

# Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee

12 November 2025



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
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<b>Title</b>	Winter Maintenance Service Plan 2025-2026
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report</b>	Emma Gee, Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhoods Services
<b>Report author</b>	Sam Shean, Highways & Traffic Services Manager
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Councillor Karen Rowland, Lead Councillor for Environmental Services & Community Safety
<b>Council priority</b>	Deliver a sustainable & healthy environment & reduce Reading's carbon footprint
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. That the Committee note the outputs delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2024/2025.</li><li>2. That the Committee note the outcome of the review carried out on the Winter Service Plan to ensure compliance with the Highways Act 1980 and the 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice'.</li><li>3. That the Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee approve the Winter Service Plan 2025/2026.</li></ol>

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. To inform the Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee of the outputs delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2024/2025.
- 1.2. To inform the Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee of the Winter Service Plan review carried out to ensure compliance with the Highways Act 1980 and 'Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice'.
- 1.3. To inform and seek approval from the Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee for the Winter Service Plan 2025/2026.
- 1.4. Appendix 1: Winter Service Plan 2025/2026.

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The Council approved Shaping Reading's Future – Our Council Plan 2025/26 to 2027/28. The Plan reflects the Council's priorities for Reading and provides direction for staff in delivering services to meet the needs of the communities within the Borough whilst working to a budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and updated to include to current Year 3 priorities.
- 2.2 The aim of the Winter Service Plan is to provide a service to reduce, as far as reasonably possible, the effects of adverse weather on the public highway during the winter period.

- 2.3 To make travel more secure, safe and comfortable for all users of the public highway and to provide conditions that are as safe as reasonably practical having regards to financial constraints and statutory duties.

### **3. The Proposal**

#### **BACKGROUND**

##### **Overview of Winter Service delivery during 2024/2025**

- 3.1 The 2024/2025 winter season was relatively mild overall although there were numerous occasions when the temperature reached the trigger point for precautionary salting action, (below 1°C and predicted to go below freezing), resulting in 54 primary runs and 4 secondary runs. The colder spells were not severe nor prolonged enough for activation of the Snow Plan. By comparison there were 34 primary runs and 3 secondary runs during the previous winter season 2023/2024.
- 3.2 There were no issues with salt supply / delivery which enabled the contractor to maintain stock levels throughout the winter season.
- 3.3 There were no issues with the contractor replenishing the grit bins as and when required.
- 3.4 The winter decision making process to determine when to salt worked well. There is a joint Berkshire Wide winter forecasting service led by West Berkshire which includes Vaisala weather stations that provide weather data for MeteoGroup to make accurate prediction forecasts, enabling informed decisions to be made by the Berkshire Local Authorities on when to grit.
- 3.5 There is also a joint arrangement/agreement with Wokingham Borough Council, through their Consultants, Volker Highways, to provide gritting decision making. This worked well and delivered against the set key performance indicator.
- 3.6 The Winter Service Plan 2024/2025 provided a robust service for the duration of the Winter period with no disruption to the primary and secondary road network.
- 3.7 With the changing climate leading to milder wetter winters, the Highways & Drainage Team reviewed the gully emptying regimes to ensure that they are clear and running to avoid localised flooding issues.

##### **Options Proposed:**

- 3.8 A review of the Winter Service Plan 2024/2025 has been undertaken. The main points, including updates for the Winter Service Plan 2025/2026, are summarised below:
- All 48 highway grit bins, remain necessary and form part of the Winter Service Plan 2025/2026.
  - No new grit bin requests were received for public highway roads.
  - The contractual salt stock held by the Council's contractor will remain at 900 Tonnes throughout the 2025/2026 winter service period up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026. All salt stock is stored by the contractor at their Aldermaston site, (under sheeting cover), as set out in Section 8 of the Winter Service Plan.
  - Confirmation has been obtained from Compass Minerals (the salt supplier) that there are adequate National salt stocks available to cope with a severe winter season.
  - Review has shown that the spread rates introduced in the 2018/2019 winter season following the National Salt Supply Review continue to prove successful and will continue for the 2025/2026 winter season.
  - Bus routes continue to be on primary or secondary precautionary salting routes.

- There are no changes to the primary and secondary precautionary salting routes for the 2025/2026 winter season. Any bus route changes will be accommodated during the winter season.
- All cross-boundary primary and secondary precautionary salting routes correspond with neighbouring authorities precautionary salting routes.
- When the Snow Plan is activated (during prolonged adverse weather events), footway/pavement snow ploughs continue to be available for use in the Town Centre and on primary pedestrian routes such as the Reading / Caversham Bridges and Christchurch footbridge. The Snow Plan is available as a background paper.
- The Town Centre 'core area' footways will be treated with a proprietary material when snow is predicted to lay for a prolonged period. Traditional grit/salt may also be used on these Town Centre footways, as an alternative, when snow is predicted to lay for a prolonged period. The Town Centre footways are listed in Appendix E of the Winter Service Plan 2025/2026 and shown on a plan 'Town Centre Winter Maintenance - Treated Footway Areas' (Drawing Number RBC/WM/001A) which forms part of this Appendix.
- The Council's advice for cyclists using the Borough's public highway network during the winter season remains the same as for last winter season. Section 7 'Footways and Cycleways' (paragraph 7.5) in the Winter Service Plan 2025/2026 refers as follows:

*Cyclists can continue to cycle in winter but are advised to dress appropriately, use mudguards and lights, consider tyres (the wider the better) and commuting by bicycle can be comfortable and efficient. It is important to make a safety assessment particularly during periods of prolonged hazardous conditions, (refer to Council's Snow Plan). The Council does not precautionary grit / salt shared footways and remote cycleways when frost, ice or prolonged hazardous conditions are forecast, with the exception of shared carriageway / cycleway routes on the primary and secondary salting network. Being part of the carriageway, shared carriageway/cycleway routes on the primary and secondary precautionary salting route networks will be salted by default in accordance with the Winter Service Plan.*

*Should individuals make the decision to cycle during hazardous winter conditions the Council recommend that they take the necessary precautionary measures for the prevailing conditions.*

- 3.9 The updated Winter Service Plan 2025/2026 and map showing the primary/secondary precautionary salting routes and grit bin locations are available in Appendix 1 and on the Council's website.
- 3.10 The Berkshire Winter Service Consortium (includes all six Berkshire Unitary Authorities) agreed to jointly tender the 'winter forecasting' service and the supplier was appointed in 2021/2022. West Berkshire Council continues to be the lead Local Authority for the administration of this contract on behalf of the Consortium. This is entering into the final year of the contract.
- 3.11 Risk assessments and method statements will, if required, be further updated and agreed with the Council's gritting contractor J. H. Cresswell and Sons Ltd, to take account of any new associated risks and any Government updated advice.
- 3.12 A review of the proposed 'Active Travel Plan' schemes has shown that they are primarily situated on the existing 'primary/secondary' precautionary salting routes. Any future Active Travel Plan schemes brought forward will be evaluated to determine whether they should be added to the precautionary salting route.
- 3.13 A Berkshire Wide Road Sensor Temperature data collection trial was carried out during last winter 2024/2025, funded by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Reading has 2

No. fixed sensor stations collecting a continual stream of data and 1 No. sensor attached to a gritting vehicle.

The results are with the scheme promotor Visala who are working with MeteoGroup to take the learning and adjust the algorithm accordingly. More data will be gathered this winter to enable more accurate temperature predictions on the network.

This scheme will improve road temperature data knowledge which will provide better decision making, leading to reduced numbers of gritting runs and provide further opportunities to only grit / treat those colder areas during certain circumstances, thereby further reducing the overall number of precautionary gritting runs, reducing the amount of grit / road salt use, reduced vehicle use and less waste that will ultimately lead to lower carbon emissions and efficiency savings in future winter seasons. It is noted that there have been some challenges in calibrating the sensor technology and the Berkshire Low Bandwidth Network (LoRaWAN) data transfer system will be improved during the winter months.

The Council do expect to start seeing the benefits of this project during the coming winter and we will provide the outcome and actual saving that this system is expected to generate at a future Committee meeting.

#### **Other Options Considered**

- 3.14 The Highways Team have explored options to join an existing framework contract with nearby Local Authorities to deliver the Winter Maintenance Service within the Borough, however, the framework access fee and high delivery costs are in excess of what we currently have secured with our term gritting contractor J. H. Cresswell & Sons Ltd.

#### **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1 Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential – and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

- 4.2 The Council's Corporate Plan has established five themes for the years 2025/28. These themes are:

- Promote more equal communities in Reading
- Secure Reading's economic and cultural success
- Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce Reading's carbon footprint
- Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children
- Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future

- 4.3 These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:

- Putting Residents first
- Building in strong foundations
- Recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities
- Involving, collaborating, and empowering residents
- Being proudly ambitious for Reading

- 4.4 Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on [Reading Council Plan 2025-28 FINAL.pdf](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

- 4.5 The delivery of the Highway Winter Maintenance Service will meet the Council's stated aims by providing:
- A safe, secure and affordable public Winter Maintenance Service for all residents and users of the public highway.
  - Maintaining a safe Primary and Secondary highway network to support journeys, which in turn will maintain economic growth in Reading and the wider region.
  - Support the Council's carbon reduction pledge by reducing unnecessary salting runs which will reduce waste, using less materials and lower carbon products, reducing energy consumption with lower energy gritting vehicles, also by moving to electric vehicles / plant and tools.
  - Delivering the Social Value requirements set out in the tendered contracts to promote local employment and opportunity for residents of Reading.

## **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2 The Berkshire Wide Road Sensor Temperature collective trial will improve local road temperature data to provide better decision making. This will lead to reduced numbers of gritting runs and provide further opportunities to only grit / treat those colder areas during certain circumstances, thereby further reducing the overall number of precautionary gritting runs, reducing the amount of grit / road salt use, reduced vehicle usage and reduce waste that will ultimately lead to lower carbon emissions and efficiency savings.
- 5.3 The Winter Service Term Contract 2022-2027 requires the incumbent contractor to consider Environmental Implications and social value.
- 5.4 The contract includes carbon reduction targets and improved sustainability. The intent is to reduce the amount of carbon used to produce the materials at source, using recycled materials, reducing the uncontrolled waste in the environment, to reduce pollution of the natural environment, use of electric vehicles and plant, sourcing green energy alternatives, carbon off-setting, as well as how they will achieve their own carbon on-going reduction targets.
- 5.5 A Climate Impact Assessment has been conducted, which considers a net 'low-positive' impact as a result of the Winter Service Term Contract 2022-2027. There will be a decrease in the amount of carbon compared with the previous Winter Service Term Contract 2016-2022.
- 5.6 The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy, which was endorsed by the Council in November 2020, highlights the importance of adapting to climate impacts as well as reducing the emissions which are driving climate change

## **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".
- 6.2 The public and national bus operators can report accumulations of snow and ice on the public highway and strategic network and all requests for additional grit bins and roads to consider for gritting will be brought to Committee for consideration and approval should they meet the assessment criteria.
- 6.3 This report and the Winter Service Plan 2025/2026 will be available on the Council's website following Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committees approval.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. The proposed Winter Service Plan 2025/2026 consists of precautionary salting of the Council's existing public highway network. There is no overall change to service delivery at this time, and all users will have a safe public highway. Should any future updates/amendments be required, which result in service delivery changes, an equality impact assessment will be carried out.

## **8. Legal Implications**

- 8.1. The Borough Council, as Highway Authority, has a duty under the Highways Act 1980 Section 41 (Clause 1A) and Section 150 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice

## **9. Financial Implications**

- 9.1 The proposed Winter Service Plan 2025/2026 will be fully funded from the existing Environmental & Commercial Services Streetcare Revenue Budget.

## **10. Timetable for Implementation**

- 10.1. The Winter Maintenance Service is a continuous service throughout the lifetime of the contract and will deliver throughout the winter service period

## **11. Background Papers**

- 11.1. There are none.

## **Appendices**

### **1. Winter Service Plan 2025/2026**

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications arising from the proposals set out in this report are set out below: -

### 1. Revenue Implications

Use this Table in the report or as an Appendix to set out the revenue implications:

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000
Employee costs (see note1)			
Other running costs	415	431	439
Capital financings costs			
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>415*</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>439</b>
Income from:			
Fees and charges (see note2)	0	0	0
Grant funding (specify)			
Other income			
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Net Cost (+)/saving (-)</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>439</b>

\* Denotes Actual spend 2024/25

The net cost of the proposal can be funded from existing Revenue Highways & Traffic Services Budgets and capitalisation.

### 2. Capital Implications

Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure	0	0	0
Funded by			
Grant (specify) DfT LTP Award			
Grant DfT Additional Road Resurfacing Fund Section 106 (specify)			
Other services (National Highways Grant)			
Capital Receipts/Borrowing			
<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**Note:** where more than one option /proposal is being made it may be easier to set out the above information in an Appendix.

### 3. Value for Money (VFM)

This is a statutory service provision.

The existing contract has shown to be competitive. Term Contract awarded October 2022 for 3-years with an option to extend for a further 3-years subject to contract compliance and meeting

the contractual KPI criteria. The extension for the final 3-years has been completed and contract extended.

#### **4. Risk Assessment.**

The Council has a duty under the Highways Act 1980 to maintain the public highway, including winter maintenance. The winter service plan and associated treating of primary and secondary routes, with the provision of strategically placed grit bins will continue to reduce the risk to the Council and the public. The on-going maintenance costs will be absorbed within existing revenue budgets for highway maintenance. Method statements agreed with the existing contractor will continue to ensure delivery during the current financial position and climate changes challenges (flood / heat / drought), as well as ensuring that disruption is minimised. Supply chain for products risk mitigated by the contractor buying large volumes & stockpiling materials based on the size of the winter service programme.

Risk Assessments and Snow Plan included within the Winter Service Plan 2025/2026

Increasing fuel costs is and will remain a risk pressure, which will need to be managed throughout the programme.