Our highways winter service started from Monday 22 October this season. Our duty decision-makers are eyeing the longer-range weather forecasts carefully, for any clues that might point to a repeat of last year’s relatively severe spells of weather.

Last season we delivered the equivalent of 108 county-wide salting runs, almost twice as many comparable treatments as the previous year.
Comment
Councillor Kevin Bentley
Deputy Leader, Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

"Welcome to this edition of Highways Highlights where we are focusing on our winter service.

"Thank you to those county Members who attended our briefing, there were many of you and thank you for the reception you gave the team.

"Keeping our roads safe is of paramount importance and depending on the weather during the winter months means gritting teams can be out several times a day or evening.

"I would like to pay tribute to them for the way they have and will continue to respond to weather conditions. I hope you find this helpful and enjoy reading!"

Getting into Gear

From 22 October our 62 gritter lorries (and 2 mini-gritters) will be out, often in the small hours when people are safe asleep indoors, to ensure that our 2000 mile, 57-route gritting network is salted and ready for careful use. Our salt bins are full; our partners have their partnership salt bags, our routes have been driven, and our driver rosters are sorted.

Every year we aim to improve the service provided. This year we have invested in an additional salt barn in Halstead, enabling us to hold even higher levels of salt in the county, and refill quicker locally when gritting routes in the north. We are also going to trial ‘route-based forecasting’ – see separate article to find out more.

There is loads of information on-line, including a map of our routes, self-help tips, and our always popular ‘gritter tracker’ (we monitor where they have been, where they are, and the speed they are moving at).

We even have a new Winter Service information video for you to watch! See it on YouTube, and share this link: https://youtu.be/tvp0DX91STc

Is your community in the Salt Bag Partnership?

During periods of extreme weather, communities and individuals can do a lot to help themselves and others. ECC operates a Salt Bag Partnership scheme, designed to help local communities support themselves during periods of heavy snow. One tonne of bagged salt, delivery and a support pack is provided, free of charge, to help County Councillors and Parish Councils organise the scheme and provide helpful information to volunteers. It is also an opportunity to think about how your community will be ready for winter. If your community is not yet in the scheme, please consider it – we usually issue the invitation to join it in May each year.


And you can download and print off a general snow/ice clearance self-guidance sheet at www.essexhighways.org/uploads/LRF/Winter_Self_Help_Snow_clearing_leaflet.pdf
Route-based forecasting

Science, knowledge and experience

We invest significant resources to provide a safe winter route network. As well as our gritter fleet and salt barns, we have a number of weather stations and road surface sensors.

These gather data which is transferred to professional forecasters, who then give us daily forecasts specifically for the county, split into inland and coastal areas. This enables us to consider sending gritters out only in those areas that need coverage.

This year for the first time we are trialling route-based forecasting. This combines thermal road mapping; weather forecasting, local topography and prior knowledge into insights allowing us to identify the likeliest cold spots on each route. In turn, we will use this knowledge to decide which specific routes to grit.

For now this is a trial on each overall route we cover, but as technology and experience grows, we may, in future years, be able to consider gritting only those ‘frost hollows’ and exposed areas that the data highlights is an ice or frost risk when temperatures fall away.

Follow the feed!
Follow us on twitter for winter gritting updates and other useful highways info. To read all our winter service information, visit our winter webpages, at: www.essexhighways.org/Roads-and-Pavements/winter-travel.aspx