

# Winter service preparations get a boost ahead of the coming season

New guidance published by the National Winter Service Research Group aims to help the sector ensure that it is well prepared in case heavy weather returns later this year, says Justin Ward.

Good planning before the winter season commences is crucial to the success of winter service. This includes ensuring that agreed and appropriate policies have been developed, service levels have been defined and an effective management and decision making system is in place.

It is also vital that authorities remember the salt stock resilience benchmark of 12 days/48 gritting runs, and it is prudent to ensure that restocking is undertaken regularly to retain the benchmark throughout the winter season.

With this in mind the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) has published its 'Planning for Winter Service' guidance through the UK Roads Liaison Group, which is available on the UKRLG website. The guidance is the latest in a series of sections within the NWSRG Practical Guide.

The aim of the new advice is to help authorities review their current policies and practices, as well as providing references to further relevant information within other sections of the guidance.



↑ Material is loaded on to a spreading machine at a depot. AMEY

One authority to appear in the new guidance is Kent County Council. Its highways project manager Carol Valentine – who is also a member of the NWSRG – says: "Planning for whatever the UK winter brings is essential for all local highway authorities.



*"Planning for whatever the UK winter brings is essential for authorities."*  
Carol Valentine

"Over the past 10 years we have experienced a few snow events which have tested our planning and contractual arrangements. Good planning has helped, as has sound mutual benefit arrangements with our neighbours.

"I am pleased to see all the good practice that has been included in the updated planning section of the NWSRG Practical Guide and I am sure that all highway authorities will benefit from reviewing their service in the light of the revised and updated guidance."

According to the new guidance, Kent has long been working with neighbouring authorities to provide mutual aid for winter maintenance.

Over the past few years, meetings have taken place alongside winter practitioners from the South East 7 local government administrative group for the region, which brings together Kent



← A new vehicle with snowplough. ECON UK

## UK ROADS LIAISON GROUP

c/o CIHT, 119 Britannia Walk  
London N1 7JE  
email: [info@ciht.org.uk](mailto:info@ciht.org.uk)  
tel: 0207 336 1555  
web: [ukroadsliaisongroup.org](http://ukroadsliaisongroup.org)  
twitter: @ukrlg

**UKRLG Chair:** Stephen Fidler

**UKRLG Board Chairs:**  
**Roads:** James Bailey  
**Lighting:** David Denner

**Bridges:** Liz Kirkham  
**Network Management:** Mark Kemp  
**Asset Management:** Garry Sterritt

**Senior Policy Officer:**

Justin Ward  
email: [justin.ward@ciht.org.uk](mailto:justin.ward@ciht.org.uk)  
tel: 0207 336 1584

with the unitary authority of Medway as well as Hampshire, Surrey, East and West Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

It also liaises with managing agent contractor A-one+ from Area 4 to discuss plans, procurement, budgets, mutual aid and engagement with the community.

Kent County Council has, for many years, had arrangements in place with the managing agent contractors to provide reciprocal help and has shared stocks of salt from two depots in the north and east of the county.

Weighbridge tickets monitor salt use and stocks were replenished as needed. This arrangement provided flexibility for the council – allowing it to access Highways England’s salt – and vice versa, thereby increasing resilience.

If it were it ever needed, Highways England’s salt spreaders and drivers can also be made available to Kent.

The guidance adds that back in February 2018, when snowfall affected large parts of the UK, close working with Highways England was critical to Kent because pre ordered salt had been delayed coming into the county.



↑ Snow clearing in action ISTOCK

Conference calls were made to assess the need, including how quickly salt that had been ordered would be received in the county and how salt would be moved from Highways England depots to those used by Kent.

It was important that salt obtained for mutual aid was returned to Highways England as soon as possible and this was achieved by diverting Kent’s supplies coming from the salt mines directly to a Highways England depot.

## Community efforts pay off in Devon

Volunteer ‘snow wardens’ have proven to be a vital back up to Devon County Council’s winter response in recent years.

Around 325 towns and parishes in the county now have snow wardens in place as part of their self help plans, should they be needed if the county suffers a prolonged spell of winter weather.

Devon County Council’s operations and communications manager Chris Cranston – who is also chair of the National Winter Service Research Group – says: “Highway authorities have to take a strategic approach to the level of service that they are able to provide. The use of snow wardens to address the very local need has been very useful in the county.”

One parish council with a group of nine volunteers on standby and its own tractor mounted plough and gritting machines to keep priority routes clear is Uplyme, in the east of the county.

Uplyme parish councillor Andy Turner, who is one of the snow wardens, explains there are only two major arterial routes in the parish which are snow ploughed and gritted, so the rest of it is not treated.

“We realise the county council has limited resources and cannot grit everywhere, so we can link up the minor roads to help people get out. When it was really bad (in 2018/19) we snow ploughed the roads to help an ambulance reach an elderly patient.

“We’re all volunteers, but we’re lucky we have our own equipment. The parish council bought the gritting machine and the county council supplies the salt. It’s not just us locals working together, it’s the parish working with Devon County Council; it makes life so much easier. All we are trying to do is help local people.”

Devon County Council launched the snow wardens scheme in 2011, following



↑ A snow warden drives along a country lane  
DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL

two harsh winters, and the number of volunteer wardens has continued to grow over the years.

Snow wardens provide a key point of contact between the local community and the county council. The volunteers receive advice and training from Devon on how to clear snow and spread salt effectively.

The authority also covers third party public liability for the treatment undertaken as part of the snow warden scheme.

To find out more click [here](#) or you can try contacting your local parish council representative who may be able to liaise with their local neighbourhood highway officer.

A short film showing Uplyme’s snow wardens in action is available: click on the photograph below to watch.

↓ Parish volunteers work to clear a blocked road

