Winter Service Plan 2026/27

Committee considering report:	Individual Executive Member Decisions
Date of Committee:	23 October 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Stuart Gourley
Report Author:	Nick Dale
Forward Plan Ref:	ID4826

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To seek approval of the 2026/27 Highway Winter Service Plan.

2 Recommendation

2.1 That the Executive Portfolio Member for Environment and Highways approves the 2026/27 Highway Winter Service Plan.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	The cost of providing the Winter Service, including the maintenance of West Berkshire Council owned salt bins (30 no.) and undertaking up to 50 primary precautionary treatments on 529.5km of carriageway, is included in the 2026/27 revenue budget. (There is no budget provision for treatment of the secondary network, snow clearance network or footway networks). Financial Officer – Jonathan Martin
Human Resource:	None arising from this report.
Legal:	Following a House of Lords ruling, the Council has had a statutory duty from 10 October 2003 to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable that the safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.

	The Winter Service is to be procured through the Highways Term Maintenance Contract 2026-2036.			
Risk Management:	Failure to treat the asset during winter conditions will affect the availability, value, safety and the Council's ability to meet it's statutory duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable that the safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.			
Property:	The public highway is an important and valuable asset. Failure to implement the plan will affect the safety and availability of the highway.			
Policy:	To comply with best practice and the statutory duty to maintain the public highway in a safe condition, the Environment Department reviews and produces an annual Highway Winter Service Plan to set out its operational proposals for Members to consider.			
	Positive	**Neutral**	**Negative**	**Commentary**
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		N/A
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		N/A

Environmental Impact:			X	Provision of salt spreading on the treatment networks will inevitably have an effect on the environment and produce carbon emissions both from the mining/transportation of rock salt and the vehicles used to treat the network. The policy looks to minimise salt use through use of appropriate spread rates and accurate weather forecasting, so treatment is only carried out when necessary. Not treating the network would likely result in longer journey times/delays due to hazardous driving conditions and accidents. We are looking to reduce the amount of salting required in future though an anticipated move to route-based forecasting. The technology to gather the data required for this transition will continue through the 2026/27 season.
Health Impact:		X		No major health implications arising from this report.
ICT Impact:		X		No additional impact – the service is already delivered using an externally hosted system provided through the Winter Forecasting Contract.
Digital Services Impact:		X		No additional impact – the service is already delivered using an externally hosted system provided through the Winter Forecasting Contract.
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			A well maintained and safe highway network for all road users, will provide an effective network to help stimulate movement across the district to enhance the local economy and help achieve the strategic priority "**a prosperous and resilient West Berkshire"**

Core Business:	X			Provision of winter service will contribute positively towards "**a prosperous and resilient West Berkshire"**
Data Impact:		X		See appendix A – Data Protection Impact Assessment
Consultation and Engagement:	All Members, All Town and Parish Councils.			

4 Executive Summary

4.1 The Council has a statutory duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable that the safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.

4.2 It is proposed that though provision of the Council's annually reviewed winter service plan, the recommendation contained within the report are considered to be a reasonably practicable approach in line with national guidance and should be approved to meet our statutory duty for the coming 2026-27 winter season.

5 Introduction/Background

Introduction

5.1 Government guidance for highway management recommends the provision of an annually reviewed operational plan for winter service. A summary of the proposals for the 2026/27 Highway Winter Service Plan is provided below.

Background

5.2 During the season the Primary treatment network was treated on 34 occasions and the Snow treatment network was treated on 1 occasion. There were no treatments of the Secondary Network. As a result approximately 1,584 tonnes of salt was used in total through the season. With this in mind the salt stock held at Chieveley Depot will be 1,200 tonnes for the coming season. This stockpile will be replenished throughout the winter season to maintain sufficient supply in accordance with the Winter Service Plan.

5.3 Details of Volker Highways Ltd performance and the number of treatments undertaken during the 2025/26 winter season are provided in Appendix C and D. Of the 305 routes treated during the winter period, 304 were completed within the specified 3-hour period.

5.4 For the 2025/26 winter period, the Highway Winter Service Plan and associated treatment routes were published on the Council's website and incorporated into the Council's online mapping facilities.

5.5 The “Safer Driving” leaflet was revised, and copies were distributed to relevant stakeholders. It was also made available on the Council’s website.

5.6 Towards the end of the last season, the Council was awarded a £225k grant to install new thermal sensors on the network and gritting fleet. Once enough data has been gathered this will enable the Council to move to route-based forecasting. This will optimise winter maintenance operations. This approach will eventually replace the broad area-wide forecasts with targeted route-specific predictions, leading to more efficient resource allocation and potentially lower costs.

Proposals - Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27

Treatment Networks

Primary Treatment Network

5.7 The Primary treatment Network, which represents 40.6% of the highway network, and will be treated when hoar frost and/or ice is forecast, includes all “A” and “B” classified roads and some strategically important “C” class and unclassified roads. No routes have been added or removed from this network for the coming season. Details of these routes are given in Appendix A of the Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27.

Secondary Treatment Network

5.8 The Secondary Treatment Network, which represents 19.9% of the highway network and will be treated when hoar frost and/or ice have been experienced for an unbroken period of 72 hours or greater (ie, sub-zero road surface temperatures are continuously experienced through the period for 3 days and nights). No routes have been added or removed from this network for the coming season. Details of these routes are given in Appendix B of the Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27.

Snow Clearance Treatment Network

5.9 The Snow Clearance Treatment Network, accounts for 51.2% of the highway network ensures, that as far as is reasonably practicable all bus routes and access routes to schools and doctors’ surgeries will be cleared of snow as a priority. No routes have been added or removed from this network for the coming season. Details of these routes are given in Appendix H of the Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27.

5.10 Footways will be cleared of snow using cross-service resources as they become available. The Footway Snow Clearance Network includes major town and village centres as well as footways to NHS hospitals and surgeries, schools and other key public buildings owned by the Council. Details of these routes are given in Appendix I of the Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27.

Contingency Treatment Network

5.11 The Contingency Treatment Network which covers 45.5% of the highway network, will be treated when hoar frost and/or ice or snow are forecast but only when there is a national shortage of salt or limited salt suppliers and/or there has been a Government

directive to limit salt use. No routes have been added or removed from this network for the coming season. Details of these routes are given in Appendix C of the Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27.

Salt Bins

5.12 Currently there are 476 salt bins on the network serving Council Offices and public buildings with daily access and the road network. Of these 30 are owned and maintained by the Council (WBC) and 446 are owned and maintained by the Town or Parish Council.

Operations

5.13 The Winter Service period for 2026/27 will operate from Monday 2 November 2026 to Sunday 4 April 2027, although this period may be extended if weather conditions dictate.

5.14 Precautionary salting, snow clearance, salt bin provision and the response to adverse weather will be carried out in accordance with the plan and guidance as detailed within the Council's Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27.

5.15 All decisions and actions will be made/instructed by the Council's Winter Service Duty Officer using forecast information as supplied by the Council's contracted forecaster and local roadside weather stations.

5.16 Operationally, the delivery of the Highway Winter Service will be provided by the Council's Highway Maintenance Term Contractor, Marlborough Highways Ltd.

5.17 A copy of the 2026/27 Highway Winter Service Plan will be issued to all Members and all Town/Parish Councils as part of the consultation process. It will also be available on the Council's website.

5.18 Salt stocks to be maintained above the minimum requirement of 500 tonnes throughout the winter season. At the start of the winter season a total of 1,200 tonnes of salt will be available for the Council's use.

Communications

5.19 A copy of the Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27 is provided in Appendix G.

5.20 Following approval of this report, the "Safer Driving" leaflet will be revised to reflect any changes in the Primary Treatment Network and any other recommendations within the report. The leaflet will also be made available on the Council's website.

5.21 Following approval of this report, an electronic copy of the Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27 will be distributed to all Members and Parish/Town Councils.

5.22 The Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27 and associated treatment routes will be published on the Council's website to allow users to make an informed decision whether to make a journey.

5.23 A map and list showing salt bin locations and ownership will also be published on the Council's website.

6 Supporting Information

6.1 In preparing this report, reference was made to the following supporting information/documentation:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission's review of the 2010/11 winter season.

UK Roads Group publication "Lessons Learned from Severe Weather, February 2009.

Well-managed Highway Infrastructure – A Code of Practice, October 2016.

The resilience of England's Transport Systems in Winter – Interim report, July 2010.

7 Options for consideration

7.1 Do nothing – Failure to undertake winter service operations will affect the safety and availability of the highway network, and the Council will not be able to meet is statutory duty.

8 Proposals

8.1 By approving the Winter Service Plan 2026/27 the Council will continue to meet its duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable that the safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.

9 Conclusion

9.1 That the 2026/27 Highway Winter Service Plan has been prepared in accordance with national guidance and best practice and should approved by the Executive Portfolio Member for Environment and Highways.

9.2 Appendix A – Data Protection Impact Assessment

9.3 Appendix B – Weather/forecast summary of previous season (2025/26)

9.4 Appendix C – Contractors Performance in delivering the 2025/26 Winter Service

9.5 Appendix D – Summary of Winter Operations 2025/26

9.6 Appendix E – Changes to the Primary, Secondary, Snow Clearance and Contingency Network 2026/27

9.7 Appendix F – Salt Bins to be removed from the Network 2026/27

9.8 Appendix G – List of departures from the Code of Practice for Maintenance Management

9.9 Appendix H – Highway Winter Service Plan 2026/27

9.10 Appendix I – Summary of Consultation Responses

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	☐
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	☐
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	☒
Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees or Task Groups within preceding six months	☐
Item is Urgent Key Decision	☐
Report is to note only	☐

Wards affected: All Wards, Town and Parish Councils.

Officer details:

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Appendix A

Data Protection Impact Assessment – Stage One

The General Data Protection Regulations require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for certain projects that have a significant impact on the rights of data subjects.

Should you require additional guidance in completing this assessment, please refer to the Information Management Officer via dp@westberks.gov.uk

Directorate:	Place
Service:	Environment Department
Team:	Asset Management Team
Lead Officer:	Nick Dale
Title of Project/System:	Highways Winter Service Plan 2026/27
Date of Assessment:	25/09/2026

Do you need to do a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)?

	Yes	No
Will you be processing SENSITIVE or "special category" personal data? Note – sensitive personal data is described as "*data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation"*	☐	☒
Will you be processing data on a large scale? Note – Large scale might apply to the number of individuals affected OR the volume of data you are processing OR both	☐	☒
Will your project or system have a "social media" dimension? Note – will it have an interactive element which allows users to communicate directly with one another?	☐	☒
Will any decisions be automated? Note – does your system or process involve circumstances where an individual's input is "scored" or assessed without intervention/review/checking by a human being? Will there be any "profiling" of data subjects?	☐	☒

	Yes	No
Will your project/system involve CCTV or monitoring of an area accessible to the public?	☐	☒
Will you be using the data you collect to match or cross-reference against another existing set of data?	☐	☒
Will you be using any novel, or technologically advanced systems or processes? Note – this could include biometrics, "internet of things" connectivity or anything that is currently not widely utilised	☐	☒

If you answer "Yes" to any of the above, you will probably need to complete Data Protection Impact Assessment - Stage Two. If you are unsure, please consult with the Information Management Officer before proceeding.