

**Highway Winter Services Policy  
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council  
October 2018**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. This document has been written to advise council staff and the public about the commitments and procedures of the council in regards to highway winter services within the borough. All care has been taken to align the policy and plan with the Code of Practice – Well-managed Highways Infrastructure, with particular focus on section B.7 Winter Services.
- 1.2. Highway Winter Service can contribute significantly to each of the core objectives set out in this Code of Practice<sup>1</sup> as described below:
- 1.3. Safety - Safety is a consideration for Winter Service, though statutory obligations and users' needs vary in different parts of the UK and within the Stockport Brough.
- 1.4. Customer - There are, in all parts of the UK, and in Stockport Brough, considerable user needs and expectations, and these can be a major influence on customer satisfaction through demonstrating an efficient, effective and proportionate response to winter conditions.
- 1.5. Serviceability - Maintaining availability and reliability of the highway network is a key objective for the Winter Service and one where user judgements of performance will be immediate rather than longer term.
- 1.6. Sustainability - Low temperatures and the formation of ice can cause serious damage to the fabric of carriageways, footways and cycle routes and accelerated damage of the network. Effective Winter Service can contribute to a reduction in whole life costs and minimise damage to the environment.

## **2. Vision**

- 2.1. The Council is committed to providing a safer highway system in winter conditions delivering winter services, such as gritting, as necessary, where required, and as practicable within the resources available. This is to be done to deal with both predictable winter weather and more extreme weather events<sup>2</sup>.

## **3. Links to other policies**

- 3.1. This policy is designed to work in co-ordination with the: Winter Services Operational Plan, Resilient Network Policy, Well Managed Highways Infrastructure Code of Practice, Practical Guide for Winter Services and Transport Asset Management Plan. It will also support the wider Greater Manchester Civil Resilience Plans and take

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<sup>1</sup> As seen in B.7.1.5 of the code of practice.

<sup>2</sup> This is in line with B7.1.2 of the code of practice

practical advice from the National Winter Services Research Group (NWSRG) Practical Guide for Winter Services<sup>3</sup>.

#### **4. Legal Position<sup>4</sup>**

4.1. Under Section 41(1a) of the Highways Act 1980, as amended by the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 the authority, which is the Highway Authority for highways maintainable at the public expense, are under a duty to maintain the highway. In particular, the Highway Authorities 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 (the highway in the terms of the Act include any footways maintainable at public expense). The Traffic Management Act 2004 also requires that authorities' do all that is reasonably practical to manage the network effectively to keep traffic moving, including the establishment of contingency plans.

4.2. To meet the statutory obligation, the Council has produced a plan to enable the cold weather maintenance of the key routes and areas of the borough. This plan prioritises the order in which the cold weather maintenance will be done. Not all routes and areas in the borough can be treated during cold weather due to financial and operational constraints. Therefore the prioritisation is carried out in such a way as to maintain an optimal level of traffic flow along major routes first with guidance from Stockport's Functional Road Hierarchy. The prioritisation has been carried out with reference to the needs of the area based on specialist knowledge and the needs of the local community. Even on those routes that are treated, it is not always possible to ensure that running surfaces are kept free of ice at all times due to the nature of the routes and the practicalities of the operational work.

#### **5. Winter Risk Period<sup>5</sup>**

5.1. The core winter risk period is October to March with 3 week lead in and lead out times with reduced operational resource. If forecasting predicts that winter services are needed before or after this period the Council can extend the resources availability. During this time the Council should have in store no less than an estimated 12 days' worth of grit. At the start of the winter period the Council will have in stock 21 days' of grit or more. In cases of forecasted prolonged bad weather reordering will be done earlier to keep stock levels higher than 12 days'. Orders to maintain stock levels will be made throughout the winter period and stock levels reported to the DfT as required.

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<sup>3</sup> As suggested in B.7.1.4 of the code of practice.

<sup>4</sup> As identified in B.2.3. of the code of practice.

<sup>5</sup> As suggested in B.7.2.3 of the code of practice

5.2. Stockport does not routinely stock de-icers that work below -15° as the chances of temperatures dropping this low are considered unlikely. In the last winter period of 2017-18 the lowest recorded temperature was -7.6°. The council contract allows us to access pre wetted salt. Pre wetted salt is more effective at lower temperatures and so in rare circumstance that there is a forecast for extremely low temperatures the Councils would order this type of product. If the Council's forecasting service did not forecast such weather patterns the Council would seek to take advantage of the agreement in principal between the Greater Manchester Boroughs for resource sharing in times of emergency and request aid which could either be the supply of salt or assistance with gritting operations.

## **6. Issues**

6.1. This policy seeks to ensure the Council uses a risk based approach to make certain:

- Identified carriageways, cycle routes and footways are treated, taking into consideration pedestrians, cyclists, public transport (including interchange), road users, promoted facilities, vulnerable users and emergency services, the needs of the resilient network and other local issues.
- As many eventualities as possible are catered for in terms of winter maintenance e.g. severe weather, day time snow etc. to support the resilience of the transport system.
- The public is aware of the system we have in place and what they can do in order to help themselves and neighbours in severe weather.
- There is a clear and well recorded process of decisions and actions taken in terms of winter maintenance.
- There is a clear criteria for routes and areas treated and provision of grit bins.
- That after a snow clearance operation takes place maintenance and inspection is undertaken to mitigate the effects of this such as the removal of accumulated grit, the clearance of drains and the inspection and repair of highway damaged by the effects of frost and winter services processes.

## **7. Objectives**

7.1. The objectives of the policy are:

- The passage for vehicles (inc. cycles) and pedestrians using the highway network is as safe as practical in the winter conditions being experienced.
- That in severe weather conditions the Council has all the necessary resources to grit/de-ice the core network during severe freezing/snow conditions.
- A service that can cope with an average winter but has the capacity to be adapted to deal with extended or more severe conditions.
- Development of a support mechanism for partner organisations including the way in which assistance will be prioritised in a major weather event.
- A service that can cope with varying conditions which may occur throughout the day.
- To ensure that the public is kept informed about our actions before, during and after the winter period.
- To ensure an adequate record of our actions is kept and shared as necessary.
- That the public are advised of the actions they can take for themselves and their neighbours in the event of severe weather.

7.2. The objectives will be met by:

- Categorising different streets into different gritting routes and the placement of grit bins using set criteria.
- The creation of plans for alternate weather situations.
- The continuation and updating, where necessary, of agreements between bordering authorities.
- The creation of an information pack, showing gritting routes and giving other cold weather information, to be issued via the internet and advertised through other media.
- Global Positioning Systems (GPS) information and decision records being used to create a comprehensive record of winter maintenance.
- Adjustment of the footway winter maintenance to reflect the day of the week.

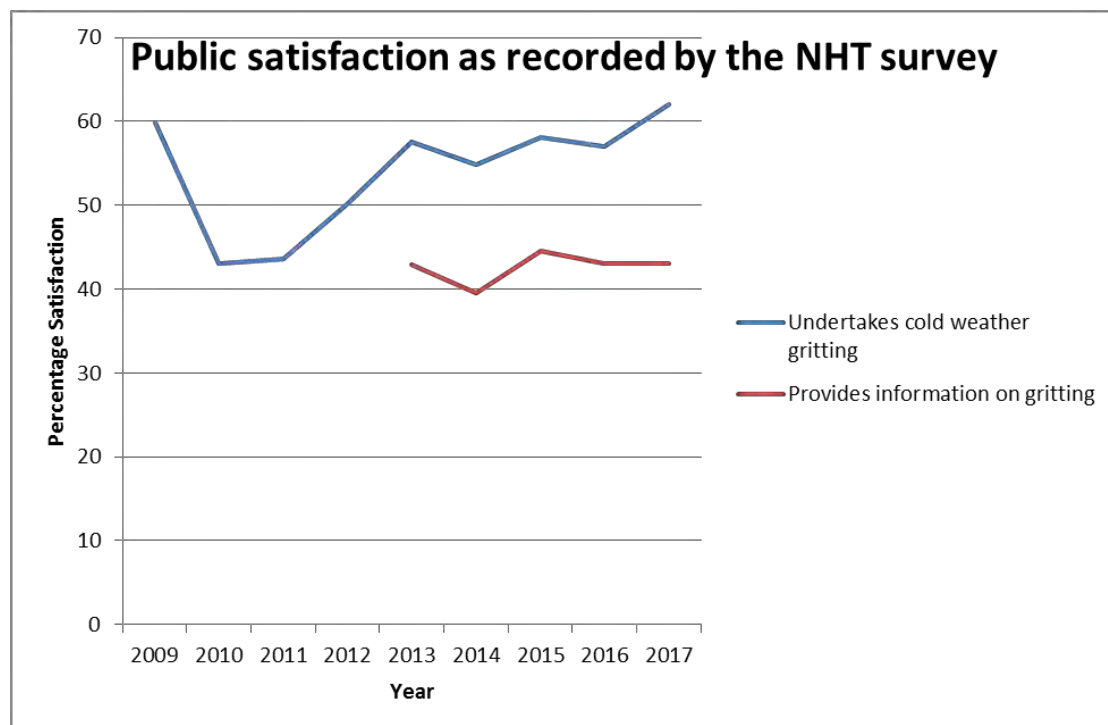
- A maintained level of deicing consumables, related equipment and personnel to utilise those resources.

7.3. Details of the Management Arrangements are covered in Appendix 1.

## 8. Stakeholder Involvement

8.1. The Council monitors its resident's satisfaction using the National Highways and Transport Network (NHT) Public Satisfaction Survey in line with recommendation 27 of the Code of Practice. With regards to the findings of the survey in 2017, the respondents in Stockport were more satisfied than the national average with the way the Council undertakes cold weather gritting. The satisfaction levels of respondents, with regards to the information we put out about gritting, was on a par with the national average.

8.2. In 2010 and 2011 the satisfaction levels for the service were low. This is a reflection of the severity of the weather in the winter of 2009 and 2010. Satisfaction levels fell for the majority of Councils facing similar circumstances in this period with the average satisfaction level dropping to 45% in 2010s survey. In both years the Council's reduced levels of satisfaction were still average when measured against other similar Councils. The Council's policies were reviewed after these winters.



8.3. The document has drawn on comments from the development and review of the resilience network. This identified locations which

needed to be prioritised in severe weather to support other services such as Adult Social Care.

## **9. Targets**

9.1. The targets for this policy are that:

- Vehicles will leave the depot no more than 60 minutes after the decision has been taken to treat the roads<sup>6</sup>.
- Routes 1 – 5 are to be treated within 2 hours of the commencement of gritting.
- Routes 6 – 10 are then to be done within 5 hours of the commencement of gritting.
- Footways/cycleways/shared paths designated as priority 1 are to be treated before 9.00 am when severe weather conditions are forecast or during periods of prolonged cold weather i.e. snow.

## **10. Monitoring**

10.1. A report on the winter gritting activities that have been undertaken will be produced yearly to clearly illustrate whether the Council has met targets and will explain any issues that have arisen. All evidence of the treatment taking place will be recorded along with treatment type used and amounts spread to support any defence the Council may need to make regarding its maintenance of the highway in line with the policy and to give a greater insight into future needs. This will be in line with B7.6.5 to B7.6.8 of the code of practice.

## **11. Review**

11.1. The Operational Plan will be reviewed annually<sup>7</sup> by the Network Asset Maintenance Team and Councils nominated contractor with approval given by the relevant Service Director in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member. This review will include: identifying changes in the needs of key stakeholders such as public transport and emergency service providers; ensuring the continued availability of appropriate staff and equipment and consideration of the effects of climate change. After significant winter weather the policy and plan will be reviewed to identify success and areas where improvements could be made. The policy will be reviewed in detail in five years time.

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<sup>6</sup> As recommended in paragraph B.7.6.12 of the code of practice.

<sup>7</sup> As advised in B.7.7.1 of the code of practice.

## Appendix 1 - Management Arrangements

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### 1. Management Arrangements

1.1. The Network Asset Maintenance Team with the Councils nominated contractor will be responsible for the operational planning and execution of the Winter Services Operational Plan, which will be developed in line with the Winter Services Policy.

1.2. The Contractor will:

- Provide, and organise labour force giving due consideration to :
  - implications of Drivers' Hours Regulations;
  - extent and nature of double manning and driver support;
  - shift system arrangements; and



- provision for holidays and sickness.
- Undertake appropriate training of the labour force and provide details of this to the authority for monitoring purposes<sup>8</sup>.
- Provide the equipment and resources (inc. fuel etc.) and appropriate storage for these resources. This equipment should enable the efficient treatment of all areas of the highway including cycle routes and pedestrian areas<sup>9</sup>.
- Carry out the winter maintenance.

1.3. The Council will:

- Liaise with Marketing and Communication Unit to keep the public up to date on actions regarding Winter Service.
- Liaise with neighbouring authorities about the status of the network and the service.

## 2. Treatment Priorities

2.1. The treatment priorities will be reviewed yearly to ensure that the routes reflect the current priorities of the Borough. The current priorities have been developed over several years, with reference to local knowledge, and weather information, to identify the more vulnerable roads. The move to the risk based approach has resulted in a review of the functional hierarchy and this is included in the development of the treatment priorities for use with the risk based approach to winter services. As suggested in the code of practice B7.5.36 the following issues will be considered when identifying routes:

- wider transport and other policy priorities;
- the Resilient Network; special requirements of carriageways, footways and cycle routes;
- safe and reliable access to emergency facilities including fire and rescue, police, ambulance services and hospitals;
- other public services access needs and critical infrastructure where the maintenance of access may be critical;
- public transport routes and access to stations, bus garages and depots;
- safe and reliable access to main industrial and business centres of key importance to the local and regional economy; any significant variation between summer and winter traffic;
- the special needs of disabled people or older people particularly where these can be effectively targeted;
- known problems, including significant gradients, exposed areas and other topological factors;
- climatic and thermal capacity differences within the area;

<sup>8</sup> This will be in line with the recommendations for training between B7.6.19 to B7.6.34.

<sup>9</sup> In accordance with the considerations outlined in B7.6.40 to B7.6.50

- and, co-ordination and co-operation with other authorities.
- 2.2. On the advice of Network Rail we will not grit level crossings.
- 3. Carriageway Priorities**
- 3.1. See the Winter Services Operational Plan for detailed routes and criteria for priorities.
- 3.2. Priority Order:
- Routes 1 to 5
  - Routes 6 to 10
  - East Areas Routes 1, 2 and 3, West Areas Routes 1 and 2, North Areas Routes 1 and 2
- 3.3. Routes 1-10 will receive precautionary/ snow/ ice gritting as appropriate in the above order. Designated East, North and West Area routes will be treated as required, where resources permit, after other routes have been effectively treated.
- 4. Forecast related route adjustments**
- 4.1. In reaction to certain predicted weather patterns only part of the boroughs road system may be gritted.
- 4.2. Wet Spot Routes – when the forecast predicts dry-freezing conditions these identified areas as listed in the Winter Services Plan will be gritted.
- 4.3. High Domain Roads - the forecast may show that only the higher and more exposed roads are in danger of freezing on certain occasions. In these cases a limited route will be treated. These 'High Domain' route priorities as listed in the Winter Services Plan cover a defined area of the borough and are treated in response to specific forecasts. The high domain routes should be treated where possible within 4 hours of commencement of gritting activities, with completion before the ice forms on the road.
- 4.4. Currently the Council considers extremely low temperatures (sub - 15°) to be highly unlikely and so does not maintain a supply of alternate de-icers, however, if this needs to change then consideration will be given to sensitive environments and structures.
- 5. Road Works**
- 5.1. Where gritting routes are affected by road works or other official closures, diversionary routes will be upgraded to the priority of the route being replaced and included in the appropriate winter maintenance schedule. This will include walking and cycling routes on steep gradients which meet the criteria of the routes gritted for these modes.

**6. Footway/shared paths/off-road cycle route priorities (See Winter Services Operational Plan)**

- 6.1. The Council recognises the need to consider all user groups and route types when planning winter services. However, the labour intensive nature of these routes means that the Council has to focus its efforts appropriately to ensure that resources are used to optimal efficiency.
- 6.2. Due to resource issues these routes will normally only be gritted during working hours. The number of areas that can be gritted is restricted by the number of personnel and resources available to do the work.
- 6.3. During snow conditions additional resources will be allocated with operational activities associated with snow clearance being undertaken on a priority basis across the borough.
- 6.4. Footway/shared paths/off-road cycle route may not be treated on weekends where it is deemed inappropriate for example school routes with limited use when the school is closed will not be gritted at weekends. The areas that are gritted are restricted to those on steep gradients that are main routes to:
- Schools,
  - Train and bus stations,
  - Health Centres and Hospitals,
  - Retail centres (Town Centre, District Centres and Local Centres)
- 6.5. Functional hierarchy routes for cycling identified as being strategic will also be addressed where on a significant gradient. These routes will be identified on the Council's mapping available on the Council's website.
- 6.6. The above areas should be prioritised in to the following way:
- 6.7. Priority 1 – Footways/ shared paths/off-road cycle route which are identified as a priority, based on an assessment of associated risk. To be treated before 09.00 hours when severe weather conditions are forecast or during periods of prolonged cold weather i.e. snow.
- 6.8. Priority 2 – Footways/ shared paths/off-road cycle route other than those above.
- 6.9. Priorities 2 will be treated if the adverse (Snow and Ice) conditions are persistent and the resources permitted.

**7. Grit Boxes (See Winter Services Operational Plan)**

7.1. Currently there are over 200 grit boxes, which are maintained by the Council.

7.2. Grit boxes are to be placed, and maintained as required. These boxes will be issued to areas that meet the Council's criteria and may be removed in areas where there has been a change in circumstance. See the operational plan for criteria and current locations. Placement/ location issues will be reviewed annually.

**8. Additional Grit Locations (See Winter Services Operational Plan)**

8.1. In rural locations, as opposed to grit boxes, rock salt heaps may be put out to be used in periods of poor weather. These will be placed to minimise negative environmental effects and wastage.

**9. Treatment Priorities in Snow and Extreme Weather Conditions**

9.1. Where roads require re-treatment, or other unforeseen circumstances occur, then high priority routes would again be treated before the lower priority ones. In severe snow conditions resources will be focused on the radial routes (as identified by the Greater Manchester Key Route Network) first and when conditions ease revert to the other priority routes. The public will be informed through social media and the local press. Internal communications will also be made to other Council staff. This will be coordinated through the Cold Weather Planning Group.

9.2. During prolonged extreme conditions, it may be necessary to reduce the network coverage in order to preserve existing rock salt stocks and only treat the minimum critical network (made up of priority routes and routes necessary to ensure that vital services are maintained). Should these conditions prevail, all key stakeholders will be informed (e.g. Hospitals, schools, public transport) before the plan is implemented. The resilience network is reviewed every 2 years to ensure that the necessary locations for the critical network are included. Ongoing communication between all parties will be maintained, with operational briefing notes issued as required throughout the winter operational period. The public will be informed via press releases and the Council website about winter maintenance issues.

9.3. The Council does not routinely close a large number of roads. However, Cowlshaw Road is closed when needed due to the gradient of the route and location. Glossop Road may also be closed

in extreme weather when required. All stakeholders are advised when road closures occur.

9.4. Stockport does not **erect temporary snow fences**. Where drifting has occurred in the past it has been judged that the affected sites are not suitable for the installation of snow fencing due to the topography.<sup>10</sup>

9.5. Non-highway private land is the responsibility of the landowner. The Network Asset Maintenance Team will advise as necessary on any prepared plans and their suitability.

## **10. Decision Making**

10.1. The Council utilises the decision treatment matrix in the Winter Services Plan to assist in decisions to treat the road. Decisions will be made considering the following factors:

- Weather that is forecast.
- Existing or potential moisture on the roads.
- Residual rock salt on the road network.

## **11. Weather Forecast Information**

11.1. Meteo Group forecasts are used for decision making with the Vaisala system that takes road surface temperatures from 2 dedicated weather stations (Glossop Road and A34). The system then advises on suitable action in terms of treatment. The Vaisala system is used by other Greater Manchester Authorities which provides a consistent approach. The data available can include air and surface temperature, surface state, wind, camera images, precipitation, humidity.

## **12. Road Closures**

12.1. Where it is considered that snow/ice has rendered a route unsafe for use the decision to close the route will be taken. All relevant groups will be notified accordingly including the Police and Network Management.

## **13. Treatment Guidelines**

### **13.1. *Precautionary Gritting***

13.2. Criteria for precautionary gritting:

- Weather is expected to drop below freezing.

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<sup>10</sup> B.7.5.44 of the code of practice advises the consideration of this option.

- There is moisture on the roads but it is not raining.
  - There is not enough residual grit to deal with the conditions.
- 13.3. Spread rates to reflect expected weather and existing conditions. See operational plan for detailed current guidelines in use.
- 13.4. The aim of preventative gritting is to prevent ice forming and to prevent snow bonding to the highway surface so it is more easily dispersed by traffic.
- 13.5. ***Post-Treatment Gritting***
- 13.6. Criteria for gritting following ice formation:
- Weather is expected to remain low.
  - Current salt levels on the highway are not sufficient for the current conditions.
- 13.7. Spread rates are to reflect expected weather and existing conditions. See operational plan for detailed current guidelines in use.
- 13.8. Designated East, North and West Area routes will receive treatment once Priority 1 -10 have been effectively treated during periods of prolonged cold weather, as resources allow.
- 13.9. ***Snow***
- 13.10. Guidelines for snow:
- Precautionary gritting will be carried out as indicated in 13.1 above.
  - During periods of snowfall gritting or ploughing activities will continue throughout the period of snow as resources and priorities allow.
- 13.11. See operational plan for detailed current guidelines in use.
- 14. Labour Resources**
- 14.1. The Councils nominated contractor will provide sufficient personnel with an acceptable level of training to be able to comply with the requirements of the operational plan. During prolonged severe conditions, additional operational resources will be allocated as necessary to assist across all areas with snow clearance activities. They will provide to the Council evidence of all completed training. All directly employed council staff will record their relevant training on the Council iTrent system.

**15. Vehicle and Plant Resources**

- 15.1. The Councils nominated contractor has a fleet of frontline gritters with GPS tracking systems for precise information on routes that have been gritted. This will assist with the monitoring needs for the policy. These are supported by a fleet of smaller vehicles, tippers, JCB's and manual spreading equipment. The fleet will be amended as necessary to service the needs of the Councils Policy and Operational Plan.

## **16. Health and Safety**

- 16.1. Appropriate Health and Safety measures will be taken that accord with current Health and Safety Legislation and good practice. The Council and the nominated contractor will agree these annually and they will be shared with all personnel involved in winter services. These will be in line with the code of practice particularly B.7.6.24.

## **17. Grit Materials**

- 17.1. 6mm Rock Salt is used on the carriageway and on footways. Where the corrosive effect needs to be lessened it is treated with molasses. This is stored at the Adswold depot. The salt dome can accommodate approximately 4000 tonnes of rock salt. This is supported by a stock management contract for stocks to be replenished as required throughout the operational period.

## **18. Salt Management**

- 18.1. Salt is a finite resource and UK suppliers are constrained by mining operations (amongst other factors) as to how much may be produced and supplied. Supply can therefore be outstripped by demand during severe weather.
- 18.2. As well as ensuring that the Council orders a suitable supply of salt the Council will also make the best use of this salt supply by ensuring the careful calibration of spreading equipment and the appropriate selection of gritting times and routes which need gritting according to the forecasted weather conditions.

## **19. External Communication**

- 19.1. The details of the winter gritting routes will be available on the Council website. The Contact Centre telephone number will be advertised for the public to notify the Council of any issues. Key press contacts will also be issued so that press enquires can be dealt with in an efficient manner. Further updates will be issued as and when required throughout the winter period.
- 19.2. At the start of the winter period the Council will communicate with the public about the need to be ready for winter weather and what they

can do to “self-help” including the snow code. This will then be reissued in the event of severe weather.

- 19.3. The Stockport Winter Service Plan will be shared with all of the surrounding authorities and agreements will be made to minimise the likelihood of a noticeable change in winter service for the user when crossing borders. Where necessary it may be agreed that another authority will provide winter services on some sections of Stockport’s roads as allowed in Section 8 of the Highway Act. Any changes made during the winter service period will also be provided to these authorities and work undertaken to minimise the disruption this may cause.

## **20. Arrangements at Boundaries**

- 20.1. There is a long-standing agreement with the surrounding boroughs where gritted routes pass out of the Stockport area to achieve (where possible) continuity of treatment along a route.

## **21. Records**

- 21.1. GPS software is used to make records of the gritting work that has been done on the carriageway. Similar information will be collected manually for the areas that are gritted not using frontline gritters, e.g. car parks and footways, to ensure that records of the work undertaken are complete.

## **22. Cost**

- 22.1. The budget for winter gritting is based on the cost of a mild winter. Additional resources will be allocated from other areas of the Service as needs arise.

## **23. Notification**

- 23.1. Major incidents arising as a result of winter conditions and closures of roads, or parts of roads, in extreme conditions shall be reported by the Operational Manager and information distributed to all key stakeholders, these will include: Council Members, Press Office, Contact Centre, Network Management, Strategic Partners and other key personnel.

## **24. Post Snow Maintenance Inspections**

- 24.1. Inspections of treated routes should be carried out after severe weather conditions to identify any emergency repairs necessary on the highway network.



