

Agenda Item	10
Report No	CC/22/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Caithness

Date: 3 August 2026

Report Title: Winter Service Plan for 2026/27

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report details the 2026/27 Winter Service Plan for Caithness.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to **approve** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** - The Winter Service must be provided in line with the relevant budget and resources (plant, materials and labour) available.

3.2 **Legal** - Under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, The Highland Council has a duty to keep roads reasonably free of snow and ice.

3.3 **Risk** - If Winter Service is not provided then there is the potential risk to life. There are no particular risks associated with this report.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – Any risks are mitigated through training.

3.5 **Gaelic** - This report has no impact on Gaelic considerations.

4 Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 20 July 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there are no impacts to associate with winter maintenance operations. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.3	Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment
	Equality	- Children and Young People – <i>no impact</i> - Children affected by disability – <i>no impact</i> - Older adults – <i>no impact</i>
	Socio-economic	<i>no impact</i>
	Human Rights	<i>no impact</i>
	Children's Rights and Well-being	<i>no impact</i>
	Island and Mainland Rural	<i>no impact</i>
	Climate Change	<i>no impact</i>
	Data Rights	<i>no impact</i>

5 Background

5.1 The Council's Scheme of Delegation to Area Committees gives them the power to approve the Winter Service Plan within the strategy and budget allocated by Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

5.2 Under Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, a Roads Authority shall take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads.

5.3 The Council's Winter Service Policy is in place to ensure a consistent level of service between areas and to ensure, as far as possible, the safety of drivers and pedestrians; however, the operation of that Policy does not, and cannot, ensure that every road and footway will be free of ice or snow at all times.

5.4 Each operational area has their own Winter Service Plan which sets out the operational details required to deliver a service and comply with the Council's policy. The plan takes account of the current policy.

5.5 The winter service for the area is provided from the following depots: -

- Wick
- Thurso

6 Winter Service Policy

6.1 The Council's Winter Service Policy sets out the hierarchy of priorities for treatment, target times for treatment and the hours of operation. The current Winter Service Policy is available on the Council website at:-

<https://www.highland.gov.uk/emergencies-safety-crime/winter-service>

6.2 Primary routes are treated first; thereafter secondary routes and then all other routes are treated as resources permit. Exception to this will be where a gritter must travel across a secondary or other route to treat a higher priority road.

6.3 The total lengths of each Priority in the operational area are:-

Route Type	Length (km)	Percentage (%)
Primary	135	33
Secondary	222	55
Other	49	12

6.4 The Council publishes Winter Services leaflets for each operational area which provide the public with information on snow clearing and gritting of Council roads, along with maps showing the priority attributed to individual roads.

6.5 The leaflets and Policy information are provided on the "Winter Road Maintenance" pages on the Council's web site at:-

<https://www.highland.gov.uk/emergencies-safety-crime/winter-service/2>

Route maps for the Area are included in **Appendix 2**.

7 Forecast/Decision Making

7.1 The Council employs a professional forecast provider who provides weather forecasts. Separate forecasts are received for the 8 climatic zones across Highland to support local decision making.

7.2 The daily forecast is received by noon and covers the following 36 hours. This forecast is used to plan treatment for the evening and following morning. The forecast is checked by the provider overnight. If there is any adverse deterioration in the forecast during the forecast period, an update is provided directly to the duty officer(s) by telephone.

- 7.3 Across The Highland Council, real time data is obtained from weather stations (including those located on the Trunk Road). These sensors provide information on the road surface temperature, surface condition (wet, dry, ice), and the presence of salt, graded 1, 2 or 3 (3 is the maximum).
- 7.4 A Duty Officer rota is operated to ensure that there is always a suitably qualified and experienced member of staff available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to take decisions on the deployment of appropriate resources to deal with the prevailing weather conditions.
- 7.5 Duty officers have all had training from the weather forecast provider. Training is refreshed every three years.

8 Staff Establishment

- 8.1 The numbers of manual workers allocated to road maintenance is determined by the number of routes required to deliver the winter service policy. Where necessary, staff from other services such as Amenities may be used to supplement the existing resources.
- 8.2 Operatives normally allocated to grounds maintenance and street sweeping (Amenities and Waste staff) are used to provide resources for treating footpaths. The majority of these operatives hold ordinary driving licences, which generally restrict their involvement to the operating of mini tractors and vehicles of 3.5 tonnes or less.
- 8.3 A standby system is put in place over the winter period to ensure sufficient drivers are available to cover weekends. An operative is also put on standby during the week which allows an initial response to emergencies out of hours.

9 Vehicles and Plant

- 9.1 The number of frontline gritting vehicles and footpath tractors is shown in the table below. Vehicles may be based in various depots across the area. There are a limited number of spare gritters available across Highland.

Vehicle	Number
Gritter	10
Footpath Tractor	6

- 9.2 Each vehicle treats, on average, 35.7km of primary and secondary routes followed by 5km of other routes.
- 9.3 Some footway tractors treat several villages, which involve travel time between routes, and this will impact on the length they can treat in a day.

10 Treatments

- 10.1 Winter service treatments consist of morning routes, evening precautionary treatment routes and, during extreme/ poor conditions, continuous or all-day treatments.
- 10.2 All operations begin at 06:00hrs and can continue to 21:00hrs. Saturday and Sunday operations also begin at 06:00hrs and treat primary routes, strategic secondary routes excluding school transport routes and difficult other routes. The routes covered during snow conditions may be restricted to the primary network.
- 10.3 Treatments consist of the application of pure salt or occasionally salt/sand mix and, where required, blading or ploughing snow from the road surface. A spread rate for salt application has been agreed by Council, dependant on weather conditions.

11 Salt

- 11.1 The average annual usage of salt for the area is approximately 6,000 tonnes. Although the occurrence of snow lying on the roads has reduced, ice and frost remain prevalent, especially on the higher routes. Before the start of the winter season, there is sufficient salt in stock or on order spread across our depot locations.

12 Provision of Grit/ Salt Bins

- 12.1 Grit/ salt bins are provided in accordance with the Highland Council Grit Bin Policy:-
<https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory-record/4871/grit-bin-policy>
- 12.2 The bins are filled before the winter period. They are replenished regularly over defined routes as well as on an ad-hoc basis as required, subject to availability of resources.

13 Co-ordination and Support for Other Services

- 13.1 There is on-going co-ordination between Council Services and the NHS to close any local gaps in the winter service at e.g. schools, care homes and housing estates.
- 13.2 At times of extreme weather, Council Services meet as a group to coordinate action to address issues of access to schools, health services and care services. Representatives from the Council's Emergency Planning section, Police, HIFRS, NHS, Transport Scotland, Trunk Road Operating Companies and other key agencies are involved if there is a requirement to consider the wider implications of a winter emergency. The meetings are normally chaired by a representative from the Chief Executive's Service. The Council's Communications Team are kept informed to enable appropriate communication with the public through media and social networking channels.

14 Exceptional Conditions

- 14.1 While the resources set out above will deal with most winter events, there may be occasions, for example periods of heavy prolonged snowfall, when additional resources are required.
- 14.2 To help deal with these exceptional situations, local contractors are available who can supply equipment and operators to assist in clearing deep snow at short notice.
- 14.3 Other Place Service resources are also available to assist with the treatment of footways, i.e. Amenities and Waste.
- 14.4 For operational reasons during the season, some routes may require to be amended daily; this is normal practice for these types of eventualities, including for exceptional weather conditions, and is delegated to managers to decide on.

15 Community Self-Help

- 15.1 The Council also encourages communities to “self-help” as much as possible and to generate awareness of people within their community that may need assistance from neighbours in clearing snow and ice or possibly shopping or accessing health and social services during extreme weather conditions.
- 15.2 Community self-help is also being encouraged under the Council’s Winter Resilience scheme whereby communities can submit an application via their community council to carry out footway gritting operations within an agreed area. The Council will provide the community with salt/grit, bins, scrapers and reflective waistcoats. It is important to note that this does not replace the service provided by the Council but allows the community to provide an enhanced level of service.
- 15.3 Guidance is also published on the Council web site and by the Scottish Government on their web site (<https://ready.scot/>) urging people to be prepared for emergencies and extreme weather.
- 15.4 The Council also provides (on request) salt/gritting services for key strategic local service providers, including hospitals, health centres, fire stations, airports, train stations etc.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 20 July 2026

Author: Joanne Sutherland

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Winter Route Plan

Integrated Impact Assessment

Appendix 1

Protected Characteristics	• Sex • Age • Disability • Religion or Belief • Religion or Belief • Race • Sexual Orientation • Gender Reassignment • Pregnancy and Maternity • Marriage and Civil Partnership	No impacts	Winter treatment of roads does not discriminate on any protected characteristics.
Poverty and Socio Economics	• Prospects and opportunities – the potential impact on people's life chances • Places – the potential to impact on specific vulnerable areas or communities • Financial impact – the potential impact on household resources	No impacts	Winter treatment of roads does not discriminate on poverty and socioeconomics.
Human Rights	• Article 8: Respect for private and family life, home and correspondence • Article 9: Freedom of thought, belief and religion • Article 10: Freedom of expression • Article 12: Right to marry and found a family • Article 14: Protection from discrimination • Protocol 1, Article 1: Right to peaceful enjoyment of property • Protocol 1, Article 2: Right to education • Protocol 1, Article 3: Right to participate in free elections	No impacts	Winter treatment of roads does not impact on Human Rights.

Children's rights and wellbeing	• You are working in the best interests of the child (Article 3) • You are providing an opportunity for children to express their views in any matter affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously (Article 12) • Children with disabilities can live a full life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community (Article 23) • Children have a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development (Article 27) • Children have a right to education (Article 28) • Education that develops their personality, talents and abilities to the full (Article 29) • Children have the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities (Article 31)	No impacts	Winter treatment of roads does not impact children's rights and wellbeing.
Data Protection	• What change will there be to the way personal data is processed?	No impacts	Personal data is not recorded during winter maintenance operations.
Island and mainland rural communities	• Does your proposal impact island and mainland rural communities?	No impacts	Roads serving mainland rural communities are included in the winter maintenance plan as per the road hierarchy.
Climate change	• Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO2e)? • Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? • Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing climate?	No impacts	The winter maintenance plan increases the resilience to extreme weather.

Winter Route Plan

Appendix 2

