

City Infrastructure Briefing: Severe Weather Forecast

(December 2010 between the two major snow events)

Weather Forecast

The Met Office's forecast for the weekend is as follows:

A depression is expected to bring heavy snow across parts of England and Wales from the west tomorrow. However, there is much more uncertainty than average in the forecast of this feature, with an increasing signal from models for its track to be further south than previously indicated.

Heavy snow is most likely over southern counties, where there could be 20-30 cm in places falling within a few hours. The picture is further complicated by the fact that it is likely to turn to rain or sleet, especially near coasts, as less cold air is pulled in, but this in turn poses a risk of black ice as it refreezes.

Please note that the Met Office is stating that there is still a lot of uncertainty about how this weather pattern will pan out across the South East regions especially where different climatic domains exist such as coastal/hilly.

City Infrastructure preparations

We have been carrying out major logistical operations all through this week with regard to gritting materials. Salt supplies have been hauled in from holding depots in East and West Sussex. I have been contacting our salt supplier persistently over the past couple of weeks and as a result we have also received road haulage deliveries from them over the past 2 days.

Sharp sand has been delivered to Hollingdean Depot, Stanmer Park and Hove Park. There is so that we can run operations out of various locations, utilising Cityclean and Cityparks staff if necessary.

Road gritting has taken place over several nights this past week.

We have also hired in an additional gritter vehicle. Please note that this is not for increasing the amount of routes that we run as this is not possible in terms of resources. We already salt nearly 43% of the network during most of our winter gritting runs. The extra vehicle is a 4x4 to boost our capability in extreme weather and to act as back-up in case of breakdowns.

Salt Supply

We are entering the Christmas-New Year period with a good supply of salt at the depot and with some remaining salt stored at West Sussex. However, national government has very recently put out a warning that salt supplies across the country need to be very carefully managed given the extreme weather starting so early in the winter season. We therefore need to be mindful that future deliveries will be

dependent on the national supply picture and whatever the weather brings. Highways need to carry out road gritting during icy conditions as well as snow conditions so all our operations need to calculate for continuing action after the snow has gone. For this reason, we will be carrying out our work according to the agreed Highways Winter Service Plan and will not be expanded gritting routes or responding to individual requests. The Plan deploys our operations as and how they will have the maximum benefit and effect.

Current operations

Some snowfall is forecast for later today so we are running our Full Routes now through the afternoon to pre-salt the network in advance of more extreme conditions. Further treatments will be decided by the Duty Officer utilising weather station data and weather forecasts. Treatments will be dependent on type and level of snowfall that we experience.

During the weekend there will be Cityclean staff on duty briefed to begin pavement clearance in the city centre and around the hospitals, etc. Given the uncertainty of the forecasts, it is difficult to know exactly what to expect so decisions will need to be made on an ongoing basis. The relevant duty managers are working together throughout the period.

Grit bins

Earlier this week, we collated requests that have come in via our website or inbox for refills of grit bins and have refilled these. We have also checked most of the bins in the outlying areas in the east and west of the city. Many of the bins were already refilled during the last snow event.

Please bear in mind that with 400+ bins, and with staff during the week carrying out their normal duties, it is not always possible to check each and every bin. Please direct residents to use our website form or inbox gritbinrequest@brighton-hove.gov.uk to notify us of empty bins as this helps us to manage the information efficiently. Please also bear in mind that although we may have filled bins, we cannot prevent these being emptied immediately if individuals chose to do so.

There will be no new grit bins put out this winter as we have already put out all the stock ordered this summer and need to maintain the ones we already have in place.

Grit drops

Many of the grit drops carried out 2 weeks ago are still in situ and we are encouraging residents to make use of these. Information on their locations can be found on our website – the majority are at important junction points in hillier colder areas. Depending on how the weather pans out during and after the weekend, we will revisit these if required.

Snow and gritting treatments

As I am sure you are all aware from the past two year's experiences, salt is not a magic cure for snowfall especially if this is continuous and heavy. Salt needs a certain amount of warmth and a good deal of pedestrian or vehicle traffic to be effective. Ploughing can take place if depth of snow permits this but will not shift all the snow layers from our city roads especially where speed humps, crowning or cambers exist. Grit can be particularly good in laying down a bed for traction and breaking down the layers. If it continues to snow, our efforts get covered up and we start all over again on the next gritting cycle. Whatever we do will take time to work especially in colder areas with less through traffic where snow layers may remain despite pre- and post-treatments.

