subsequently contribute to reducing the risk of accident injuries on the network.
- benefits to peoples health by keeping open access to essential health services,
- gritting of cycleways allows active travel measures to be undertaken all year round

4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Positive

Explanation: The proposal enables the continued use of public transport during adverse weather events. By moving to 5 domains rather than 3 has the potential to reduce unnecessary mileage driven by the gritters and therefore reduce emissions.

4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category

- 4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.
 Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
 Explanation: Since gritting salt is a pollutant, and the weather zoning will decrease unnecessary salt application.
- 4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:
 Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
 Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category
- 4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.
 Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
 Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category
- 4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.
 Positive/neutral/negative Status: Positive
 Explanation: The proposal will lead to our services having greater ability to cope with the effects of climate change keeping the highway network open and available for use during adverse weather events such as prolonged cold weather and snowfall events.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes
 Name of Financial Officer: Sarah Heywood

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement? Yes
 Name of Officer: Henry Swan

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law? Yes
 Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?
 Yes
 Name of Officer: Elsa Evans

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?
 Yes
 Name of Officer: Sarah Silk

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes
 Name of Officer: Emma Murden

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?
 Yes
 Name of Officer: Kate Parker

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?
 Yes

Name of Officer: Emily Bolton

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 Source documents

Cambridgeshire County Council Highways Winter Service Operational Plan 2021-2022
(Appendix A)

[Gritting Roads, cycleways and paths](#)