

# Highways Winter Service Task Group

March 2019

## 1. Recommendations

The Task Group asks the Corporate Infrastructure & Regulatory Services (CIRS) Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet to endorse and action the recommendations below. The Task Group requests that an update on the progress of the recommendations should be brought back to the Corporate Infrastructure & Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.

	Overall Approach	Specific Recommendations
1.	The County Council to deliver a Winter Service policy which continues to prioritise strategic and high use sections of the highway, access to larger settlements and other key premises across the County.	<b>1.1</b> Retention of the County Council's current Winter Service Policy, with no reduction to the primary and secondary gritting networks across the County, for remainder of this Council.
		<b>1.2</b> The County Council to consider amending its salting networks to include access to all Devon GP surgeries (see costings in para 4.30), if compelling evidence can be identified of the benefits following discussion with the Devon Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).
		<b>1.3</b> The County Council to continue to monitor cycle path journeys in Exeter and other key cycling routes, and reconsider winter treatment if/when journey numbers significantly increase (i.e. when winter cycling path journeys are around 1000 per day, in line with the criteria used for roads).
2.	Communities be encouraged and supported to deliver well organised and resourced self-help and volunteer schemes, with improved, practical support from the County Council and partners.	<b>2.1</b> The County Council to support communities and cycling groups to explore options to enable the winter treatment of cycle paths in the county, through voluntary and self-help schemes, in line with the Snow Warden scheme.
		<b>2.2</b> The County Council to work with Devon & Cornwall Police, CCGs, hospital trusts and 'Devon & Cornwall 4x4 Response' to promote and encourage individuals with access to 4x4s to join

		<p>organised 4x4 response groups, to enable a more co-ordinated and efficient response to widespread snow.</p>
		<p><b>2.3</b> The County Council to provide improved support and guidance for the Snow Warden Scheme through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a review and revamp of the online guidance for the Snow Warden Scheme, to include specific guidance and signposting on getting the necessary insurance cover;</li> <li>• a hard copy version of the above guidance which can be distributed to all Devon Town and Parish Councils and relevant community groups;</li> <li>• use of social media and email alerts to inform Town and Parish Councils and community groups as and when Council gritters are treating primary and secondary routes across the County;</li> <li>• use of social media to promote community volunteering in the Snow Warden scheme and in emergency planning;</li> <li>• use of online/social media platform to provide advice/guidance and sharing of best practice for Town and Parish Councils on the Snow Warden Scheme;</li> <li>• use of Town and Parish Conferences to provide advice and guidance on the Snow Warden Scheme (and other self-help), and provide an opportunity for local councils to network and work together.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.</b></p>	<p>Improved public understanding of the dangers of driving in extreme weather and a reduction in the number of people who undertake non-essential journeys during future snow events.</p>	<p>The County Council to work with partner agencies (including police, fire service and local media) to launch a consequences based public education campaign around the risks of driving in snow and extreme weather.</p>

## 2. Background

2.1 At its January 2018 meeting, the Corporate Infrastructure & Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee considered an urgent item on the council's gritting regime, due to the impact of recent adverse weather conditions across the County (mainly ice and freezing rain).

2.2 On 26 February 2018 a Member Development session was held to provide Members with a greater understanding of the Council's gritting policy, and at this session it was further agreed that a Task Group be established to examine the current Highways 'Winter Service' policy and practice in more detail, and evaluate the success of the Snow Warden Scheme.

2.3 Following the establishment of the Task Group, late February and March 2018 saw two separate snow events. The first of which followed a red weather warning from the Met Office, and caused dangerous and unpassable road conditions in Devon and the closure of the A380. Consequently, the Task Group decided to widen the scope of the review to consider the effectiveness of the County Council and partners' response to these extreme weather events.

### Scope of the review

2.4 To examine:

- the sufficiency of the current salting network under the Highways 'Winter Service' policy
- the potential for increasing/amending the network to service primary schools, school transport routes and other local priorities
- the effectiveness of the response to widespread snow in February/March 2018 and if the available resource is appropriate for the frequency of such events
- the contribution/sufficiency of the current self-help/snow warden schemes

## 3. The Highways 'Winter Service'

### Statutory duties and the County Council's approach

3.1 As a Highway Authority, Devon County Council has a duty in law to "ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice"<sup>1</sup> as well as having a duty to remove snow as an obstruction<sup>2</sup>. The County Council complies with these duties through the delivery of its 'Winter Service' by salting major roads to prevent ice forming, as well as on some occasions clearing snow, as well as reacting to floods and fallen trees. It is widely accepted, and recognised by the UK Roads Liaison Group in their Code of Practice<sup>3</sup>, that it is not 'reasonably practicable' to provide the Winter

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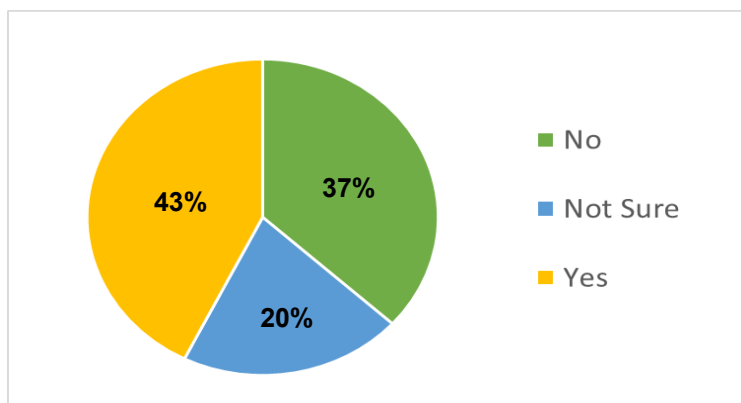
<sup>1</sup> Section 41, Highways Act 1980 (as amended by the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003)

<sup>2</sup> Section 150, Highways Act 1980 (as amended by the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003)

<sup>3</sup> Well Managed Highways: A Code of Practice, <http://www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org/en/utilities/document-summary.cfm?docid=4F93BA10-D3B0-4222-827A8C48401B26AC>

Service on all parts of the highway network, and that even treated sections of the highway may not always be free of snow and ice (rain, road temperature, severe weather can all impact the effectiveness of treatments).

3.2 The Task Group was keen to understand how communities feel about the appropriateness of the current Winter Service and therefore conducted a Town and Parish Council survey. Respondents were asked whether they consider that the County Council complies with its legal duties in respect of the Winter Service in their town or parish. A summary of responses is presented below.



3.3 Results are only indicative of the general feeling across communities; 69 town and parishes responded to the survey, around one fifth of local councils in Devon. Quite understandably, we would also expect communities who are on the primary salting network to respond more positively to this question, than those who are not.

3.4 As well as having a legal duty to provide a Winter Service, the County Council recognises the importance of keeping the county moving on the local economy, health and social care services, education, and on anyone who needs to get from A to B. However, like all local authorities, since 2010 Devon County Council has been subject to major cuts in Government funding, as well seeing an increase in demand for many of its services. This means that the Council has to look very carefully at the services it currently delivers, and the capacity for increasing service levels across the Council is very limited. A number of local authorities have made the difficult decision to reduce their Winter Service budget and consequently their gritting routes. As part of their attempt to save £15 million from their overall budget by 2020, Somerset County Council have reduced the number of their precautionary salting routes from 23 to 16<sup>4</sup>. Devon County Council has budgeted to maintain its current salting routes for the 2019/20 winter.

## What does the current Winter Service look like?

3.5 Together, the Winter Service policy and procedures ensure that the County Council complies with its legal requirements, within the resources available, and sets out how the service will be delivered in practice. This Winter Service has five key components:

- **Precautionary treatment – ‘Primary Salting Network’ (1665 miles)**
- **Extended freezing – ‘Secondary Salting Network’ (additional 350 miles)**
- **Widespread snow and ice – ‘Snow Plan’**
- **Minimum Winter Network (850 miles) - Not been used to date – would provide access to market/coastal towns and emergency services premises in the event of salt, fuel or driver shortage (i.e. during flu pandemic)**
- **Self-help – Snow Warden Scheme and grit bins / bagged salt provision**

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<sup>4</sup> Somerset County Council, Cabinet meeting 12 September 2018  
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=663&Ver=4>

3.6 The County Council contracts Skanska Ltd to carry out the Winter Service on its behalf, through its Highways Term Maintenance contract. The Devon County Council and Skanska partnership is known as 'Devon Highways'.

3.7 As per its terms of reference, the Task Group focussed its review of the Winter Service on the Primary and Secondary Salting Networks, the Snow Plan, and Self-help schemes. No detailed review of the Minimum Winter Network component of the Winter Service has been undertaken.

## 4. Primary and Secondary Salting Networks

4.1 Devon Highways deliver a precautionary treatment of salt to Devon's Primary Salting Network (see Appendix) when freezing conditions are predicted, which is around 65 times a year. The criteria used to determine which routes are included in the Primary Salting Network is as follows:

- Strategic routes – A and B roads (some C)
- Roads with more than 1000 vehicles a day
- Access to settlements of over 500 people
- Cross county boundary consistency
- Emergency service premises
- Bus routes with very frequent service
- Access to all secondary schools
- Access to hospitals, as requested by NHS

4.2 Under this criteria, 1665 miles of highway receive a precautionary treatment. This equates to only 20% of Devon's roads, but covers around 70% of traffic in the county, and provides access to 80% of Devon's population.

4.3 The Secondary Salting Network is treated when widespread ice or snow is expected to persist throughout the day; this usually occurs a handful of times a year. The criteria used for the Secondary Salting Network is as follows:

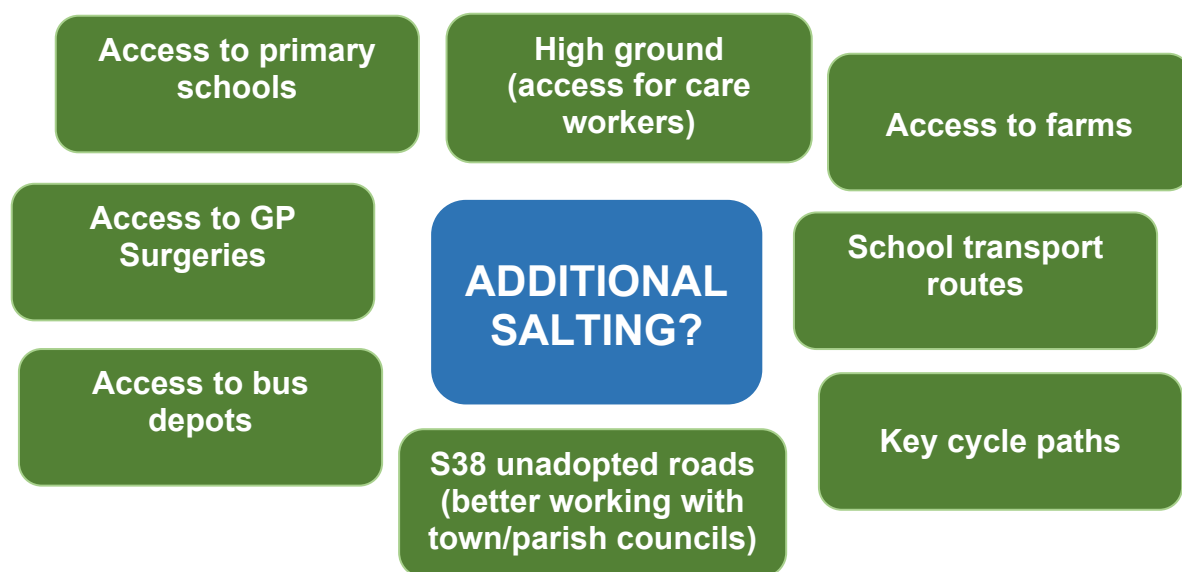
- Access to settlements of over 100 people
- Bus routes of 30 minute frequency
- Park and ride sites
- Critical County Council properties which are key to delivering essential services

4.4 This network provides treatment to a further 350 miles of Devon's roads and reasonable access to an additional 10% of Devon's population.

### Are the Primary and Secondary Salting Networks sufficient?

4.5 Members received feedback from a range of stakeholders and witnesses on the sufficiency of the Council's current salting networks over the course of the Task Group review. Feedback was generally positive, with the majority of people accepting the limitations of the Council's resources and being supportive of the Council's policy to focus on keeping major and high use routes moving.

4.6 However there were also a number of areas highlighted that might benefit from being added to the Primary or Secondary Salting Network.



4.7 Any consideration to increase the current Primary and/or Secondary Salting Network brings a number of financial implications and challenges. A significant change to the network will require route optimisation work costing £60,000-£100,000. Every additional salting route added to the network brings an additional annual cost of £40,000-£55,000. Any additional routes which include narrow roads may require smaller spreaders, with lower capacity (and increased cost).

4.8 Increasing the network could also cause additional strain on contractor resources and any significant increase in salt use will lower resilience within the existing barn capacity. It is also important that the Council maintains a clear and consistent criteria for salting, to ensure parity across the County and to maintain a robust legal position.

4.9 The Task Group considered in greater detail four of the areas raised; access to primary schools and school transport routes (both of which had been raised by some communities prior to the establishment of the Task Group), and cycle paths and access to GP surgeries (both of which were specifically raised by stakeholders during the course of this review).

### Access to Primary Schools

4.10 Concern had been raised locally with Members over the traverseability of roads to and from primary schools, particularly in rural areas, during periods of ice and snow. Roads which become difficult to travel on cause a safety concern, and in addition, although most families accept that during episodes of extreme snow, primary schools will close as of course, parents can feel frustrated when rural schools close their doors during episodes of light snow and less extreme weather, particularly if it is felt that some additional salting would prevent closure.

4.11 Of the 303 primary schools in Devon, over a third currently sit on the Primary Salting Network. The Task Group considered the financial implications of extending the Primary

Salting Network to include access from the current salting network to all primary schools, and then prioritisation based on pupil numbers and altitude.

Criteria	Additional distance	Potential pupils benefitting	Estimated additional cost
On Primary salting n/w	0	38%	£0
All primary schools	140km (3 routes)	100%	£120,000-£165,000
Over 200 pupils	17.4km (1 route)	74%	£40,000-£55,000
Over 100 pupils	40km (1 route)	92%	£40,000-£55,000
Over 200m in height	16km (1 route)	40%	£40,000-£55,000
Over 150m in height	40km (2 routes)	48%	£80,000-£110,000
Over 100m in height	72km (up to 3 routes)	59%	£120,000-£165,000

4.12 Although altitude tends to be a good indicator for areas likely to be affected by snow, it is less indicative for frost and ice, which can form at different altitudes dependant on the weather scenario. Not surprisingly, figures also clearly show that using pupil numbers as a criteria has the potential to support the school journey of many more children, than the altitude criteria.

4.13 Crucially however, the estimates provided are based on extending routes from the Primary Salting Network to each primary school, and although this may be helpful for some pupils, this will not help children travelling from neighbouring villages or isolated rural areas, who do not touch either the original or the proposed extension to the network on their route to school.

4.14 In addition, teaching and support staff tend to live further away from school than their pupils, so the benefit of linking a school to the Primary Salting Network for staff is also difficult to establish. And, ability of staff to get to and from the school site is very often the key factor, when a school takes the decision to close for the day or to send children home.

4.15 Without conducting a very detailed consultation and analysis with each of the potentially affected schools, it is very difficult to draw any conclusions about the number of pupils who would actually benefit from this kind of alteration to the network.

## School transport network

4.16 A number of concerns have also been raised with Members of the impact of snow and ice on the reliability and safety of school transport services.

4.17 Due to the rural nature of the County, Devon's school transport network is vast. The network consists of a number of school buses carrying multiple children, but also taxis collecting just one or two children from more remote areas, and pupils attending special schools across the County. As of August 2018 Devon's school transport network was 8,139km long. In comparison the County Council's current primary and secondary salting network is 3,210km. It would clearly be impractical and unaffordable for the Council to salt the entire school transport network.

4.18 Adding some of the more frequented school transport routes to the primary or secondary salting network could be a more affordable option, however, school transport routes are revised annually, as well as amended in year, as pupils' journey's change in line



with school moves and family house moves. Ensuring the most necessary routes were being treated would require a route optimisation exercise to be undertaken annually, costing at least £60,000 per exercise.

4.19 From a safety point of view, an examination of school bus injury collision data over the last 10 years does not show any evidence of snow or ice on the road being a factor, or even present, with seven incidents having occurred on a dry road and five on a damp or wet road.

## Cycle paths

4.20 During the course of this review, the Task Group were contacted by an Exeter City Councillor and the Exeter Cycling Campaign regarding the lack of gritting on cycle paths in Exeter. Concerns raised related to the safety of cyclists during winter, but also to the Council's role in promoting and enabling cycling as transport across the County, and the public health, congestion and environmental benefits associated with increased cycling as a mode of transport. In addition, many cycle paths in Exeter and across the County are 'shared use', and are therefore used by pedestrians, as well as cyclists.

4.21 In respect of safety, and the frequency of accidents and injury caused to cyclists slipping on ice, there is very little useful recorded information available. However, anecdotal evidence from the Exeter Cycle Campaign and from members of the public, indicate that slips and associated injuries on cycle paths are relatively common place during the winter.

4.22 The County Council's current Winter Service policy provide for salting treatments on roads which receive over 1000 vehicles per day, and currently has no provision for routinely treating cycle paths or footpaths. The highest use cycle paths in Exeter are the Haven Banks and Riverside Valley Park routes, which according to data recorded in January 2018, receive an average of 613 and 586 cycle journeys a day respectively, during winter. This is considerably lower than the minimum requirement for roads to be treated.

4.23 The County Council is responsible for local transport planning within Devon and a key part of the Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan<sup>5</sup> is working with communities to provide safe, sustainable and low carbon transport choices, of which promoting and enabling cycling is an important element. The County Council has committed significant sums of money over several years to deliver new cycle infrastructure to encourage more people to cycle more often, more safely. Since 2015 the County Council has delivered over £20million of cycle projects; examples include new routes on Dartmoor and the final sections of the Exe Estuary trail. Monitoring of cycle numbers has shown increased levels of cycling across the County as a result of this investment, which suggests that delivering new cycle routes which are safe, convenient and attractive to use is the most effective way to boost cycling.

4.24 All cycle routes monitored by the Council record reduced cycling journeys during the winter months. The number of instances when the paths are icy over the course of the year is relatively few, and dark nights, cold weather and rain are equally likely to have an influence on whether people cycle or not. By gritting paths, it would enable regular cyclists

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<sup>5</sup> <https://new.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/traffic-information/transport-planning/devon-and-torbay-local-transport-plan-3-2011-2026/>

to use some of the County's cycle paths every day of the year, but it seems unlikely that the gritting of cycle paths would encourage non-cyclists or less confident cyclists to take up cycling, which is the County Council's priority target groups.

4.25 If the Council was to make the decision to treat some of its highest use cycle paths in Devon on safety or sustainable transport grounds, there would be a reasonable capital investment required in appropriate equipment; a quad bike towing a bowser for spraying brine (rather than salt); for each treatment route required, as well as the ongoing revenue costs of treatment. By way of example, the annual cost of treating all 53km of cycle paths in Exeter would be in the region of £60,219, with capital investment in equipment of £30,000 (two vehicles).

4.26 The Task Group are sympathetic to the difficulties that untreated cycle paths provide for those who cycle, but considering current levels of cycling in the County, and the financial restraints that the highways service is under, Members do not feel that County Council delivery of a winter service for cycle paths can be a priority at this time.

4.27 As has already been highlighted, the Council's responsibility under law is to ensure that highways remain free of ice 'as far as is reasonably practicable'. Beyond this, there remains a responsibility on all individuals to make decisions about their choice of travel method and travel route.

4.28 However, with support from the County Council, there is potential for community and cycling groups to meet the needs of those who cycle through a self-help scheme, similar to the Snow Warden scheme.

## **GP Surgeries**

4.29 The two Devon Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have raised concerns about the lack of winter treatment of roads to and from Primary Care Facilities (primarily GP surgeries) across the County, suggesting that patients who are unable to safely access their GP surgery maybe present at acute hospitals instead.

4.30 A review of Primary Care Facilities shows that 92 out of 144 premises are already located on the primary salting network, with a further 25 being located within 100 metres of the network. If the primary salting network was extended to include direct access to all Primary Care Facilities this would require one additional salting route, with a cost of £40,000-£55,000. It might be considered more proportionate to add Primary Care Facilities to the Secondary Salting Network, which is treated in periods of extended freezing; this cost would be much lower, at around £5,000-£10,000.

4.31 If the lack of gritting to GP surgeries is causing additional pressures on acute hospitals, the Task Group would be keen to suggest further investment in winter treatment to respond to this. However, Devon CCGs have not at this stage presented the Task Group with any evidence to support the supposition that a lack of gritting to GP surgeries actually results in increased presentations at acute hospitals, and given the Council's very limited financial resources, Members feel that the Council would need to satisfy itself of this impact, before making any changes to its salting network.

## 5. Widespread snow and ice – ‘Snow Plans’

5.1 Whilst preventative treatments are sufficient during most of the winter period, episodes of more extreme weather require a more widespread, multi-agency response. The ‘Snow Plan’ is activated when snow is likely to cause disruption to travel in a specific area, or across the County. When this happens, the Council prioritises the Primary Salting Network for clearance (excluding the moors, unless snow is only an issue on high ground). Following this, the Secondary Salting Network and footways in main shopping centres will be cleared, followed by other access routes and footways, as resources will allow.

5.2 Key routes which are particularly susceptible to snow, the A380 Telegraph Hill and the A361 from Tiverton to South Molton, have special Snow Plans which include multi-agency pre-event meetings (Police, Fire, Highways England), the setting up of the Forward Command Post (central point of contact for all agencies involved), and active road and traffic management.

### Are the Council’s ‘Snow Plans’ sufficient?

5.3 The Countywide Snow Plan was implemented twice during February and March 2018, when the County saw two separate widespread snow events. Feedback from stakeholders about the Council’s management of the road network was generally positive, but a number of challenges were also identified, as laid out below.

#### SUCCESSES

- Accurate and well communicated weather forecasting
- Critical routes managed well, passable for emergency services
- Road closure/accessibility information and safety advice was well communicated
- Multi-agency working was well co-ordinated through the Local Resilience Forum and the Highways Operational Control Centre
- Police were able to make use of volunteer drivers/vehicles from Devon & Cornwall 4x4 Response
- Schools able to make informed and timely decisions about closure
- Social media and digital communication used and accessed more widely than ever before
- Community response was overwhelming, many people volunteering to transport hospital/social care staff in 4x4s
- Many health, social care, emergency services, highways etc staff went ‘above and beyond’ to get the job done

#### CHALLENGES

- Some people ignored advice not to travel and got stuck, despite ‘red’ weather warnings and widespread media coverage of dangers
- Acute hospitals found there was a lack of 4x4 vehicles available to hire and limited number volunteer drivers/vehicles from Devon & Cornwall 4x4 Response available
- Challenges around the use of individual volunteers with 4x4s – agencies having no knowledge of their driving skill, DBS checks etc
- Snow events across the County are rare and so volunteer arrangements, training etc can easily become out of date or forgotten by the time they are needed again
- Agencies and communities were able to cope for a few days, but capacity, resources and ability to cope would deplete considerably if snow continued

5.4 Severe snow events which cause countywide travel disruption are relatively unusual, and so there is always a challenge for the County Council and partner agencies to balance resourcing and preparedness for these type of events, alongside more regular and immediate priorities.

5.5 Based on the evidence gathered, the Task Group feels that the County Council's Snow Plans and the overall multi-agency response achieves a good balance. However, there is the potential for a better co-ordinated volunteer and community response, and a need to encourage volunteers to join organised 4x4 response organisations. The County Council and partners should have a key role in supporting and enabling this.

5.6 During the March 2018 snow, it was also evident that despite communication from the County Council and partner agencies regarding the dangers of driving in such conditions, a number of people did not take heed, resulting in vehicles becoming stranded and an increased risk to the public and emergency services and other workers. Education in this area needs to be stepped up, at a local and national level.

## 6. Self-help – Snow Warden scheme

6.1 The Snow Warden Scheme in Devon was initially set up to support and equip town and parish councils to clear snow in areas not covered by other parts of the Winter Service. As the scheme developed, many Snow Wardens took on salt spreading and ordering as well. Snow Wardens may be assisted by one or more Snow Warden volunteers. A plan for delivering the Snow Warden scheme must be developed and agreed by the County Council and the town or parish council. Snow Wardens must undertake appropriate training and town/parish councils must ensure that they are insured to carry out the work; only public liability cover is provided by the County Council.

### Devon County Council

- Provides advice & training
- Records details of Snow Wardens
- Supplies limited bagged salt free of charge (further salt can be purchased)
- Provides public liability cover

### The Snow Warden

- Works to the Town/Parish Council Snow Plan
- Orders grit supplies
- Keeps a record of Snow Warden volunteers
- Receives and acts on local weather forecasting
- Organises & deploys volunteers to spread grit when icy conditions are forecast
- Organises & deploys volunteers to clear snow
- Encourages responsible use of grit/salt

### Snow Warden volunteer

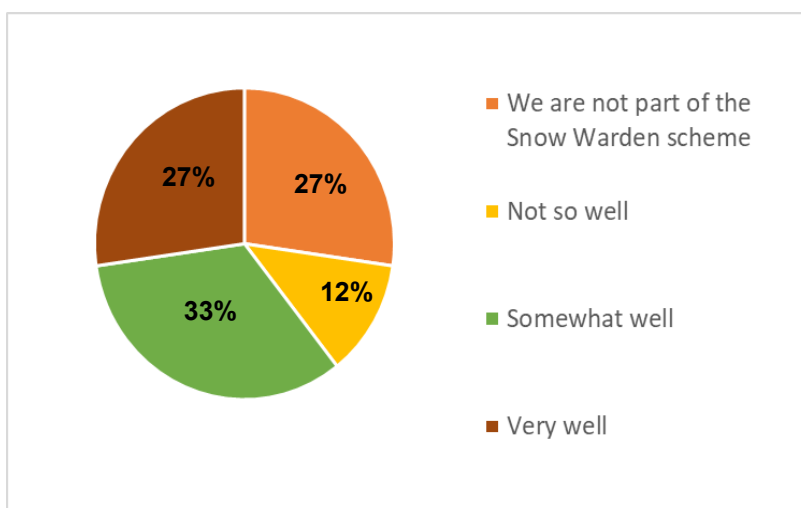
- Spreads grit/salt
- Clears snow
- Refills grit bins and bags
- Reports issues with grit bins and bags online

6.2 Towable salt spreaders and other necessary equipment must be provided by the town or parish council, however County Councillors can use their locality budgets to contribute towards the cost of these.

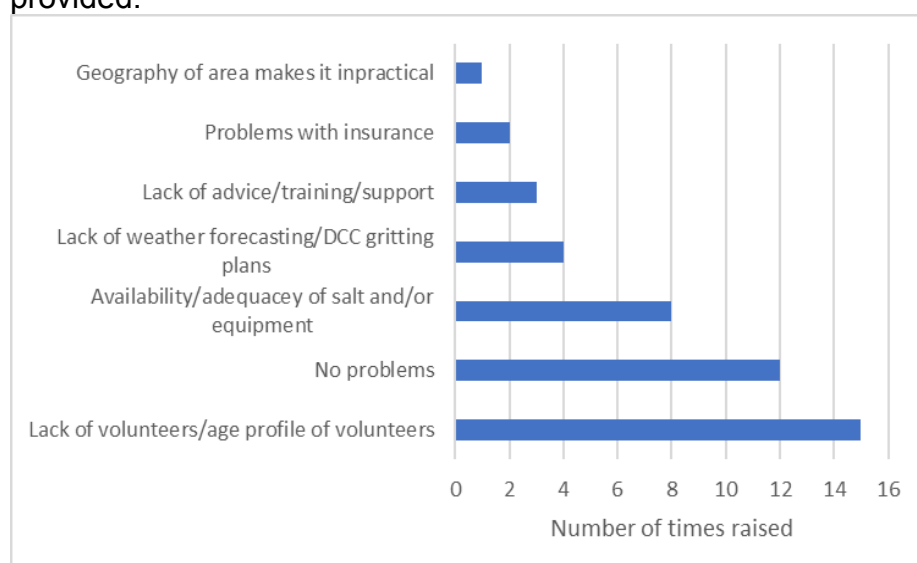
6.3 The County Council provides grit bins, and to a far more limited extent, bagged salt, across the county. With over 3,500 deployed, it is a very expensive asset to maintain and fill, and the authority needs to contain their expansion. Communities, as part of the Snow Warden scheme can purchase and maintain their own grit/salt bins (by agreement with the County Council where placed on the highway). Where other funding is not available, County Councillors can use their locality budgets to fund grit bins, providing it fits broadly within the Winter Service Policy.

### How well is the Snow Warden Scheme working?

6.4 Whilst again acknowledging that the below chart can only be indicative of experiences across the County, responses to the question 'how well does the Snow Warden scheme work in your town or parish?', indicate that the scheme is working well in many areas.



6.5 When asked if there had been any barriers or challenges in either joining or continuing with the Snow Warden scheme, a variety of responses were provided.



6.6 Difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers, particularly those able to do manual work, were raised again when the Task Group met with town and parish councillors and clerks, as were issues relating to equipment and salt provision, and lack of communication and co-ordination with the County Council over their salting schedule.

## Volunteers

6.7 The recruitment and retention of Snow Wardens and their volunteers appeared to be the biggest problem for town and parish councils. Many also reported that they were particularly short of younger people and those more capable of carrying out the manual work required. This is a difficult challenge for town and parishes to overcome, but this may be an area that the County Council could take a greater role in promoting and encouraging people to come forward as volunteers.

## Insurance

6.8 Problems securing adequate insurance arrangements has been raised as an issue with Members locally, as well as through this Task Group review. The County Council provides Public Liability insurance for any Snow Warden or Snow Warden volunteer working under the scheme, which means that if any damage to property or personal injury was caused to a third party as a result of work being carried out under the Snow Warden Scheme, the County Council's insurance would cover this. In addition, the County Council also has a personal accident policy for employees and volunteers which would provide a one-off payment of up to £5000 in the event of serious injury or death. The Council's insurers have confirmed that this cover does also apply to volunteers working under the Snow Warden scheme.

6.9 Public liability insurance however does not apply to any work being carried out in a vehicle, which by law, requires motor insurance cover. It is this motor insurance cover that some town and parish councils have had difficulty securing, particularly where the towing of a gritter is required. In most cases the Snow Warden or volunteer will use their own vehicle to carry out this work, and therefore the expected route for this cover is that the individual carrying out the work will arrange for their existing personal or business motor insurance to be extended to include this. Most motor insurers are happy to provide additional cover for voluntary work for no extra premium, however the specific nature of Snow Warden work seems to cause problems for some, with some local councils reporting that insurers have either refused to provide cover, or will only do so at significant cost. There are however different experiences across the County, with many local councils reporting no issues at all.

6.10 It is likely that the inconsistencies in experience are down to a number of factors (whether the current policy is personal or business, whether towing is required, individual motor insurers approach, the detail on the type of work provided by the insured), however, clearly obtaining the correct level of insurance is a barrier to the success of the scheme, where this is an issue. One local council advised that they have purchased a towable gritter, but have been unable to use it because of this issue.

6.11 Through discussion with the Council's Insurance Manager, a number of solutions to this problem have been considered:

- utilising the County Council's own corporate motor insurance policy;
- arranging a bespoke policy for town and parish councils to buy into;
- town and parish council's arranging their own motor cover through a specialist insurer.

6.12 The only option which seems at all viable is the third, however the success of this option rests entirely on the insurance market's willingness to respond to this need. The



County Council's own insurance broker has suggested a specialist 4x4 and off-road motor broker who may be interested in arranging this kind of cover, but it would be for individual town and parish councils to investigate this option with the broker further. However, if this option turns out to be unviable, then the County Council must continue working to find a solution to this problem.

## Information, support and cross parish working

6.13 Many town and parishes have requested better information from the County Council about when they plan to treat local roads, to enable them to co-ordinate their work under the Snow Warden scheme. The County Council does send email alerts to those local councils who have signed up for this, but there seemed to be lack of awareness of this alert, or knowledge of how to sign up among town and parishes.

6.14 A lack of advice, guidance and in some cases, access to appropriate training, has also been raised by local councils. Much of the information that communities need regarding the Snow Warden scheme can be found on the County Council's website<sup>6</sup>, however the addition of more detailed advice around obtaining motor insurance would be helpful, along with clearer signposting for arranging training etc. Better promotion of the Snow Warden webpages and the scheme more generally, could help boost the number of local councils who engage with the scheme, as well as promoting the advice and guidance available to town and parishes who are already engaged.

6.15 Many town and parishes councils felt that more opportunities were needed for them to come together to share experiences and good practice, both in terms of the Snow Warden scheme and a range of other issues. Some local councils have detailed Parish Emergency Plans in place, whereas others do not. The Task Group considers that both the County Council, alongside Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) should have a key role in supporting town and parish councils to work better together and share learning.

## 7. Conclusion

7.1 Having reviewed the sufficiency and effectiveness of the Highways Winter Service, the Task Group considers that the current policy and practice in respect of both preventative and reactive treatments, and the Council and partners response to widespread snow and ice, is largely appropriate and well balanced.

7.2 There are some sections of the highway network that the County Council could be justified in adding to its salting routes, however, in the context of reduced funding and savings requirements, Members would need to see clear evidence that these changes would make a significant difference for those using the network.

7.3 The Snow Warden scheme works well in many parts of the County, and this success should be celebrated. However, there remain a number of challenges that town and parish councils face in engaging with the scheme; some of which are within the gift of the County Council to improve, others are not.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://new.devon.gov.uk/communities/opportunities/snow-warden-scheme>

7.4 There is an opportunity to build on the community spirit and good will shown by so many people during the February and March 2018 snow events, and the County Council, as the upper tier authority in Devon, has the responsibility to support local communities to engage volunteers, help themselves and work successfully together.

## 8. Membership

Councillors Polly Colthorpe (Chair), Alistair Dewhirst, Linda Hellyer, Richard Hosking and Andrew Saywell

## 9. Contact

For all enquiries about this report or its contents please contact:  
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## 10. Sources of Evidence

### Task Group Activity

The Task Group undertook a range of evidence gathering activity including:

- Winter Service Masterclass (26<sup>th</sup> February 2018)
- Scoping Meeting with lead highways officers (5<sup>th</sup> April 2018)
- Stakeholder Engagement Workshop (21<sup>st</sup> May 2018)
- Witness Interviews (28<sup>th</sup> June 2018, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2018, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018 and 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019)
- Town & Parish Council Feedback meeting (19<sup>th</sup> December 2018)
- Town & Parish Council Survey
- Desk research

### Witnesses

The Task Group heard testimony from a number of stakeholders and witnesses and would like to express sincere thanks to the following people for their contribution and the information shared.

Chris Cranston	Highways Operations and Communications, Devon County Council
Matthew Scriven	Traffic Management, Devon County Council
Paul Edmonds	School Transport, Devon County Council
Martin Carder	School Transport, Devon County Council
Nicola Channon	Emergency Planning, Devon County Council
Katharine Finnigan	Adult Social Care Commissioning, Devon County Council
Tom Dixon	Digital Communications, Devon County Council
Chief Inspector Adrian Leisk	Devon & Cornwall Police
Rob Llewellyn	Highways England



Simon Kane	Skanska
Jason Tetley	Skanska
Ric Robins	Met Office
Mark Bevan	Met Office
Richard Gilpin	South West Water
Ann Maidment	CLA (Country Land and Business Association)
Ralph Rayner	CLA
Michael Green	Federation of Small Business
Andrew Butler	NFU (National Farmers Union)
Rhys Williams	Road Haulage Association
Chris Comer	Stagecoach
Lesley Smith	Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC)
Anne Mayes	Bridford Snow Warden
Jamie Stone	Devon Association of Primary Headteachers (DAPH)
Rob Andrews	Mears
Donald McIntosh	Tally Ho Coaches
Will Kearns	South West Ambulance Service (SWAST)
Jo Smith	Royal Devon & Exeter NHS Trust
Ian Payne	Devon Air Ambulance
Emily Wilkins	Corporate Insurance, Devon County Council
Tony Matthews	Neighbourhood Highways, Devon County Council
Biddy Walton	Exeter Cycling Campaign
Paul D'eathe	Exeter Cycling Campaign
Peter Mason	Gallaghers (Insurance Broker)
Cllr Ray Bloxham	Cranbrook Town Council and Devon County Council
Cllr Brian Lamb	Bere Ferrers Parish Council
Cllr Anthony Howell-Jones	Poltimore Parish Council
Cllr Ray Watts	Colyton Parish Council
Cllr Derek Boustred	Stoke Canon Parish Council
Cllr Tessa King	Dartington Parish Council
Cllr Kevin Farrelly	Abbotskerswell Parish Council
David Munden	Abbotskerswell Parish Council

## References

### Devon County Council, Snow Warden Scheme

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/communities/opportunities/snow-warden-scheme>

### Devon County Council, Winter Travel

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/safe-travel/winter-travel/>

### Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/traffic-information/transport-planning/devon-and-torbay-local-transport-plan-3-2011-2026/>

### Highways Act 1980

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/66/contents>

**Somerset County Council, Cabinet meeting 12 September 2018**

<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=663&Ver=4>

**Somerset Live, 'Why are we paying taxes?'**

<https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/why-paying-taxes-somerset-county-2484103>

**UK Roads Liaison Group, Well Managed Highways: A Code of Practice, October 2016**

<http://www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org/en/utilities/document-summary.cfm?docid=4F93BA10-D3B0-4222-827A8C48401B26AC>