

WINTER SERVICE OPERATIONAL PLAN

FOR PUBLIC HIGHWAYS WITHIN THE

LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON



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1. Introduction

This London Borough of Merton (Merton) Winter Service Operational Plan sets out how the Council provides its service to ensure safe and functional operability of its highway network during periods when it is or may be affected by ice and/or snow.

Section 41(1A) of the *Highways Act 1980* (as inserted by Section 111 of the *Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003*) requires highway authorities to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.

Section 150 of the *Highways Act 1980* requires highway authorities to remove obstructions in a highway arising from the accumulation of snow.

The Winter Service in Merton is consistent with the requirements of “Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure - A Code of Practice” (the Code) published in September 2016, specifically Part B.7 ‘Winter Service’. The Operational Plan also draws upon the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) Practical Guide for Winter Service.

Through the implementation of this plan, Merton aims to:

- provide a Winter Service which will, as far as is reasonably practicable, ensure the safe movement of all highway users in the borough and minimise delays and accidents caused by adverse weather;
- ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken across London through the participation in the LoTAG Winter Service Practitioners Group (WSPG).

The legislative background lays down clear duties on highway authorities in terms of safety and traffic movement, and recognizes, through the phrase “**as far as is reasonably practicable**” that authorities face resource and financial constraints. In addition, a service based on spreading salt / physically clearing snow, takes time to provide. Therefore, it is inevitable that under adverse winter conditions some roads will remain affected by ice / snow and budgets need to reflect a service prioritized by likelihood of occurrence and impact of occurrence.

This Winter Service Operational Plan sets out how winter service is provided by the London Borough of Merton for its public highways. It is important to note that Merton do not treat private roads and public car parks. The Winter Service exists specifically and exclusively to ensure safe operability of the highway network, and therefore other Council services which may be affected by snow and / or ice (other than on the highway) should have in place their own arrangements for business continuity which do not rely on resources that are part of the Winter Service.

2. Operational Roles

The Future Merton Team oversees the Winter Service Provider (WSP) for operational management of the Winter Maintenance Service for carriageways, footways, cycleways and other pedestrian areas. The WSP is Veolia (procured as part of the South London Waste Partnership).

3. Winter Service Risk-Based Approach

The Future Merton Team use a risk-based approach to its Winter Maintenance Service in line with the Code. This approach allows Merton to assess where to deliver its Winter Service with maximum effect, thereby mitigating risk to the public and at the same time making best use of both the available financial and human resources.

The Future Merton Team is responsible for the management and maintenance of 363 km of road network. Merton, as part of the Primary Salting Network salts 4 pre-determined routes, which covers 113 km, or 31% of the adopted highway network. Depending on forecasts received, this will determine whether Merton also carries out salting for 4 pre-determined routes for a Secondary Salting Network and – during supply shortages – a Resilience Network, covering 62 km and 92 km accordingly.

Priority is set in line with the recommendations of the Code, as set in section B.7 ‘Winter Service’, whereby resilience is at the heart of prioritising routes. The key networks identified for both carriageways and footways provide the highest contribution to the economy and well-being of the businesses and residents of Merton. The routes identified as not to be treated are the ones that generate the least demand and therefore are deemed of less risk.

The main criterion used in drawing up the predetermined routes was to maintain:

- Links to the national road network, industry, commercial and business centres.
- Public transport and access by emergency services.
- Journeys to and from work.

Routes for carriageway and footway networks are provided through the following link:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/streets-and-pavements/gritting>

Winter Service is different from most activity on the highway, in that it is not primarily about maintaining the physical asset per se; rather it is about enabling the safe usage of the highway by pedestrians and vehicles during conditions of ice and/or snow.

As a policy, cycleways will not be treated separately from the road or footway prioritisation, due to it being operationally very difficult to send a gritter down such routes. It could also mislead people into thinking that when part of a cycle route had been treated as part of the carriageway network that the whole cycle way has been treated. The question on whether it is sensible to encourage the riding of a bicycle in such weather also is of concern. This policy will be reviewed if new methods of treating such routes become available.

The Resilience Network in Merton forms part of the London Wide Resilience Network. If there are extreme conditions where salt supplies are limited, or other resources are restricted (e.g. fuel supplies), these will be salted, and other salting may be curtailed to ensure preservation of scarce resources.

The resilience standard is to ensure sufficient resources are available at all times during the Designated Winter Period to treat the resilience network (Carriageways) four times a day for 12 consecutive days.

4. Operational Periods

This approach to the winter service is operated during periods when winter maintenance is required to be undertaken, known as the Designated Winter Period. The Designated Winter Period is from the last Monday of October until the first Sunday of April the following year, during which full standby arrangements will be in place.

Merton will arrange the weather forecasting service and will monitor the weather daily throughout the standby period. Borough-specific weather forecasts are provided by MeteoGroup.

Merton also has contingency arrangements for Winter Service operations should adverse weather conditions occur outside the Designated Winter Period. The need to extend the designated winter period will be determined by the Future Merton team.

5. Operational Communications / Stakeholder Engagement

It is important that good communications are maintained during the winter period to ensure that the response to poor conditions is effective and immediate.

Merton's neighbours are TfL, London Borough of Sutton, Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames, London Borough of Wandsworth, London Borough of Lambeth and London Borough of Croydon. Liaison with each authority is carried out periodically to ensure an understanding of their Winter Service plans and ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, these are aligned.

Service requests from the public are logged on a Customer Relations Management (CRM) module and are routed to the winter maintenance team. During times of severe weather, Merton's Communications team will issue alerts on social media as appropriate. For further information visit Merton's website:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/streets-and-pavements/gritting>.

Appendix A – Self Help Guidance includes the self-help guidance issued by the DfT. The Future Merton team will ensure this message is published in advance of Winter and they will also ensure a summary of the strategy is published to help address public expectations.

Appendix A – Self Help Guidance

Clearing Snow and Ice from Pavements and Public Spaces

This guide is designed to help you to act in a neighbourly way by safely clearing snow and ice from pavements and public spaces.

Will I be held liable if someone falls on a path I have cleared?

There is no law preventing you from clearing snow and ice on the pavement outside your property, pathways to your property or public spaces.

It is very unlikely that you would face any legal liability, if you are careful, and use common sense to ensure that you do not make the pavement or pathway clearly more dangerous than before. People using areas affected by snow and ice also have responsibility to be careful themselves.

What can I do to help clear snow and ice from pavements and public spaces?

Practical advice from highway engineers is given below. This is not a comprehensive list.

- Start early: it is much easier to remove fresh, loose snow compared to compacted ice that has been compressed by people walking on it.
- **Do not use hot water.** This will melt the snow, but may replace it with black ice, increasing the risk of injury.
- Be a good neighbour: some people may be unable to clear snow and ice on paths leading to their property or indeed the footway fronting their property. Snowfall and cold weather pose difficulties for them gaining access to and from their property or walking to the shops.
- If shovelling snow, consider where you are going to put it, so that it does not block people's paths, or block drainage channels. This could shift the problem elsewhere.
- Make a pathway down the middle of the area to be cleared first, so you have a clear surface to walk on. Then you can shovel the snow from the centre to the sides.
- Spreading some salt on the area you have cleared will help to prevent any ice forming. Table salt or dishwasher salt will work but avoid spreading on plants or grass as it may damage them. A few grams (a tablespoon) for each square metre you clear should work. The salt found in salting bins will be needed for keeping roads clear.

Particular care and attention should be given to steps and steep gradients to ensure snow and ice is removed. You might need to apply additional salt to these areas.

- Use the sun to your advantage. Removing the top layer of snow will allow the sun to melt any ice beneath; however, you will need to cover any ice with salt to stop it refreezing overnight.
- If there is no salt available, then a little sand or ash is a reasonable substitute. It will not have the same de-icing properties as salt but should offer grip under foot.

Where can I find out more information about what I can do in an emergency?

There are various websites which offer information on how to prepare for the winter period.

The MET office has a useful guide which can be found here:

<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/weatherready>

For residents, borough specific information can be found here:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy/emergencies>

Why is the Government publishing this information?

During the severe winter in 2009/10, many people across the country worked very hard to keep our transport network open. This included many members of the public who cleared pavements and public spaces around their homes. Some people, however, were deterred from taking action to clear pavements and other public spaces because they feared that they might be sued.

An independent review of the transport sector's response to the severe weather of 2009/10 recommended that the DfT should publish this note on good practice for members of the public in clearing snow and ice from footways and other public spaces. The Local Government Association published a report on behalf of Councils which reached the same conclusion.

The Government response, in preparation for winter can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/winter-weather-uk-government-response>