

Winter Service Scrutiny: Road Gritting

Brighton & Hove City Council provides up to 40% coverage of its highway road network. This is above the current Audit Commission target, and similar to adjacent local authorities.

The gritting routes cover all main roads (A, B and C) and any bus routes. So residential roads (“unclassified roads”) only receive treatment if they are part of the bus network. The aim of this is to provide comprehensive coverage across the city with options for people to travel, as most roads and dwellings are not far from a bus stop/bus route.

The majority of the winter service operates as “pre-treatment” i.e. spreading of salt in advance of snow, ice and frost. Pre-treatment gritting runs are carried out several times during the winter usually in the evenings after rush hour but prior to freezing temperatures which tend to mainly occur at night here in the South East. The service is rarely noticed except in more extreme weather conditions.

In prolonged ice or snow, post-treatment is also carried out, which is the spreading of salt, salt/grit or pure grit on roads and the use of ploughs if the depth of snow allows this.

The coverage only includes public highway not private land or other owned-council land as the service is run from the Highways budget.

For clarity of communication, best use of resources and liability reasons, the gritters are rarely directed to go off route. During severe snow events, all resources are required to keep the identified routes open.

As explained in the original Scrutiny document, gritting the roads does not always mean they will be free from frost, snow or ice as there are a number of factors that determine how effectively the treatment will work.

Routes:

The routes were carefully designed and mapped some years ago at unitary status, using thermal mapping information and weather station data as well as road and bus network information. The routes are not currently electronically mapped although this is being worked on.

Minor changes are made to the routes (such as a change in a particular bus route) annually before each winter season.

However to make any major changes to the routes would require considerable time and resources. This is because:

1. Gritter routes have to be efficient – not too much time should be spent going back over roads already gritted or travelling without gritting
2. Gritter routes have to be completed within reasonable timescales – no more than approximately 3 hours in normal conditions otherwise it

becomes difficult to complete coverage in advance of the predicted freezing conditions.

3. Gritter routes have to be coherent and follow a defined plan in order to be clear to the public what to expect of the service.
4. Gritter routes have to be achievable within the relevant resources e.g. 6 routes requires 6 gritters. Increasing the amount of roads covered will increase the amount of gritters, personnel, fuel and materials required. Careful calculation is needed to analyse the impact of any increase in routes.
5. To work out new routes would require electronic route mapping, route optimisation and personnel to carry this out.

Currently the routes do not as a matter of course cover schools, nurseries, business areas, health centres, etc.

The routes do cover all emergency services' premises including the hospital A&E ramp/forecourt and Hove Fire Station forecourt.

Any major changes to the routes would require consultant input as there is not the time, staff or IT expertise within Highways to undertake this.