Thurrock Council

Winter maintenance plan 2026/2027

Introduction

Thurrock Council is responsible for the maintenance of all adopted highways in Thurrock excepting those that are part of the Trunk Road Network. As part of this the Council is responsible for ensuring that, as far as reasonably practicable, the network is open and safe to use during periods of severe weather. This is achieved by monitoring weather conditions and pre-treating certain parts of the network when ice and/or snow are likely to form; treating areas where ice has formed and removing snow when necessary.

It must be accepted that it is not practicably possibly to carry this out on every road under our control or to ensure that running surfaces are kept free of snow and ice at all times, even on roads that have been treated. To ensure that the available resources are deployed in the most effective manner this policy details the procedures with which Thurrock will deal with severe weather conditions that affect the roads under its control.

The plan has been prepared using the National guidance for Local Authorities contained in the updated "*Well Maintained Highways Code of Practice and the relevant section Appendix H Winter Service Practical Guidance."* 18th September 2013.

This policy relates to the Winter Maintenance carried out by Thurrock Council. In addition, Thurrock Council will consider requests and provide assistance to approved local groups and volunteers to clear and grit other areas. Any such clearance is additional to the provisions of this policy.

Definition

The winter maintenance service covers the monitoring of weather conditions to determine when ice and/or snow are likely to affect the adopted public highway network. If ice and/or snow are anticipated the service performs the application of ice prevention materials to the identified roads to reduce the possibility of ice/snow forming. Where ice and/or snow have formed on the highway it also includes treating the identified roads to assist in making them safer to use.

Statutory duties

By virtue of Section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980 there is a statutory duty on all highway authorities to maintain a highway maintainable at public expense. This Act was modified by Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003 and now provides clarification over the extent of a highway authority's duty to take action to prevent ice and/or snow affecting the public highway.

The first part of Section 41 now reads "In particular, a highway authority is under a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice."

Additionally, the Traffic Management Act 2004 places a duty on all local traffic authorities to do all that is reasonably practicable to manage the network effectively to keep traffic moving. This requires the establishment of contingency plans to deal promptly and effectively with unexpected events including unforeseen weather conditions, so far as reasonably practicable.

Objectives

Thurrock has always recognised the need to ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable, its roads are kept open and safe to use during the winter. Whilst legislation has clarified its duty under the law, Thurrock Council intends to continue to extend that duty and achieve to following:

- To ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow and ice.
- To minimise delays caused by the presence of snow or ice on the highway
- To minimise delays to the Emergency Services in carrying out their functions.
- To ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that residents, businesses and visitors in Thurrock can function as normal.

The winter maintenance plan

The highways maintained at public expense within the borough are categorised into two priority groups for salting/snow clearance; Priority 1 routes and Priority 2 routes.

Thurrock Council will use ice prediction systems and meteorological consultant as an aid to predict the likelihood of ice and/snow forming on the highway.

When ice is predicted precautionary salting will be undertaken on the Priority 1 'main routes' (Plan A) carriageways consisting of:

- *All 'A' and 'B' roads under our control.*
- *All other roads carrying a registered local bus route with four or more buses per day in each direction.*
- *Any other road, which the Director of Public Realm, deems to be of such a character and use as to require inclusion on the Priority 1 routes.*
- *Roads identified as Priority 1 are split into five routes.*
- *There is no precautionary or post treatment of footways and footpaths subject to normal overnight frosty conditions.*

Where snow is predicted then precautionary salting will be carried out as Plan A and also to roads that are known to experience particular problems should snow fall. These are designated as Priority 2 'secondary routes'. (Plan B)

Where snow has settled but is not of significant depth or its presence is expected to be short lived treatment will be restricted to the Priority 1 road network (Plan A) and Priority 1 footway network - heavily used footways around transport links and shopping areas, those leading to health premises and areas outside of schools (provided the schools are open), footbridges and approaches to subways (Plan C).

Where snow has settled in significant amounts or in the event of severe and persistent frost or ice then salting and/or clearance will be concentrated on the areas covered by Plans A, B & C above. However, the treatment of other areas can be considered if resources are available.

Every effort will be made by the Council to obtain and maintain sufficient salt stocks and reserves to carry out the treatment of the highway network in accordance with the Winter Maintenance Plan.

In the circumstances of exceptional supply difficulties emergency measures shall be implemented:

- When retained stocks fall below 300 tonnes, salting shall only be carried out in accordance with the 'Reduced routes'
- When retained stocks fall below 200 tonnes then salting shall only be carried out on designated high speed 'Minimum routes'

The Winter Maintenance plan will be reviewed annually.

Operational details – delivering the winter maintenance plan

Winter Maintenance Season

The winter maintenance service consists of 3 distinct operations:

- There is a need to monitor the weather forecast to determine if ice and/or snow are likely. This will be carried out from the 26th October 2026 through to 11th April 2027.

- To ensure that the vehicles and drivers are available to carry out treatment to the highway when necessary. The crews will be available from the first Monday in November through to the first Sunday in April, although this period can be brought forward or extended if necessary.

- In the event of significant snowfall, and/or severe & persistent frost/ice sufficient to justify the Highways Decision Making Duty Officer declaring the 'Snow Plan Operational', available resources to be employed in salting and/or clearing major footways (pedestrian areas/outside schools, etc.).

Introduction to operational procedures

Highways Section monitor the weather on a daily basis from October through to the end of season in April. Information on road temperature and air conditions is provided via a system of weather stations. For these purposes Thurrock has a weather station situated on The Manorway and is also part of 'Essex County Council Thames Domain', the weather station covering this area is located at Canvey Way.

This information is also monitored by the specialist meteorological company who also have access to their own weather forecasting systems. From the data collected this company then generates a weather forecast (through websites) which is provided to us by 11am each day. This forecast will predict whether there is a likelihood of ice and/or snow forming and using this information the Highways Decision Making Duty Officer will decide if treatment to the network of any type is required.

The instruction on what action to take (even if this is to take 'no action') is sent to the Highways Operations Duty Officer by email on normal working days and also by mobile telephone and messaging at weekends and bank holidays. This information will also be sent to Thurrock Chief Executive, Heads of Service, Highways Portfolio Holder and other specified sections of Thurrock Council and also Essex CC. Monitoring of the weather is continuous and updated information will be provided by 18.00 hrs each day.

If there is any significant change in the weather at any time the specialist meteorological company will phone the Highways Decision Duty Officer to ensure that the appropriate action is taken.

Responsibilities

The Highways Section will:

- Procure specialist meteorological forecasting services, weather station data, DTN RoadMaster and other software systems through the East Anglian Weather Consortium.
- Manage the operation and maintenance of The Manorway weather station
- Review and update the Winter Maintenance Plan.

- Issue strategic precautionary and post salting instructions.
- Prioritise roads for salting and snow clearance, including planning of routes.
- Manage and respond to public enquiries.
- Co-ordinate winter maintenance operations with other consortium Authorities.
- Provide information and updates to Thurrock Communications Section.

The Highways Operations will:

- Provide the salt.
- Provide depots and material/plant storage.
- Provide the vehicles and manpower.
- Provide winter maintenance plant.
- Carry out precautionary salting, post-salting operations & snow clearing operations as required.
- Take all reasonable measures to secure salt stocks from theft.
- Provide emergency temporary signing to warn motorists where roads are impassable to the gritting vehicles.

Duty officers (Highways Decision Makers)

Experienced trained members of the Highways Section will act as Decision Making Duty Officers throughout the monitoring period on a rota basis. The officer on duty is responsible for:

- Receiving information from the meteorological company.
- In collaboration with the meteorological company and the information from the weather station, monitor prevailing weather conditions.
- Issue instructions to Highways Operations section, including which plan to implement.
- Receive updates and monitor post action reports from Highways Operations section.

The plan has been prepared using the National guidance for Local Authorities contained in the updated "*Well Maintained Highways Code of Practice and the relevant section.*

The decision making process will be based on *Appendix H Winter Service Practical Guidance* and with particular reference to the Recommended Precautionary Treatments Sections H8 & H9.

Appendix H of the Code of Practice includes a dry salt target rate of 20g/m^2 within the guidance Treatment Matrix. All Thurrock gritting routes are currently designed on a 20g/m^2 which allows for up to two treatments in advance of snow if required. The 20g/m^2 will remain the maximum spread rate when making decisions until such time as the routes are re-optimised.

Duty officers (Highways Operations)

Experienced employees from Highways Operations will act as Duty Officers (Operations) throughout the Stand-By Period. The officer on duty is responsible for:

- Acting on the instructions of the Decision Making Duty Officer and ensuring that the roads are treated as instructed.

- Reporting back to the Decision Making Duty Officer any problems experienced or on any areas where the Operations Duty Officer considers additional work is required.
- Recording the completion time and ensuring the plant used is stored correctly and available for use.
- Daily reporting on salt used and on remaining stock level.
- Ensuring that the salt stock is monitored and does not fall below the minimum required.

Planning of priority 1 and priority 2 precautionary salting and snow clearing

At the start of each season (i.e. by 20th October) Highways Decision Makers will supply to the Highways Operations a list of roads that require Priority 1 precautionary salting and details of the routes to be followed. These will also be the routes that will be priority for snow clearance.

A schedule of roads that are to be treated as Priority 2 'secondary routes' will also be supplied by the beginning of the season (treating of these routes may be by inclusion with main routes, or with one or more vehicles carrying out additional spreading after reloading, this to be agreed between Duty Officers as most appropriate at the time).

There will be a presumption that the main routes will not be altered during the season. However, there may be times (such as when traffic on a scheduled road is diverted onto a non-scheduled road) when this is necessary. In these instances, the Highways Section will agree the changes with the Highways Operations.

Priority 1 routes (plan A)

The roads included in the Priority 1 salting routes will be those that meet the criteria in the policy, which are:

- All 'A' and 'B' roads under our control.
- All other roads carrying a registered local bus route with four or more buses per day in each direction.
- Any other road, which the *Director of Public Realm* deems to be of such a character and use as to require inclusion on the Priority 1 salting routes.

Where a bus route is registered after September the route will not be considered for inclusion in the Priority 1 route salting schedules until the following year. At the discretion of the *Director of Public Realm* a road on a bus route can be omitted from the schedules if the character of the road is such as to make it unsuitable for use by the salting vehicles.

The roads included in the Plan A Priority 1 salting routes for the 2026/27 season are listed in Appendix 'A' attached.

The Decision Making Duty Officer, according to the forecast weather conditions, will specify the earliest time of commencement for precautionary salting routes. As a minimum requirement the Operations Duty Officer shall have sufficient time to complete all of the precautionary salting routes within 3 hours from starting. They shall also be able to mobilise within 1 hour of any instruction being given.

Other roads will not be treated under normal winter conditions. However, the Decision Making Duty Officer will instruct the Operations Duty Officer to carry out treatment of specific areas in response to specific incidents being reported. These may include:

- A request from the police or other Emergency Service following a road traffic accident, fire-fighting activities, etc. and there is significant ice (or the potential for) on the road surface.
- Where there is a burst water pipe and/or flooding and there is significant ice (or the potential for) on the road surface.

These incidents will be attended to as soon as practicable after completion of the Plan A Priority 1 salting routes.

Footways and cycle tracks will not receive precautionary salting but may be attended to in accordance with the specific incidents mentioned above.

Priority 2 secondary routes (plan B)

When snow or particularly severe weather is expected then the identified Priority 2 routes will receive precautionary salting in line with that instructed for the Plan A Priority 1 salting routes. However, Plan A Priority 1 routes will take precedence.

In previous years difficulties have been encountered in fulfilling the Priority 2 routes due to inappropriately parked vehicles preventing access by the gritting vehicles. In an attempt to overcome this situation, residents in those areas known to have suffered from this problem will receive, in advance, a letter from the council advising of these difficulties and requesting considerate parking that will allow the execution of the complete routes. Should this not be effective, those areas affected will receive manual spreading of salt utilising small vehicles if and when resources permit.

The list of roads included as Priority 2 routes is attached as Appendix 'B'.

Moderate snowfall – implementation of the snow plan (plan C)

Where snow has settled but is not deep enough to warrant the fitting of snow ploughs then the gritters will concentrate upon the Plan A Priority 1 routes. If resources permit they will then be deployed onto the Plan B Priority 2 routes and requests from the emergency services. Following this they will deal with requests from the public. It must be appreciated that it is unlikely that sufficient resources will be available to treat roads that are not included on either the Priority 1 or Priority 2 routes.

Hand clearance of footways and pedestrian areas will be carried out in priority order. The Priority 1 footway network consisting of heavily used footways around transport links and shopping areas, those leading to health premises and areas outside of schools (provided the schools are open), footbridges and approaches to subways, will be attended first. (Plan C). In order to achieve the maximum effectiveness of available resources, where only one footway is designated for clearance on any street, the footway cleared will be the one serving the facility access is being provided for. On footways where there is no specific facility, then the footway most exposed to the effects of sun will be the one cleared. A list of these Priority 1 footways is included as Appendix 'C'. Other footways and cycle tracks will be cleared as, and when, resources permit. However, it must be appreciated that it is unlikely that sufficient resources will be available to carry out treatment to any more than Priority 1 footways.

Where hand clearance is carried out on footways and pedestrian areas, in order to optimise the clearance of snow/ice a width up to a maximum of 2m will be cleared. In wider pedestrian shopping areas, connecting access paths will be cleared up to a maximum width of 1.2m to extend

to shop entrances or to the limit of adopted footway. Connecting access paths to extend to the kerb will also be cleared up to a maximum width of 1.2m at approximately 20m spacing.

Where hand clearance is carried out on footways and pedestrian areas arrangements will be made to apply treatment to the cleared area. Beyond this cleared footway width no clearance will be carried out to verge areas of any description.

Heavy snowfall

Where a significant amount of snow has settled on the road, snow ploughs will be used to keep carriageways clear. The priority will be to deal with the 'A' & 'B' roads and then the remainder of the Priority 1 network.

Only when these routes have been cleared and adequately treated will the gritters then be used to deal with the Priority 2 secondary routes and requests from the emergency services. Once these too have been adequately treated, then other requests from the public will be considered, although it is extremely unlikely that there will be sufficient resources available to deal with anything other than the Priority 1 and 2 roads.

Hand clearance of footways and pedestrian areas will also be carried out in priority order commencing with the Priority 1 footway network. Once again, it must be appreciated that it is extremely unlikely that sufficient resources will be available to carry out treatment of any more than priority 1 footways.