



Winter Service Plan 24/25



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

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(other appendices referenced are for internal use only)

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh.

1. Introduction

This document outlines the Council's responsibilities and operational procedures for the management of the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council highway network during the winter period.

Copies of this document will be made available online and upon request. Appendices containing internal contact details or operationally sensitive information will be omitted from public release.

This document will also be shared with external organisations as listed in Appendix 19.

2. Objectives and Aim

Considering available resources, the Council's objective is to maintain or restore the safe use of the highway network as promptly as possible during winter. The specific winter services described in this plan are delivered between October 1 and April 30, which covers the period when winter hazards are most likely to occur. Outside of this timeframe, any incidents will be dealt with reactively, following the general principles outlined in this document.

3. Roles & Responsibilities

This Winter Service Operational Plan (WSOP) provides clear guidance to the Council's staff involved in winter maintenance operations. It also serves as an informative document for the public and external organisations.

The **Director of Highways, Streetcare & Transportation** holds overall responsibility for the Council's Winter Service, with support from the Highways Infrastructure Manager (HIM), Streetcare & Highways Operations Manager (SHOM), and the Standby Officer (SO) outside of regular office hours.

Highways Infrastructure Manager (HIM)

The HIM is responsible for overseeing key operational aspects of the winter service, ensuring that decision-making and resource allocation are managed effectively. Key responsibilities include:

- Procuring weather forecasting services, weather stations, salt, and salt bins
- Defining the Precautionary Salting Network (PSN)
- Determining the provision and locations for salt bins
- Making precautionary winter action decisions during regular working hours
- Liaising with forecasters, the press office, call centres, and emergency services
- Monitoring weather stations and salt stock levels
- Liaising with adjacent highway authorities and other departments during heavy snowfall
- Keeping accurate and comprehensive records
- Determining proactive road closures

Streetcare & Highways Operations Manager (SHOM)

The SHOM is responsible for the practical execution of winter services, supported by teams based at the Dinas and Abercynon depots. Responsibilities include:

- Ensuring specialist vehicles and equipment are available and properly maintained throughout the winter season
- Managing standby arrangements for winter operations
- Ensuring that salt-spreading equipment is checked, calibrated, and fit for purpose
- Maintaining a list of contractors for snow-clearing purposes and hiring additional equipment when required
- Overseeing the delivery of both precautionary and reactive winter maintenance services
- Monitoring actual road conditions and adjusting treatment plans accordingly
- Prioritising snow clearance and directing resources where they are most needed during prolonged wintry conditions
- Maintaining detailed records of all winter service activities

Standby Officer (SO)

The SO coordinates winter service activities outside of regular office hours, with support and guidance available from both HIM and SHOM staff as required.

4. Service Levels & Prioritisation

4.1 Precautionary Salting Network (PSN)

Precautionary salting is applied to a specific portion of the highway network, known as the Precautionary Salting Network (PSN). Route Plans and Route Cards, which detail the order in which salting routes are treated, can be found in Appendix 5. The primary goal is to complete precautionary salting of the PSN ahead of the forecasted onset of snow, frost, or ice. In some cases, residual salt from previous actions may allow a delay in further salting, improving operational efficiency. The PSN includes all A and B classified roads, as well as highways used by more than 4000 vehicles a day. A small number of historically salted and key through roads are also included. Salt is not spread on footways or cycle routes on a precautionary basis.

4.2 High Routes

There are instances during the winter when the risk of road hazards is limited to higher elevations. In such cases, a targeted response known as "High Route" action is initiated. High Routes consist of roads within the PSN located above 200 meters above ordnance datum (AOD). For continuity, when a distinct section of a route crosses this height boundary, the entire section is treated.

4.3 Critical Salting Network

A Critical Salting Network is defined for use in emergencies, such as during severe salt shortages or when extreme weather conditions are widespread. This network consists of the essential routes required to maintain a minimal yet functioning network that supports inter-town travel, emergency services and essential deliveries (e.g., food supplies). The introduction of this reduced service level is accompanied by a public information campaign to ensure that road users are aware of the situation.

4.4 Mobilisation and Route Target Times

The aim is to mobilise vehicles for precautionary salting within an hour of receiving the instruction to proceed. The time required to complete the salting operations will vary based on traffic conditions, the time of day, and the spread rate being used. During off-peak traffic hours, when salting at a spread rate of 20g/m^2 , treatment is typically completed in approximately $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours. However, at peak traffic times or when spreading at 30g/m^2 , the treatment time may increase to around five hours.

4.5 Salt Bins

A network of salt bins is maintained throughout the Borough to facilitate local self-help. Salt bins are filled at the start of the winter season and are replenished following prolonged periods of winter activity. Salt levels in the bins are monitored during the winter, and bins are refilled as needed. Requests for new salt bin locations are

assessed by the HIM using a point-scoring system, with additional bins placed subject to available resources (Appendix 12).

4.6 Snow Clearance

In many cases, snow only affects certain geographic locations, such as higher elevations or areas where snowdrifts are common. When snow is widespread, clearance efforts will generally follow the priorities established for pre-salting. However, designated officers may adjust operations based on the onset of drifting snow, road blockages caused by accidents, or other special circumstances that require immediate attention.

4.6.1 Snow Clearance - Carriageways

During periods of persistent ice or snow, A and B classified roads are cleared first, followed by the remainder of the PSN. Other carriageways and footways are treated as resources allow, considering the expected duration of the conditions. Apart from these key priorities, the general order of treatment is as follows:

- Routes and distributor roads serving significant industrial traffic or providing access to hospitals, fire stations, and emergency centres
- Access routes to fuel and food sources
- Bus routes
- Industrial estate roads and key through routes in built-up areas
- "Short cut" routes and lanes to isolated farms
- Any other unlisted routes

While the Council aims to keep all highways open at all times, it may become necessary to assess whether the allocated resources are achieving their objectives. In particularly severe conditions, operations may need to be suspended, and resources withdrawn until conditions improve. Close liaison with neighbouring highway authorities is essential when considering the suspension of operations.

Requests from the public for snow and ice clearance will be prioritised by the SHOM using the above hierarchy, and considering the availability and location of resources, predicted weather conditions, and any special circumstances, such as the need for emergency services to access a site or specific medical conditions.

4.6.2 Snow Clearance - Footways & Cycle Routes

Salt is not applied to footways, footbridges or cycle routes on a precautionary basis. However, when snow or persistent ice affects these areas, footways and cycle routes are cleared as resources allow. The following priorities apply:

- Pedestrianised areas and main town centres
- Primary shopping areas
- Key pedestrian routes, including routes to schools, hospitals, sheltered housing, residential homes, and urban bus routes

- Footbridges on main routes
- Access to public buildings, medical surgeries, clinics, cemeteries, etc.
- Steep sections of footways, residential underpasses, and associated steps
- Other busy pedestrian routes
- Residential areas
- Industrial estates
- Low-use rural footways, surfaced footpaths, and off-road cycleways

Unsurfaced footpaths, public rights of way, and private footways will not be treated. Given resource constraints, footways in lower-priority categories will only be treated in the most severe conditions.

5. Winter Action Decision Making

Each day during the winter period, officers consider and determine the required winter maintenance actions. Using experience and local knowledge, they assess whether no action, precautionary salting, or continual ploughing and salting is necessary.

Precautionary salting ahead of frost or ice is typically carried out at 20g/m². If conditions are particularly severe or if there is a risk of precipitation washing away the salt, application rates may increase to 30g/m². In preparation for snow, a spread rate of 30g/m² is used to delay snow settlement and facilitate ploughing.

The chart in Appendix 13 provides guidelines for determining the appropriate treatment based on road surface temperatures and conditions. This is a general guide, and professional judgement will determine the best course of action based on prevailing conditions and local characteristics.

All decisions are recorded in the winter action sheet, which details the type of action, salt spread, and timing. Actions are forwarded to both internal recipients and external partners using the Highways Winter Action mail distribution group.

5.1 Weather Forecasting

The Council's specialist weather forecasting service provides daily forecasts throughout the winter period. These forecasts are informed by a combination of weather modelling, radar imaging, and data from physical road weather stations within the County Borough. Forecasts are updated three times daily to reflect ongoing changes in weather conditions.

Each forecast includes a general narrative, a prediction of minimum road surface temperatures, and details of anticipated winter hazards, including the timeframe within which those conditions are likely to occur. An example of the weather forecast can be found in Appendix 2.

The forecast provider is kept informed of the Council's intended winter maintenance actions and is required to notify the Council of any substantive changes in the forecast that may necessitate a revision of the planned action.

6. Information & Publicity

6.1 Publicity and Social Media

The Council's press team will be informed of all winter actions to facilitate timely updates via social media. These updates aim to inform the public of winter maintenance activities, road conditions, and safety advice.

6.2 Local Press and Broadcast Information

In the event of significant snow or ice events, the Council's Press Office will provide local media with updates on road conditions, details of any specific challenges, and guidance for the public. This ensures that essential information is available to help road users make informed decisions during periods of severe weather.

7. Organisational Arrangements

7.1 Duty Schedules, Rotas, and Standby Arrangements

A SO is on call at all times outside of normal working hours, supported by two Call Out Officers. The SHOM oversees the rotas for both the SO and the Call Out Officers.

Winter operations staff rotas are managed by the SHOM. Standby staff for winter operations include:

- Two supervisors
- Eight salter drivers
- Four driver's mates
- Two loader operators

In addition, the 52-week call-out staff are available to carry out winter duties if necessary.

7.2 Training and Development

All staff involved in winter maintenance operations are fully trained and qualified. Regular training ensures that all personnel are familiar with the routes they are assigned to treat and are equipped with the necessary skills to respond to winter conditions.

7.3 Facilities, Plant, Vehicles, Equipment, and Compounds

Winter service operations are conducted from depots at Abercynon and Dinas. Both depots are adequately equipped with welfare and communication facilities to support the winter operations staff.

7.4 Fleet

The Council maintains a dedicated fleet of winter service vehicles, including salting and ploughing equipment. A detailed schedule of the winter service fleet is included in Appendix 14. In addition to the winter-specific fleet, all other vehicles and equipment managed by the SHOM can be deployed for winter service activities as needed.

Routine maintenance of the fleet is carried out by the Council's Fleet Team, with annual servicing, calibration, and major maintenance of salting equipment performed by external contractors. Calibration certificates are held by the SHOM

7.5 Salt

The Council uses 10mm coarse grade rock salt (complying with BS3247 standards) for both precautionary and reactive salting operations. Salt stocks are stored at the operational depots in Abercynon and Dinas, with additional reserves held at the Pontcynon compound. These stocks are monitored and replenished as needed throughout the winter season.

The pre-winter stock levels are as follows:

- **Dinas:** 1,000 tonnes
- **Abercynon:** 1,000 tonnes
- **Pontcynon:** 8,000 tonnes

The procurement and monitoring of salt stocks throughout the winter period are managed by the Highways Infrastructure Manager (HIM).

7.5.1 Supply of Salt to Others

Salt and salt bins are supplied on an ad hoc, rechargeable basis to other Council departments, schools and limited partner organisations, such as school transport providers. In general, salt is not supplied to non-Council bodies or individuals.

7.6 Adjacent Highway Authorities

The Council works closely with neighbouring highway authorities to coordinate winter maintenance efforts where boundaries are shared. The following authorities share boundaries with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council:

- South Wales Trunk Road Agency
- Bridgend County Borough Council
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
- Cardiff County Council
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council
- Powys County Council

In certain areas, the Council undertakes salting on behalf of neighbouring authorities, while in other locations, neighbouring authorities treat sections of road on behalf of the Council. Details of these shared arrangements are outlined in Appendix 8.

8. General & Miscellaneous Information

8.1 General Principles

Winter maintenance operations must be conducted in a practical and efficient manner, considering the basic requirements of the service. Key principles include:

- **Simplicity:** Instructions issued at all levels should be clear and concise to ensure efficient operations.
- **Labour:** Only trained operatives are assigned to routine winter maintenance tasks. Staff receive pre-winter training and are familiarised with the routes they will be required to treat.
- **Plant:** Sufficient equipment should be available to meet the demands of the winter service. All plant and equipment must be fully serviced and calibrated prior to the onset of the winter season.
- **Materials:** Appropriate stocks of de-icing salt will be available at Abercynon, Dinas depots, and the Pontcynon compound at the start of the winter.

8.2 Precautionary Salting

Precautionary salting is the application of salt to the predefined PSN ahead of freezing conditions. This lowers the freezing point of water on the road surface, preventing ice from forming. Salting is conducted according to route cards unless unforeseen conditions, such as accidents or obstructions, prevent adherence. Any deviations from the route cards must be reported to and recorded by supervisors.

Salting vehicles operate at the speed recommended by the equipment manufacturer, while also observing local speed limits and taking account of road and traffic conditions. The width of the salt spread is adjusted by the driver to suit the road width and any parked vehicles. All front-line vehicles are equipped with GPS tracking to monitor their location, speed, and salt spread settings.

At the completion of each salting action, operators are required to complete a report form, which is then certified by the duty supervisor and submitted to the Highways Construction Manager on the next working day.

If, during salting operations, conditions worsen due to snow or rain, drivers are instructed to report back to supervisors, who will liaise with the HIM or SO to adjust the level of action as needed.

8.3 Post-Treatment

Requests for reactive treatment of highways affected by severe weather are logged and inspected to determine their validity and priority. Except in emergencies, reactive treatments are only carried out once resources are available after completing treatment of the PSN.

8.4 Snow Conditions

During severe weather, winter service operations are managed within Highways and Streetcare Services. If extreme conditions persist for an extended period, the Council's Emergency Planning Officer will provide appropriate advice, and elements of the Council's "County Borough Emergency Plan" may be implemented as necessary.

8.5 Organisation of Emergency Works

Detailed records of all instructions, reports, and requests for assistance will be maintained. Staff are required to regularly report on conditions to the Highways Infrastructure Manager, Standby Officer, or supervisors as appropriate. Depots will be opened and additional staff called in if required to deal with emergency situations.

In cases where extreme weather is forecast to last more than five days, or upon request from the Director of Highways, Streetcare & Transportation, an Emergency Winter Service Group will be established. This group will consist of senior political leadership and officers from key departments, including Streetcare, Highways Infrastructure, Procurement, Finance, Emergency Planning, and the Press Office. The group will determine the Council's response to the developing situation.

 **High Routes**
 **Low Routes**

