1. **Purpose of report**

1.1 To report on the operation of the Winter Service Operational Plan (WSOP) for the 2019/2020 season; outline development of the WSOP for 2020/2021; provide an update on the indicative 10-year winter service review and development programme; and seek Cabinet’s approval prior to publication of the WSOP for the 2020/2021 season.

2. **Summary**

2.1 There were 56 precautionary salting outings during the 2019/2020 winter gritting season (1 October 2019 to 30 April 2020), which is just above the previous 5-year gritting season average of 55. In addition, several trial runs were carried out as part of the practical and accessible check.

2.2 In line with some other neighbouring authorities and as a result of continued improvement in weather forecasting, Hertfordshire moved from a road surface temperature of $1.0^\circ C$ to $0.5^\circ C$ this year. Had the trigger level remained at $1.0^\circ C$ a further 11 runs would have been carried out.

2.3 The winter self-help scheme saw a large increase in requests for free salt, which increased the overall winter spend by approximately £80,000.

2.4 The proposed review of high priority footway routes and salt bins started during 2019/2020 but has been put on hold temporarily due to the Covid19 pandemic. It is hoped to start this again later in 2020 but is unlikely to be in place in time for winter 2020/21. The delay will allow time for the County Council to consider how LTP4 could influence the footway hierarchy, and to learn from the latest footway guidance which the
National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) are currently finalising.

2.5 The WSOP for 2020/2021 includes those roads which satisfy the gritting criteria agreed at Cabinet in December 2017, except for those that are non-practical/not accessible.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Highways and Environment Cabinet Panel will consider a report on this item of business at its meeting on 16 September 2020. The Panel will be invited to recommend to Cabinet that Cabinet:

i. agree the Winter Service Operational Plan 2020/2021 prior to its publication on the County Council’s website;

ii. adopts the Winter Service Operational Plan 2020/2021; and

iii. notes the proposed review and the programme of activities.

3.2 The Cabinet Panel's recommendation/s to Cabinet will be reported orally at the Cabinet meeting and circulated to Members in the Order of Business sheet.

4. Background

4.1 As outlined in previous years, every highway authority should have a WSOP, which sets out the winter service provision, following the guidance contained in “Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure – A code of Practice” (WMHI).

4.2 To comply with the requirements of WMHI, in 2017 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) started a review of its precautionary salting network. This included developing new criteria, which was presented to the Highways Cabinet Panel in November 2017 and subsequently approved by Cabinet in December 2017.

4.3 During the 2019/2020 winter season, the winter team carried out a substantive practical and accessible check to ensure that the individual roads that made up the gritting network could be treated safely, by means of a conventional vehicle mounted gritter. Where it was not possible to treat a section of road, alternatives were looked at. This included smaller gritters and having a second person to act as a banks person if the vehicle needed to reverse. This was in operation until Covid-19
restrictions on social distancing were put in place, when the routes requiring a banks person had to be dropped.

4.4 Where a suitable alternative was not available, the section of road was removed from the gritting network and the relevant County Councillor was informed. By doing this, the Council continue to evolve the gritting network with a focus on where winter service can be conducted safely.

5 Report on the operation of the Winter Service Operational Plan (WSOP) for the 2019/2020 season

5.1 The winter season of 2019/2020 was slightly colder than previous winters in Hertfordshire, with no snow events.

5.2 Hertfordshire County Council Highways carried out 56 precautionary gritting runs between 1 October 2019 and 30th April 2020. This is slightly above the previous 5-year seasonal average of 55. During each run, the service treated approximately 1,553 miles (2,500km) of the county’s precautionary salting network. In total, gritters drove approximately 86,991 miles (140,000km) and spread more than 12,560 tonnes of salt.

5.3 Graph 1 and table 1 provide a breakdown of the precautionary salting runs from 2015 to 2020.
5.4 Winter self-help saw an increase in 2019/20 compared to the previous year, particularly regarding schools, see table 2 below.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orders</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools Orders</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish C Orders</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town C Orders</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents Orders</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borough- District Orders</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church's Orders</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery/School orders</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 Outline Development of the WSOP for 2020/2021

6.1 Minor changes and operational improvements have been included in the 2020/2021 WSOP.

6.2 As in previous years, the WSOP 2020/21 reflects the recommendations, where appropriate to Hertfordshire County Council, from the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) guidance and WMHI.

6.3 The general format and content of the WSOP has been tested in court on various occasions and has found to be robust. For this reason, the format for 2020/2021 is the same as in previous years.

6.4 A common problem encountered during the gritting season is the difficulty in treating some roads because of obstructions caused by parked cars. Roads that may be bus routes and have daytime parking restrictions on them are often obstructed during night-time salting operations. Whilst the use of smaller vehicles and two-person crews is possible, with one acting as a Banks person if the vehicle gets into a tight space, these options are not always reasonable and practical, and consequently on occasions some roads may have to be missed altogether or dropped.

6.5 The use of these smaller vehicles does have a knock-on effect in that more vehicles/drivers are needed to salt the same amount of road, which results in additional costs. The practical and accessible check is aimed at identifying these individual roads so appropriate adjustments to the routes can be made at the planning stage. Where roads still prove to be inaccessible or impracticable and therefore need to be dropped, the relevant County Councillors will be informed.

6.6 The gritting criteria developed in 2017 included gritting to school entrances. At the time this only included state schools and not private schools. A review has now been undertaken and of the 61 registered private schools with a Hertfordshire address: 37 are already on a precautionary salting network; 5 have entrances outside of Hertfordshire (despite having a Hertfordshire address), 16 are either not practical or are on unadopted roads.

6.7 Marginal changes to the gritting routes will be made to add three remaining schools to the winter 2020/21 winter gritting routes.

6.8 Developments for 2020/2021 include:

1. Internal testing of gritter tracking took place throughout the year and it is hoped to launch this via HCC’s website during the winter season – this will include where the gritter is and a snail trail of where it has been;
2. Publishing of grit bin status (i.e. when it was filled) via HCC’s website, which has been tested offline this year.

6.9 The WSOP 2020/2021 is attached as Appendix 1 of this report.

7 **Outline 10-year Development Programme**

7.1 The winter service now includes a 10-year development plan which considers how the service may evolve, taking account of technology improvements, known contract changes and planned review cycles.

7.2 The revised development programme, included at Appendix 2, outlines key dates including when a new weather forecaster needs to be sought. This is usually procured through the East Anglian Consortium and is due in October 2021.

7.3 The programme includes the replacement of the council’s weather stations. A number of these developed faults last year and needed to be repaired. Over the next few years Hertfordshire will need to invest in replacing / extending its weather station forecasting equipment. This will ensure Duty Officers have the latest technology to make informed decisions.

7.4 Table 3 below, outlines the revised winter network review cycle for the next 4 years. Reviews will start in the years indicated with any updates being included in the following season’s WSOP.

**Table 3:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020/21</td>
<td>High Priority Footway and salt bin review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On hold</td>
<td>Secondary Route review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020/21</td>
<td>Prepare Weather Station replacement information for inclusion in new HST Contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021/22</td>
<td>Precautionary Route review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. **Financial Implications**

8.1 The winter service budget for 2020/21 is £3.49m.
9. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

9.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.

9.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council’s statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

9.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

9.4 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken and updated for 2020/2021 and is attached at Appendix 3.

9.5 The revised code of practice WMHIs suggests consideration is given to the special needs of disabled people or older people, particularly where these can be effectively targeted. The proposed criteria include treatments to such facilities where this is practicable and accessible. Action to mitigate potential impacts where it is not possible to treat these facilities includes the potential extending of self-help, providing grit bins and footway salting.

10. **Summary of Appendices**

1. **WSOP 2020/2021** – Appendix 1 to the report
2. **Revised 10 Year Plan** – Appendix 2 to the report
3. **EqIA** – Appendix 3 to the report

**Background Information**

Highways Cabinet Panel - 16 November 2017
Cabinet – 18 December 2017
https://democracy.hertfordshire.gov.uk/CeListDocuments.aspx?CommitteeId=146&MeetingId=420&DF=18%2f12%2f2017&Ver=2

NWSRG Guidance
Well-managed Highway infrastructure - A code of practice - See Page 114, Section B7 for Winter Service