



**Northumberland**  
County Council

# **WINTER SERVICE POLICY AND COMMUNICATION**



**September 2020**



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## 1.0 **Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles that the County Council uses to meet its obligations and duties in respect of the winter service. It lays down which categories of road are to be treated, in what order of priority, and how quickly they should be treated. It is intended, through the use of this Policy, to ensure that there is a uniform level of service, throughout the county.
- 1.2 Within Northumberland there are over 5,000 kilometres (3,000 miles) of road varying from major roads to housing estates and minor rural roads. The altitudes of these roads varies from sea level to 610 metres (2,000 feet) and therefore a flexible approach is required to deal with the wide range of winter conditions which can be encountered.
- 1.3 **Northumberland's statement of service for Winter Service is:**  
*Northumberland County Council aims to provide an economic, effective and efficient winter service within the resources available which seeks to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a public highway is not endangered by snow or ice and delays caused by adverse weather are kept to a minimum.*
- 1.4 As highway authority the County Council is responsible for undertaking winter service on the highways maintainable at public expense across the county. The service is mainly provided by our own directly managed resources.
- 1.5 The objective is that a network of treated routes should be reasonably accessible for the majority of residents and businesses, supplemented by the targeted provision of self-help facilities (grit bins, grit heaps etc).
- 1.6 The service is essential for public safety and to the national and local economy in maintaining movement of vehicular traffic, cycles and pedestrians. Owing to limited resources and available finance, provision of the winter service reflects the importance of 'traffic' routes. It is not reasonably practicable to provide the service on all parts of the network or to ensure that all surfaces are kept free of ice or snow at all times even on the treated parts of the network.
- 1.7 Winter service operations by their nature are complex and require substantial flexibility to deal with the wide variety of conditions that can occur throughout Northumberland. Winter service policy and operations cannot be considered in isolation and have been developed to support the wider context of strategic and transportation aims of the County Council, as well as having relevance to emergency planning for dealing with other extreme weather conditions.
- 1.8 This policy reflects the best practice and recommendations of the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) and Well-managed Highways Infrastructure: a Code of Practice (Section B7 Winter Service).
- 1.9 The County Council is not responsible for carrying out winter service on the A1, A19 and A696 (between the A1 and Newcastle Airport) trunk roads within Northumberland. These roads are the responsibility of Highways England (A1, A19 and A696). The County Council undertakes winter service operations on the A69 (as agents to Road Link between the A1 and M6 junctions).

## 2.0 **Legislation**

2.1 Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 imposes a duty on highway authorities to maintain highways maintainable at public expense. In particular, Section 41 (1A) imposes a duty on highway authorities *“to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.”*

2.2 Under Section 150(1) of the Highways Act 1980, *“if an obstruction arises in a highway from accumulation of snow”* *“the highway authority shall remove the obstruction”* and Section 150(3) of the Act states that the following factors should be taken into account:

a) *“The character of the highway”* *“and the nature and amount of the traffic by which it is ordinarily used.”*

b) *“The nature and extent of the obstruction.”*

c) *“The resources of manpower, vehicles and equipment for the time being available to the highway authority for work on highways and the extent to which those resources are being, or need to be, employed elsewhere by that authority on such work.”*

Thus recognising that it would not be practicable for a Highway Authority to treat all roads and footways in the event that ice forms or snow falls.

## **3.0 Winter Service Policy**

### **3.1 Statement of Service**

Northumberland County Council aims to provide an economic, effective and efficient winter service within the resources available which seeks to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a public highway is not endangered by snow or ice, and delays caused by adverse weather are kept to a minimum.

### **3.2 Background**

3.2.1 The winter service operations fall into three main categories:

- Treatment of frost (precautionary salting - pre treatment)
- Treatment of widespread ice and light snow (post treatment)
- Clearance of heavy snow falls.

The Policy has been developed to deal with these categories in a rational manner, taking into account the resource levels available, and are set out in the rest of this section.

### **3.3 Precautionary Network**

3.3.1 The Precautionary Network underpins the service and has been developed to ensure that where possible no one living within Northumberland is more than five miles from the treated network.

3.3.2 The precautionary network is pre-defined and comprises Primary and Secondary Routes:

- In built-up areas (defined as settlements with a population greater than 1000) salting will be carried out on selected parts of the network (derived from the roads functional hierarchy - Appendix A) such that residents will not have more than a mile to travel to reach the salted network. In addition main bus routes will be salted, as will link roads having steep downhill approaches (1 in 10 or steeper).
- In non-built-up areas salting will be carried out on routes such that residents of small villages (defined as greater than a population of 100) will not have more than five miles to travel to reach the salted network.

3.3.3 Roads routinely treated to prevent the formation of frost form the Precautionary Network, primary routes are shown on the link to the Winter Service [Interactive Map Page](#) on the Northumberland County Council website.

### **3.4 Treatment of Frost (precautionary salting - pre treatment)**

3.4.1 Routine salting of the Precautionary Network to deter the formation of ice during a normal overnight frost will generally be by morning and / or evening turnouts and where salting takes place during the early morning our aim is to complete routes by 8.00 am.

3.4.2 The target completion time for each route is 3 hours from the point at which a gritter leaves the depot to the point at which treatment is complete.

### **3.5 Treatment of Widespread Ice and Light Snow (post treatment)**

- 3.5.1 Such conditions are likely to occur when roads are wet and ice is forecast and freezing is likely to continue after 10.00 am or snow falls are anticipated up to 25mm in depth.
- 3.5.2 In widespread freezing and wet conditions Precautionary Network routes will be treated. Secondary routes will be treated when widespread ice is expected to continue through the day and in light snow falls. Essentially these routes will only be treated when, after treating the primary routes, there is time and resources to cover them and that prevailing conditions will continue.

### **3.6 Clearance of Snowfalls - Roads**

- 3.6.1 Whenever possible it is crucial that treatments are made before snowfall or freezing rain so that sufficient de-icer is on the road surface to provide a debonding layer. The provision of a debonding layer is the main function of de-icers in snow ice treatments because it is impractical to spread sufficient salt to melt anything other than very thin layers of snow and ice
- 3.6.2 Where forecasts indicate that adverse weather conditions are likely to result in the need for snow clearance, appropriate resources are placed on standby to be mobilised. Appropriate resources can be any of the County Council's direct labour force, pre-assessed private contractors and farmers.
- 3.6.3 Clearance of snow will inevitably take longer than gritting operations and may need two way working. Conditions may vary across the County and a flexibility of approach and management will be required to make best use of available resources, where necessary resources will be transferred across the County to areas of greatest need.
- 3.6.4 Snowfalls in excess of 25mm with possible drifting will require the use of snow ploughs attached to gritters and the possible use of snow blowers and other specialist plant.
- 3.6.5 The objective shall be to maintain roads open to traffic, remove blockages to re-open routes by salting, gritting, ploughing, excavating and snow blowing as appropriate to the prevailing conditions.
- 3.6.6 It should be noted that continuous snowfall and strong winds will influence snow clearing operations considerably and will therefore delay completion times.



- 3.6.7 In severe snow conditions it may not be possible to clear the roads that form the Precautionary Network. In such circumstances priority will be given firstly to clearing a defined subset of the Precautionary Network, known as the Winter Minimum Network.

In such cases resources will be allocated to clear roads in the following priority order:

- a) Winter Minimum Network - incorporating all sections of the Major Road Network (maintained by NCC) and selected parts of the Resilient Road Network.
  - b) The remainder of the Resilient Road Network (which also captures emergency services locations).
  - c) Roads into the main towns, other towns, service centres and villages – at least one road into each settlement to allow access to the cleared major road network / resilient road network.
  - d) Approaches to schools.
  - e) Town centre car parks (council owned).
  - f) Other roads.
- 3.6.8 In situations where snowfalls are likely to prevent schools from opening, efforts will be made to clear the approaches to schools once the above priority routes have been cleared. Schools will remain responsible for their own grounds, but Council officers will liaise with the schools to reinforce the ability to keep schools open.
- 3.6.9 Snow clearance on the lower priority roads will only take place when the higher priority roads have been cleared, which may take several days after the initial or recurring snowstorms.

### **3.7 Clearance of Heavy Snowfalls - Footways and Cycleways**

- 3.7.1 Priority will be given to the treatment of roads and resources will not be deployed on treatment of footways and cycleways to the detriment of the roads.
- 3.7.2 Priority on deploying resources to footways will be given in such a way that treatment of the lower categories is not to the detriment to the level of service of the higher categories.
- 3.7.3 Snow clearance / treatment of ice on footways or cycleways may be ceased at any time if, for example, actual forecast conditions improve or for logistical reasons.
- 3.7.4 **Footways**
- 3.7.5 The treatment of footways is based on the footway hierarchy. Normally only the higher usage footway categories 1 and 2 in urban centres and environs will be treated for snow and ice in accordance with table 1 below.



Table 1. - Footway Treatment

<b>Footway Category and Description</b>	<b>Overnight Frost Conditions Forecast not likely to extend beyond 10.00 am</b>	<b>Daytime Frost Conditions Forecast likely to extend beyond 10.00 am</b>	<b>Extended Frost Conditions Forecast likely to continue throughout daylight hours</b>	<b>Snow Clearance</b>
<b>1a and 1.</b> Prestige Walking Zones - Very busy areas of towns with high public space and streetscene contribution. Primary Walking Routes - Busy urban shopping and business areas and main pedestrian routes	No treatment except reactive salting at specified locations of exceptional difficulty	Reactive salting as required	Reactive salting as required	Clearance to be undertaken, as resources become available, priority given to locations of highest usage
<b>2.</b> Secondary Walking Routes - Medium usage routes through local areas feeding into primary routes, local shopping centres etc.	No treatment	No treatment	Reactive salting as required following completion of category 1 footways in prolonged conditions	Clearance undertaken as resources become available in prolonged conditions with priority given to higher usage locations
<b>3.</b> Link Footways - Linking local access footways through urban areas and busy rural footways	No treatment	No treatment	Normally no treatment other than locations of greatest difficulty in prolonged conditions	Normally no clearance other than at locations of greatest difficulty as resources become available in prolonged conditions
<b>4.</b> Local Access Footways - Footways associated with low usage, short estate roads to the main routes and cul-de-sacs	No treatment	No treatment	Normally no treatment other than locations of greatest difficulty in prolonged conditions	Normally no clearance other than at locations of greatest difficulty as resources become available in prolonged conditions
<b>5.</b> Minor Footways - Little used rural footways serving very limited numbers of properties	No treatment	No treatment		

3.7.6 However, it is recognised that as well as pedestrian usage site characteristics, such as localised frost hollows, tree cover, footbridges and access ramps, can be important factors in determining risk of a fall in winter conditions. At locations where site characteristics pose a particular problem a specific risk assessment will be undertaken to determine if a higher level of treatment should be undertaken above that justified by the hierarchal categorisation.

3.7.7 Links to the treatment maps for the category 1a and 1 footways are provided in Appendix B.



### 3.7.8 Cycleways

3.7.9 The treatment of cycle ways is based upon the cycleway hierarchy. Treatment will be in accordance with table 2.

Table 2. - Cycleway Treatment

Cycleway Category and Description	Overnight Frost Conditions Forecast not likely to extend beyond 10.00am	Daytime Frost Conditions likely to extend beyond 10.00am	Extended Frost Conditions to continue throughout daylight hours	Snow Clearance
A. Cycle lane forming part of the carriageway, commonly 1.5 metre strip adjacent to the nearside kerb	Treated in accordance with priority given to carriageway it forms part of			
B. Shared cycle / pedestrian paths, either segregated by a white line or other physical segregation or unsegregated	No treatment	Reactive salting as footway	Reactive salting as footway	Clearance as footway
C. Cycle track, a route for cyclists not contiguous with the public footway or carriageway	No treatment	Reactive salting of underpass ramps	Reactive salting of underpass ramps and salting of highest usage routes in prolonged conditions	Clearances undertaken as resources become available in prolonged conditions with priority given to highest usage routes
D. Cycle trails, leisure routes through open spaces (These are not necessarily the responsibility of the highway authority)	No treatment	No treatment	No treatment	No treatment

### 3.8 Grit Bins

3.8.1 The County Council undertakes precautionary gritting on only a proportion of the highways network (the precautionary network) and many minor roads are untreated. On such roads the County Council will consider the provision of grit bins as self-help facilities. Grit bins will only be provided in accordance with justification criteria which limit them to areas where they are most needed.

- 3.8.2 Grit bins will normally be provided and maintained with stocks of salt / grit mixture where they provide a necessary improvement to road safety and benefit to the community at large.
- 3.8.3 Requests for grit bins normally will only be justified where it is considered that there is a particular hazard caused by a steep inclines and sharp bends and taking into account: -
- Exposure of the site or otherwise significantly affected by winter weather
  - Prevailing volume of vehicular or pedestrian flow
  - Other hazards such as junctions with a main road.
- 3.8.4 Bins provided will be filled prior to the start of winter and replenished as necessary. Except in locations of particular sensitivity, bins will be left in place throughout the year. Where necessary damaged bins will be replaced.
- 3.8.5 All grit bins provided and maintained with stocks of highway salt / grit are coloured yellow and clearly labelled with a unique identification number for public reporting and asset management purposes. Within the county there are a number of grit bins that have been funded by town or parish councils that have not met the County Council's justification criteria. The filling and maintenance of these bins (usually coloured green) is normally undertaken by the relevant town or parish council, or the County Council depending upon the agreement in place.
- 3.8.6 In appropriate locations in rural areas grit heaps may be placed on the highway verge.

## **4.0 Communication and Publicity**

### **4.1 How We Keep You Informed**

4.1.1 Our website contains useful information in relation to winter service where you can view our policy and procedures, and detailed maps of gritting routes, footpath clearance. The winter service information is at [Northumberland Winter Service](#)

4.1.2 There is also advice from Central Government and Met Office regarding winter such as what you can do to clear snow and ice, [Clear snow from a road, path or cycleway](#) [Clearing your path or driveway - the snow code](#)

4.1.3 During severe winter weather we will endeavour to keep you up to date with our actions by giving you regular updates on the road conditions and gritting and ploughing operations across the County, as well as related important matters such as school closures, public transport information and details of other public services affected by the adverse conditions such as refuse collection. You can find this on our alerts page at [www.northumberland.gov.uk/alerts](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/alerts).

Users of Facebook and Twitter can sign up to receive updated information and alerts direct to their mobile devices using the following links:

<http://www.facebook.com/nccalerts>

<http://twitter.com/northumberlands>

4.1.4 To obtain up to the minute information on local and national weather forecasts from the Met Office visit [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk) or follow the link from our website. The BBC also has useful weather forecasts and advice at [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) For the motorway and trunk road network the latest traffic and travel information, giving details of road closures and conditions can be found at <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/>

4.1.5 Local radio stations are a useful source of information for updates on weather and road conditions. The local radio stations for our area include:

BBC Radio Newcastle

Metro Radio

Radio Borders

4.1.7 To check public transport information in Northumberland follow the link to Public Transport at <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Highways/Public-transport.aspx>

or contact: Traveline NE Public Transport Information

Dial 0871 2002233 or visit [www.travelinenortheast.info](http://www.travelinenortheast.info)

### **4.2 Contacting Us**

4.2.1 There are many ways to contact us whether it is to ask us for assistance, report something or to seek advice and information.

- The best way during periods of adverse weather conditions is to access our website [www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk) as this is regularly updated with information and you can also make reports and requests direct to us via the website. Use our alerts service at [www.northumberland.gov.uk/alerts](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/alerts)
- If you don't have access to a computer at home then you can use one for free at any Northumberland County Council Library.

- Telephone us 24 hours a day 7 days a week on **0345 6006400**.  
Between Monday to Thursday 08:30 - 17:00 and Friday 08:30 - 16:30 your call will be answered by a customer service advisor.  
Outside these hours your call will be answered by Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service and calls should be made in emergency cases only.

- Contact us by post: County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF

- Contact us in person at one of the nine customer information centres:

Alwick Information Centre, Council Offices, Greenwell Lane, Greenwell Road, Alwick, Northumberland, NE66 1HB

Ashington Information Centre, Council Offices, Wansbeck Square, Station Road, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 9XL

Bedlington Information Centre, Northumberland Information Centre, Bedlington Library, Glebe Road, Bedlington, Northumberland, NE22 6JX

Berwick Information Centre, Northumberland Information Centre, Berwick Library, Walkergate, Berwick-Upon-Tweed, Northumberland, TD15 1DB

Blyth Northumberland Information Centre, Blyth Library, 20 Bridge Street, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 2DJ

Cramlington Information Centre, Concordia Leisure Centre, Forum Way, Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 6YB

Hexham Information Centre, Queens Hall, Beaumont Street, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3LS

Morpeth Information Centre, Royal Sovereign House, Manchester Street, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 1BH

Seaton Delaval Information Centre, Astley Community High School, Elsdon Avenue, Seaton Delaval, Whitley Bay, Northumberland, NE25 0BW.

**Remember** – the A1, A19 and the A696 (between the A1 and Newcastle Airport) are the responsibility of Highways England to treat these roads. You can contact Highways England as follows:

- Telephone: 0300 123 5000
- Email: [info@highwaysengland.co.uk](mailto:info@highwaysengland.co.uk)

Table 3 - Road Hierarchy

Category	Hierarchy Name	Type of Road General Description	Detailed Description
	Strategic Road Network (SRN)	Motorways and Trunk Roads	In Northumberland they consist of the A1, A69 and A19, none of these are maintained directly by the County Council. Nationally they are routes for fast moving long distance traffic with little frontage access or pedestrian traffic. Speed limits are usually in excess of 40 mph and there are few junctions per km. Pedestrian crossings are either segregated or controlled and parked vehicles are generally prohibited.
1	Major Road Network	Major Road Network	<p>Composed of (in priority order):</p> <p>1A. The Primary Route Network (PRN)</p> <p>1B. Major Road Network (MRN), Trunk roads and high speed main roads designated by DfT</p> <p>1C. Major Road Network (MRN), Trunk roads and high speed main roads designated by TfN</p> <p>1D. Key Road Network, Trunk roads and main roads designated by NECA</p> <p>Those elements that are not Motorways or Trunk roads (A1,A19 &amp; A69) are designated local roads and maintainable by Northumberland County Council.</p>
2	Resilient Road Network	Roads that maintain economic activity. Designated by NCC	<p>Those routes in addition to the Major Road Network that are prioritised to maintain economic activity and access to key services / infrastructure</p> <p>Key Utility Infrastructure - e.g. power stations / electricity substations / reservoirs /</p> <p>Designated Filling Stations (stations that are guaranteed fuel deliveries by Central Government during civil emergencies)</p> <p>Hospitals with Accident and Emergency facilities</p> <p>Police Stations</p> <p>Fire Stations</p> <p>Ambulance Stations</p> <p>Ports - Berwick, Amble and Blyth</p> <p>Highway Depots / Winter Service Depots</p>
3	Main Distributor	Main routes linking the (NCC) main towns to the Resilient Road Network	<p>Any main routes not included within the RRN that link our main towns to the RRN.</p> <p>The primary function of these roads is to serve the efficient movement of vehicular traffic including freight distribution. Where possible we would like to encourage long distance traffic movements to and from our towns to use these roads.</p> <p>These routes will normally have a limited number of accesses and will usually not have any speed restrictions, however, as they travel through communities of any size they may be subject to speed and parking restrictions.</p> <p><b>Main Towns are:</b></p> <p>Alnwick, Amble, Ashington, Bedlington, Berwick upon Tweed, Blyth, Cramlington, Haltwhistle, Hexham, Morpeth, Ponteland, Prudhoe.</p>
4	Secondary Distributor	Routes linking the (NCC)	Routes linking our smaller towns and larger villages, known as service centres, and significant HGV generators to the RRN or Main Distributor Network. The primary function of these roads is

		Service Centres to the Main Distributor Network (or higher category road Network).	<p>to facilitate the efficient movement of vehicular traffic, including freight distribution. Where possible we would like to encourage traffic to use these roads rather than smaller local routes.</p> <p>These routes will have more accesses and will usually not have speed restrictions, however, as they travel through communities of any size they may be subject to speed and parking restrictions.</p> <p>They are the main access routes through the less populated areas.</p> <p>In residential and heavily built up areas these roads are likely to have 20 or 30 mph speed limits and higher levels of pedestrian activity with some crossing facilities including zebra crossings. Generally on-street parking is unrestricted except for safety reasons.</p> <p><b>Service Centres have populations between 1,000 and 6,500 and are:</b>  Allendale, Belford, Bellingham, Choppington / Guidepost / Stakeford, Corbridge, Haydon Bridge,  Holywell / New Hartley / Seaton Delaval / Seghill, Newbiggin by the Sea, Rothbury, Seahouses, Wooler.</p>
5	Major Link Road	Roads linking the Main and Secondary Distributor Networks with large villages and residential estates, and industrial areas.	These roads provide access routes to and through larger villages and residential estates. These are likely to serve areas with a population between 500 and 1,000. In built up areas they are significant generators of traffic including main industrial collectors and provide access to larger schools, local hospitals and shopping areas.
6	Minor Link Road	Roads linking smaller settlements travelling through residential estates and industrial areas.	These roads serve smaller villages, local communities and residential estates that may or may not have small schools and individual shops or facilities such as pubs or cafes. These are likely to serve areas with a population less than 500. The roads are likely to be of varying width or have a significant number of vehicles parking on them and are therefore reliant on drivers being considerate as the roads are not always capable of carrying two-way traffic. We encourage HGVs to use higher categories of road for longer journeys, however, we accept that most properties require deliveries by HGVs at some time.
7	Local Access Road (through route)	Roads serving limited numbers of properties but also facilitating travel to other settlements	These roads serve small settlements and residential estates, probably less than 50 properties but also facilitate longer journeys to other small communities. The roads are likely to be of narrower width or have a significant number of vehicles parking on them and are therefore reliant on drivers being considerate as the roads are likely to be incapable of easily carrying two-way traffic. We encourage HGVs to use higher categories of road for longer journeys, however, we accept that most properties require deliveries by HGVs at some time.
8	Local Access Road (dead end)	Dead end roads serving limited	These roads serve small settlements and residential streets, probably less than 50 properties. The roads are likely to be of narrower width or have a significant number of vehicles parking on them and are therefore reliant on drivers being considerate as

		numbers of properties.	<p>the roads are likely to be incapable of easily carrying two-way traffic.</p> <p>These roads will not provide access beyond the properties they serve.</p> <p>We encourage HGVs to use higher categories of road for longer journeys, however, we accept that most properties require deliveries by HGVs at some time.</p>
<b>9</b>	Unsurfaced Roads	Unsurfaced Roads which are generally unsuitable for normal use	These roads are not surfaced and are generally unsuitable for normal vehicular use.



Footway treatment plans (links to NCC website):

- [Alnwick](#)
- [Amble](#)
- [Ashington](#)
- [Bedlington](#) [Bedlington 1](#) [Bedlington 2](#)
- [Berwick](#)
- [Blyth 1](#) [Blyth 2](#) [Blyth 3](#) [Blyth 4](#)
- [Cramlington](#)
- [Hexham](#)
- [Morpeth](#) [Morpeth 1](#)
- [New Hartley](#)
- [Newbiggin](#) [Newbiggin 1](#)
- [Prudhoe](#)
- [Seaton Delaval](#)
- [Seaton Sluice](#)
- [Seghill](#)