



Brighton & Hove City Council

HOUSING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICIES

COUNCIL HOUSING ADVERSE WEATHER POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy aims to identify the appropriate actions that will be taken by Estates Services during severe weather conditions affecting employees, tenants, contractors and members of the public. The document sets out the minimum standards of service which will be provided and defines the required responsibilities.

1.2 It is the responsibility of the council to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage on or around an entrance to a block of flats is not endangered by snow or ice. However, in some circumstances, dependent upon the risk to staff or residents the organisation may incorporate public areas within this policy.

1.3 For the purpose of this policy, severe weather can be defined as extreme conditions that may have a direct impact upon a person's health, safety and well being.

2. The extent of 'duty of care'

2.1 This will depend upon a number of factors, including the type of property and the people likely to be affected, e.g. much greater care would be required around a sheltered scheme where tenants may be more unsteady on their feet and where they would be expected to use the common areas. Key matters to be considered include

- The high risk areas
- When action is to be taken (preventative and reactive)

2.3 Whilst our duties are enshrined in law (statutory and common) it is important to note that our response will be proportionate and using sensible risk management – see relevant departmental risk assessments for guidance.

2.4 We will take an objective view of issues, such as where the responsibility for clearing snow, ice begins and ends, and how far we should go in terms of gritting and clearing. There is often no straightforward answer to these questions but the controls put in place will reflect the degree of risk identified.

2.5 This policy meets the council's following corporate objectives

- Promoting public, partnership and community engagement
- Delivering improved customer service
- Supporting the delivery of the City Outcomes/Priorities

3. Access and Communication

3.1 The council is committed to ensuring that our services are accessible to everyone. We will seek alternative methods of access and service delivery where barriers, perceived or real may exist, that may make it difficult for people to work for us or use our services.

3.2 The organisation recognises the need to safely maintain services during adverse weather conditions, whilst properly discharging its duty of care to employees. We have a new and updated winter information map; this shows the locations of our Estates Service grit bins. This can be used in conjunction to the Highways winter information map. All this information can be found on the council's easy to navigate website.

4. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights

4.1 This policy aims to identify the appropriate actions that will be taken by Estates Services during severe weather

4.2 The council is committed to ensuring that no person or group of persons will be treated less favorably than another person or group of persons and will carry out our duty. The council will ensure that all services and actions are delivered within the context of current Equalities Legislation and Human Rights legislation. Staff and others with whom we work, will adhere to the central principles of the Human Rights Act (1998).

5. This Policy should be read in conjunction with

- Corporate Policy for Staff on Adverse Weather
- The Health & Safety Policy
- The Estates Service Pledge
- Highways Winter Maintenance Service (available on BHCC website)
- Housing and Social Inclusion Business Continuity Plans
- Estates Service Adverse Weather Risk Assessment

6. Policy

6.1 The council will carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of severe weather effects to help identify and prioritise risk areas. The risk assessment will include

- Areas that are most likely to be affected (e.g. walkways, building entrances, sloped areas etc.)
- Persons likely to be affected and how (our duty of care increases in areas likely to be used by elderly, children and other vulnerable persons)
- The risk factors and reasonable precautions. It is unreasonable to hold the council responsible for all weather conditions but certain hazards are foreseeable such as adverse weather forecast days in advance and autumn/winter months providing generally wetter/icier weather
- The process involved and the responsible persons for implementing the remedial works (i.e. gritting/clearing). The council will facilitate the services of the Neighborhood Response Team to carry out gritting services as per agreed specification. Every effort will be made to deliver the service in accordance with the specification at agreed locations. However, no guarantees of service can be given to residents if the adverse weather conditions present a high risk to employees or contractors.

6.2 In accordance with section 2 of this policy, the council will, so far as is reasonably practicable, maintain safe access to and from our premises. As such snow clearing and/or gritting will be carried out for the following premises

- Sheltered Schemes
- Housing Estates
- Housing Offices

6.3 Providing areas that are not common and where tenancy agreements make the tenant specifically responsible for outside areas within the boundary of their home, there is no duty for the council to clear them.

7. Extreme cold Snow and Ice

7.1 We have 102 grit bins which are kept stocked with grit for use by residents and staff on housing owned land during periods of snow and ice. These are located at priority locations across the housing stock and an online map is available on the Brighton & Hove City Council website. Housing and Social Inclusion are not able to supply grit for use on public highways and any land which is not owned by housing. This includes public highways and the associated pavements.

7.2 Pavement clearance is a lengthy labour-intensive task by hand spreading, so operationally and practically this work requires a high level of resources. To help combat this issue all tenant and resident representatives have been supplied upon request with snow shovels to aid with clearance. Therefore the Duty Manager must decide on priorities and when the snow may be likely to clear naturally due to improved weather conditions. In heavy and continual snowfall, clearance may need to wait until it stops because all efforts would be immediately covered over again.

7.3 Grit bins will be kept locked in the summer months and unlocked during winter so that residents can access the grit easily during the winter. A guidance panel is fitted to each bin with all the relevant information that the user may require, for example, specific location, contact details for re-stocking and guidance for the use of the grit.

7.4 There is a limit to the number of grit bins we can supply as we are limited on the amount of grit we can store and the number of bins that we can realistically replenish.

7.5 Priority will be given at all times to areas of greatest risk, as identified by the risk assessment outlined in section 2. The council will adopt a preventative approach wherever possible. Using met office forecasts and information from our Civil Contingencies Department will enable us to grit when snow and ice is forecast.

7.6 We would generally regard the areas of greatest risk as being

- Geographically challenged buildings
- Sheltered Schemes
- Hilly Areas
- Areas where high densities of older people

7.7 In icy/snowy periods we will redirect Estates staff to gritting and restocking grit supplies. However it should be recognised that it will not be possible for housing staff to grit all areas of housing land due to staff numbers, the need to keep the rest of the service operational and because in times of snow and ice we may not be able to access all areas of the city. We will however try to maximise our capacity to grit as much housing land as possible by:

- Keeping grit supplies in cleaners store rooms in blocks of flats

- Arranging for staff to grit near to their home if they live near housing land that they are able to safely access
- Encourage staff and residents who are willing and able to work together to grit, where this is safe to do so. This would facilitate the “Salt, Sweep & Shovel” initiative that the Highways department promotes.
- Facilitate the Community Payback Team to grit

8. Taking Care of Vulnerable Residents

8.1 Housing Management and Sheltered Service staff will try to proactively contact tenants known to be vulnerable in circumstances of extreme weather and check what assistance they need. This could include the provision of an electric heater if there is a heating breakdown, advising tenants to keep battery powered torches if there is an electrical failure, delivery of shopping in extreme situations, and the possible provision of temporary accommodation if a major problem was to occur.

9. Flooding

9.1 The Environment Agency’s Flood Warning service aims to reduce risk to life, distress to people and damage to property caused by flooding by providing accurate, timely flood warnings. To provide this service in an area it must be technically feasible and the costs against the benefits must be justified.

9.2 The service is provided to residents within the floodplains of rivers, estuaries and coasts in England and Wales; to the media and partner organisations. Where the water levels in rivers rise rapidly due to heavy rain or melting snow, there may not be enough time to issue specific warnings. In these cases, a general warning will be issued to a large geographical area.

9.3 In the event of severe flooding we will assist with any emergency accommodation that is required. This would form part of the major incident contingency plan that housing has developed. The Estates Service will work with the Corporate Emergency Planning Unit to provide resources in line with the Corporate Major Incident Plans, along with associate council partnerships will endeavor to provide flood defences or clear up facilities in the event of this potential risk.

10. Extreme Heat

10.1 A Heat-Health Watch system operates in England and Wales from 1 June to 15 September each year. During this time social and healthcare services will ensure that all awareness and background preparedness work is ongoing.

10.2 The Heat-Health Watch system comprises four levels of response based upon threshold maximum daytime and minimum night-time temperatures. These thresholds vary by region, but an average threshold temperature is 30 °C by day and 15 °C overnight.

10.3 The distribution of water if the water supply is disrupted and the local authority requires our assistance. We can also liaise on the tenant’s behalf with social care services and voluntary groups if they need additional help during this period with day to day activities. Every reasonable effort will be made to help out the local community within the resource at our disposal.

11. Sustainability

11.1 All our grit is sourced as locally as possible. This can be affected by demand levels during cold conditions. We have learnt lessons from previous years and we are now forward planning and building up our stocks from late August to ensure the maximum level required, this also helps reduce the need for repeat deliveries and the impact of potential congestion on the local highway infrastructure in times of severe cold weather.

11.2 Insulating your home is often an easy job which is cost-effective and keeps your house warmer in the colder months. You might even be eligible for insulation grants and discounts. Better standards of Insulation of homes to improve heat retention, reduce fuel poverty and increase the health and wellbeing of residents.

12. Performances and Resident Involvement

12.1 Following Extended Periods of Snow and Ice or other adverse weather the Estates Services Business Manager will review the performance of the Estates Service with Estates Services Monitoring Group to determine if the service is meeting the needs and aspirations of residents or if any improvements can be made. .

13. Reviews

13.1 The Estates Services Business Manager will review the policy every three years (from the date of approval) to ensure its continuing suitability, adequacy and effectiveness or as required by the introduction of new legislation or regulation that impacts on the obligations of the council, changes to council business practices or in the light of management system audits.

14. Equality Impact Assessment

14.1 This policy has been subject to an EIA screening and carried out by the Estates Service Projects Manager. This is to help identify any adverse impact on the local communities. Further data will be collected upon implementation of this policy, and a further screening will take place after twelve months of operation.

