Winter Advice and Arrangements

Contents

1) Weather monitoring
   i) How do we know when to act?
   ii) How do we inform and advise people?
   iii) What are our priorities?

2) Roads
   i) Gritting routes
   ii) Grit Bins
   iii) Salt supplies
   iv) Potholes and repairs

3) Pavements
   i) Gritting shopping areas
   ii) Gritting outside your own home or business

4) Schools
   i) Gritting
   ii) School closures
   iii) Info about individual school websites

5) Household waste collections
   i) How can you manage your waste?
   ii) Assisted Bin Collections

6) Help for older people
   i) POPIN service
   ii) Age Concern (Age UK)
   iii) Staying Fit and Active
   iv) Merseylink

7) Help with warmer homes
   i) Free or discounted home insulation
   ii) Other support
   iii) Interest Free Loans
   iv) Payments and fuel debt advice

8) Your safety
   i) Winter driving tips
   ii) Be safe, be seen
   iii) Keeping warm at home
   iv) Stay healthy
   v) Protecting your property
   vi) Footwear

9) List of useful numbers and links
   i) Council call centre
ii) Streetscene
iii) Revenues and Benefits
iv) CADT
v) One Stop Shops locations
vi) POPIN team
vii) Sport and Recreation booking line
viii) NHS Wirral – GP Out of Hours – Walk in Centre
ix) Energy Saving Trust
x) Direct.gov
Weather monitoring

How do we know when to act?

The Council receives weather warnings from the Met Office through an automated service; we also receive a more in-depth overview from the North-West Public Weather Service Advisor, who assists the Health, Safety and Resilience Team to assess the risk in our area from predicted or ongoing severe weather events.

Note:
- The Environment Agency issues warnings for flooding
- The Department of Health provides the council with Heat-wave warnings.

How do we inform and advise people?

Public (external): Weather Warnings are generally broadcast through the media – including TV and radio, and online, on media websites.

In addition Wirral Council updates residents via our website and Contact Centre.

Wirral Council (Internal): Internal service areas, Elected Members and partner organisations are kept informed via regular bulletins from the Health, Safety and Resilience Team on the predicted weather forecasts.

What are our priorities?

- Keeping Wirral’s primary and secondary road network safe
- Providing advice to Wirral residents on how best to keep safe in the snow and icy conditions.
**Roads**

**Gritting routes**

Keeping the borough moving when the winter weather starts to bite is a key priority for the Council.

Whenever the weather demands it, the Council deploys dedicated gritting teams to treat all major roads in Wirral, as well as bus routes and other roads or locations that are suitable.

Inevitably, there aren’t the resources to grit every side street or minor road. Priority has to be given to maintaining safe driving conditions along the busiest routes and in areas that have the greatest potential for accidents.

Wirral Council publishes details of the Highway Winter Service Plan on this website together with maps of all the roads in the borough that will be gritted when the weather makes it necessary.

If your road isn’t on the list but you believe snow or ice has made the area around your home particularly hazardous, you can call Streetscene on 0151 606 2004 and inspectors can investigate whether gritting is necessary.

**Grit bins**

In particular potential problem locations the Council has situated grit bins. These are stocked with salt for local residents to use themselves in their local area to clear icy roads and pavements.

There are almost 300 of these grit bins situated across the borough and they are kept regularly stocked during the winter months. In recent times, funding has been provided through your local Area Forums to provide grit bins in areas that residents have identified as needing them. If you know of an area you feel would benefit from the installation of a grit bin, let us know by contacting Streetscene on 0151 606 2004 or email streetscene@wirral.gov.uk.

A full list of where grit bins are currently situated can be found together with the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan on the Wirral Council website – www.wirral.gov.uk
**Salt supplies**

Year-round Wirral maintains an ample stock of salt for gritting purposes, which we hope would be sufficient to enable the Council to carry out its gritting operations in the event of extreme weather.

At times of prolonged severe weather, when demand for salt nationally is naturally high, there may be times when supplies run shorter than we’d like. During the last couple of severe winters, Central Government has established a national salt cell in order to ensure that salt supplies reach the areas where it is most needed.

This ensures that gritting operations continue to take place across the country and that some areas aren’t left with no supplies at all, while other authorities stockpile salt. It may mean, however, that the Council must prioritise gritting operations at times of limited supply until we can replenish our stock sufficiently.

**Potholes and repairs**

Potholes are one of the biggest bugbears for road users everywhere and they also present a headache to the Local Authority whose responsibility it is to repair and attempt to prevent them.

Potholes are formed when water gets into the road surface through cracks caused by traffic. In the winter months, when temperatures plunge, this water freezes, expands and causes the surface to rupture. When the ice melts, a hole is caused below the surface, which collapses under the stress of vehicles and forms a pothole.

Council engineers regularly inspect roads across the borough for defects but during winter months they also rely upon members of the public reporting problems to the Council using the Streetscene service.

Once problems are reported, engineers will assess the extent of the pothole and class it either as a ‘priority’ job or as a ‘serviceability’ job. This classification depends on a range of factors such as the depth of a pothole or the extent to which a paving flag has lifted.

Priority jobs need to be done first for safety reasons and after an initial inspection they will be repaired. Serviceability jobs are ones that don’t present any immediate risk to public safety. They are still recommended for repair work, but the timescale within which they are carried out depends on the availability of funding.

A list of all outstanding serviceability jobs is drawn up and reviewed on a monthly basis. We attempt to clear as much of this work as possible, depending on available budget.
Pavements

Gritting shopping areas

The Local Authority does not routinely grit pavement areas in the event of ice or snow. An exception to this, however, is when icy conditions last for several days. At such times busy pavements, such as those in the main shopping areas, may be considered for gritting.

Gritting outside homes and businesses

While Wirral Council makes great efforts to make roads as safe as possible during the most severe winter weather, it is not possible to grit all roads. There are almost 300 grit bins located across Wirral which you can use on a self-help basis to spread salt on problem spots.

If you have a particular problem location which you feel needs to be added to the winter gritting schedule, get in touch via Streetscene – we will ask our inspectors to investigate.
Schools

Gritting – Schools

It is the responsibility of schools themselves to ensure they apply grit to pavements around their school gates and on paths on their own premises. In certain circumstances the roads around some schools may form part of the Council’s regular gritting schedule during the winter months.

If you think the roads around your child’s school pose a particular hazard during icy weather or snow, contact Streetscene on 0151 606 2004.

School closures

During cold spells, local schools are often unable to open either because the conditions are too dangerous for pupils or staff to make the journey in, or because the weather has caused heating systems to fail.

Where possible, the schools themselves inform parents directly if the school is forced to close. Often, however, the decision to close is taken at short notice. In these circumstances, school closures will be announced on local radio stations and also publicised on the Council website, www.wirral.gov.uk. Schools will also post a notice on their own websites, if they have one.

If you have any doubt as to whether your child’s school is open or closed on a particular day, please refer to one of these sources or ring your child’s school.

Information about individual schools websites

To find out whether your child’s school has its own website and to find a link to it, please visit the Wirral Learning Grid - http://www.wirral-mbc.gov.uk/schoolwebsites/index.asp
**Household Waste Collections**

**How can you manage your waste?**

There are three elements to Wirral’s household waste collection service; green bins, into which bagged non-recyclable items are placed, grey bins, which are designed for a range of recyclables, and some areas have a brown bin into which garden waste can be deposited. Green and grey bins are collected on the same day on alternate weeks.

Domestic waste collections are scheduled to operate as normal, all year round, with the exception of the garden waste collections, which are suspended for three weeks during winter months due to the low demand for the service. This allows additional resources to be dedicated to other collections.

At times of extreme weather, such as ice and snow, it is often not possible for some waste collections to take place. This is largely due to main, minor roads and back streets being too dangerous for the large collection lorries to drive down.

If collections are unable to take place for just a couple of days, then the collection crews make every effort to catch up with collections at the earliest opportunity by putting in extra shifts and working weekends. When this happens, householders will be asked to leave the relevant bin out until crews can collect it.

However, in extreme circumstances – either when collections are suspended for a prolonged period or if there are a number of suspensions in quick succession – it is simply not possible to ‘catch up’. On those occasions, the likely course of action is that residents will be asked to retain waste on their property until their next scheduled collection day. In some circumstances, where main roads are passable but residential streets are not, special collection points may be set up where residents can take their waste themselves for disposal.

**Assisted refuse and recycling collection**

In times of poor weather and if regular bin collections have had to be cancelled, more household waste than usual could begin to pile up. At times like that, a little help with getting those heavy bins to the kerbside for collection could come in very useful.

Wirral Council operates an assisted collection service especially for householders who are unable to take their bin to the kerbside because of ill health or disability.
Special arrangements are made for the refuse and recycling collectors to wheel your bin out for collection and return it after it has been emptied.

To apply for an assisted collection, contact Streetscene on 0151 606 2004.
Help for older people

POPIN

The first port of call for any older person feeling the strain during winter might be to an advisor at the Council’s POPIN – Promoting Older People’s Independence Network – Service.

This service is open to people over the age of 65 and aims to promote health and well-being, safety, independence, care and finances of older people in their own home.

One phone call – either to the POPIN team directly on 0151 641 8932 or via the Council’s Central Advice and Duty Team on 0151 514 2222 option 3 (out of hours emergency, 0151 677 6557) – can open up a whole range of options for help, which will likely begin with an advisor visiting you in your own home to carry out a complete assessment of your needs.

Once this has been done the advisor will then get the ball rolling on getting help to meet these needs, be it by helping the older person to apply for all the benefits and grants they are entitled to, or introducing them to other agencies who can assist them with specific needs.

Age UK Wirral

Age UK Wirral - the new name for Age Concern Wirral - is a local, independent organisation providing a range of services to people aged 50+. During the winter months, Age UK Wirral can offer a range of information and advice on the full spectrum of issues affecting later life, including keeping warm and well, help to make sure you are claiming all of the money you are entitled to and support to access grants and other help with repairs, insulation and heating.

Other services and activities the organisation has on offer include Lunch Clubs, Advocacy, Day Services, Social Groups, Exercise Classes, Arts & Crafts, Bathing Services, Bereavement Support, Support for Carers, Counselling, Befriending & much more.

For information and advice or to access any of these services contact Age UK Wirral on 0151 482 3456.
Staying fit and active

Getting out and about and staying active is important for both physical and emotional well-being and in Wirral there is a wide variety of opportunities to do that, many of which are free or discounted for older people.

From January 2015, residents aged 65 and over will be entitled to swim for free in any Council leisure centre, Monday to Friday, from opening until 12 noon (last admission 11:30am) and all day Saturday and Sunday.

They may also qualify for up to 25% off other activities and classes such as Aerobics, Easy Line Fitness, Health Walks, Line Dancing, Social Tennis, Social Badminton, Tai Chi, Weight Wise Exercise and pool-based classes like Aqua, 50+ Swim and Ladies Only Swim.

There are even activities designed for those who might want the social and health benefits, but who aren’t capable of much physical exertion. Classes covering subjects such as Healthy Cookery, Relaxation, Stopping Smoking and Reading take place in conjunction with NHS Wirral at various centres around the borough.

For further information on activities, people can visit the Wirral Council website – www.wirral.gov.uk – call 0151 606 2010 for sport and recreation information or 0151 630 8383 for NHS Wirral.

Merseylink

The Merseylink service is Merseytravel's dial-a-ride service for people with mobility problems or difficulties who cannot use ordinary public transport some or all of the time.

For more details about Merseylink and the benefits of becoming a member, visit the Merseytravel website - http://www.merseytravel.gov.uk/travelling-around/transport-accessibility/Pages/Merseylink.aspx - or call Merseytravel on 0151 330 1661.
Help with warmer homes

Warmer Wirral – heating grants for low income households

Wirral Council provides Cosy Homes Heating Grants to residents with low incomes. With ever-increasing energy bills, the Council is keen to assist households on certain welfare benefits with broken or inefficient heating systems when they’re not eligible for the Affordable Warmth scheme. The grant can provide new central heating systems, replace faulty or broken boilers and upgrade existing heating systems to improve their energy efficiency.

If you meet the criteria above, and would like to apply for this grant, please call 0151 691 8114 or email heatinggrants@wirral.gov.uk. For further information on the grant please go to www.wirral.gov.uk/heatinggrants.

Other support

There are other heating grants, free insulation and an interest free loan available through the council and its partner organisations, some of which are outlined below. To find out more about what you may be eligible for, please contact the Save Energy Advice Line on Freephone 0800 043 0151.

Interest Free Loans

Cosy Loans are available from the council to homeowners, private tenants and landlords for energy efficiency improvements such as boiler replacements and solar water heating.

For further information, telephone Wirral Methodist Housing Association on 0151 647 5471

Payments and fuel debt advice

If you are experiencing difficulties paying for fuel or water bills, it is important to contact your supplier to try to reach a financial arrangement which is acceptable to both you and your supplier. Your supplier must offer you a payment arrangement that takes into account your financial circumstances and ability to pay.

Energy Projects Plus operate the Wirral Fuel Debt Advice service. If you need any help in handling debts to your energy company telephone 0800 043 0151.
Your Safety

Winter driving tips

With the days being shorter during the winter months and daylight hours often not particularly bright, drivers need to take extra care to ensure that their lights, including fog lights, are working properly and that they are used at the appropriate times. Side lights are often appropriate during the day time as visibility can be poor due to light and weather conditions.

In the winter, it’s even more important to check that your car is in a good condition and is also advisable to consider doing a few extra checks over the colder months. Completing the following checks will reduce your chances of breaking down on the road and keep you safer:

- Check and replace the anti-freeze in the radiator
- Make sure your lights are clean and check the bulbs
- Ensure your windscreen is clean - It should also be free from ice and snow and not misted up. Allow your windscreen time to de-mist before driving off to give you a clear view of the road. Do not be tempted to wipe a 'porthole' for you to see out of as this will not provide you with a clear view of the road ahead.
- Replace the battery if it’s not reliable
- Check windscreen wipers are working effectively
- Check that the washer bottles are full and contain a suitable additive to prevent freezing.

Check your tyres

In the winter months it is essential that your tyres are well maintained. Cold temperatures, damp roads, snow and ice all reduce a tyre's ability to grip the road properly, leading to longer stopping distances and a higher risk of an accident.

Ensure your tyres are correctly inflated and replace them if the tread has reached the legal minimum. For further information please see www.tyresafe.org

Putting aside ten minutes to plan your journey before you set off could make all the difference. Check your planned route at on the Highways Agency's website where you can find up-to-date traffic information.

Driving in freezing conditions
Gritting helps to prevent ice forming and melt any ice and snow which is already there. However, it does not automatically make roads ice-free. Wherever possible, use main routes which are likely to have been treated. Allow extra time for your journey in wintry conditions.

Reduce your speed and allow more time to stop than usual. Cut your speed, don't brake suddenly, drop down a gear to let your engine help with the braking and, above all, anticipate possible problems ahead.

If you are planning a long winter journey, you should pack your emergency kit in your car. This simple array of everyday household items could be your salvation if you get caught out by adverse weather conditions on the journey. Gather a few items together and keep them in your car - just in case.

In particularly severe weather consider whether your journey is necessary or whether it can be delayed. If you have to go out, dress warmly and be prepared in case you get stuck or delayed.

**Make sure you can be seen**

If the visibility is poor during the day through heavy rain, snow, fog or mist, you must turn on your headlights so that your vehicle can be seen. In poor visibility, use dipped headlights and only use fog lights when visibility is less than 100 metres. Remember to switch your fog lights off when visibility improves. In rain, fog lights are a hazard for the motorists behind you, so do not use them.

“**Be bright, be seen**”

As the days become shorter, the potential for accidents on the road tends to increase due to wet or icy road surfaces, bad weather and poor light even during daylight hours. Children in particular become more vulnerable as they are less visible to motorists.

The advice to pedestrians and cyclists during the winter months is ‘be safe, be seen’.

- Make sure you can be easily seen, especially at night, on dark days and in bad weather.
- Bright or fluorescent clothes show up best by day, especially in dull or misty weather.
- By night, reflective material is best and shows up in car headlights - fluorescent clothing doesn't work after dark. Reflective tape can be put on clothing, school bags and equipment.
• It is against the law to cycle at night without a white front light, a red back light and a red reflector at the back, so make sure all bikes are properly equipped and working.
• Cross the road at the safest place possible. e.g. zebra, pelican, puffin and patrolled crossings.
• Use the Green Cross Code: Stop, Look, Listen and Think
• If you are out at night, choose routes that are well-lit by streetlights and cross at well-lit places.
Keeping warm at home

Keeping warm at home during winter is an obvious thing to want to do and is essential to help prevent colds, flu or more serious health problems like pneumonia taking hold.

However, it isn’t always that straightforward as keeping warm often comes at a cost.

Here are simple things you can do to keep warm at home without breaking the bank:-

**Heating your home**

To keep warm at home during the day try to:

- heat your main living room to around 18-21°C (64-70°F) and the rest of the house at least 16°C (61°F)
- heat all the rooms you use in the day
- make sure you keep your living room warm throughout the day and heat your bedroom before going to bed
- set the timer on your heating to come on before you get up and switch off when you go to bed
- in very cold weather set the heating to come on earlier, rather than turn the thermostat up, so you won’t be cold while you wait for your home to heat up

To keep warm at home during the night you should:

- try to keep the temperature above 18°C (65°F) in your bedroom overnight
- open the window or door a little at night for ventilation if you use a fire or heater in your bedroom during winter
- never use an electric blanket and a hot water bottle together as you could electrocute yourself
- check what type of electric blanket you have – some are designed only to warm the bed before you get in and should not to be used throughout the night
- make sure your electric blanket is safe to use by getting it tested every three years - the Fire Brigade, Trading Standards and Age UK can test your electric blanket for safety

**Wearing warm clothes**

You can help keep warm by:

- wearing plenty of thin layers, rather than one thick one
• putting on a coat, hat, scarf, gloves and warm shoes or boots when you go outside
• wearing clothes made of wool, cotton, or fleecy synthetic fibres
• wearing bed socks and thermal underwear at night

Stay healthy

There are things you can do that will reduce the risk of illness and protect you against the cold.

Get an annual flu jab

You can get a free jab if you:

• have serious heart, lung or kidney disease or diabetes
• have a weak immune system, caused by disease or medical treatment
• have had a stroke or TIA (transient ischaemic attack)
• are aged 65 years or over
• are pregnant

Contact your GP or talk to your pharmacist if you think you might qualify for a free flu jab.

Eat well

Eating regular meals will help keep your energy levels up during winter. Try to:

• have plenty of hot food and drinks
• plan your meals and keep your diet as varied as possible
• aim to include your daily 5 portions of fruit and vegetables, this includes tinned and frozen fruit and vegetables

Protecting your home

There are a number of steps you can take to make your home more resilient to the elements, particularly when winter bites.

Insulation will help keep the heat inside your home as well as helping to keep your heating costs down. It’s a good idea to:

• fit draught-proofing to seal any gaps around windows and doors
• make sure your loft has at least 10–11 inches (270mm) of insulation, any home with 6 inches (150mm) or less should have it topped up
• make sure wall cavities are insulated
• insulate your hot water cylinder and pipes

Burst pipes and other leaks are also a major risk during winter, so make sure you don’t have to make an insurance claim this winter by following these handy tips:-

1. Prune those trees around your house - heavy snow can cause branches to break and cause damage to your home

2. Keep your gutters clear to avoid flooding and damage to your home

3. To avoid frozen pipes and flooding always keep your heating on at a low temperature. And remember to keep it on if you go away over the festive season

4. Make sure your pipes and water tanks are well insulated

5. Know how to turn the water off, so you’re prepared in case your pipes do start leaking

6. If you are planning to use your chimney this winter then check it’s in good working condition. The cost of a chimney sweep is fairly small and could prevent a chimney fire

7. Make sure you have home insurance for extra peace of mind

**Footwear**

It’s a well-known fact that falls can kill, so in wintery weather, make sure you choose your footwear wisely. Your shoes should be well insulated and waterproof with thick, non-slip soles, wide, low heels and should be reasonably lightweight.
List of useful numbers and links

Council call centre

For general enquiries, call 0151 606 2000

Streetscene

For enquiries relating to roads, pavements, litter, waste collections and other related matters, call 0151 606 2004 (out of hour emergencies, call 0151 647 7810).

Revenues and Benefits

For advice on Council Tax, benefits, reporting change of address, payments or other information or claims, call 0151 606 2002.

CADT for Adult and Children's social services

Call 0151 514 2222 option 3, email wcnt.centraladviceanddutyteam@nhs.net

One Stop Shops locations

For contact details of your local One Stop Shop, please visit the Wirral Council website - wirral.gov.uk/onestopshop

POPIN team

The Council’s POPIN – Promoting Older People’s Independence Network – Service can be contacted on 0151 666 4659 or via the Council’s Central Advice and Duty Team on 0151 514 2222 option 3 (out of hours emergency, 0151 677 6557)

Age UK Wirral

Age UK Wirral’s Head Office is at 42-44 Market Street, Birkenhead CH41 5BT. Telephone: 0151 482 3456

Sport and Recreation booking line

For further information on activities to help keep you active over the winter months, visit the Wirral Council website – www.wirral.gov.uk – or call 0151 606 2010 for sport and recreation information and booking line. Information on health-led initiatives and activities can be obtained by calling NHS Wirral or 0151 630 8383.

NHS Wirral – GP Out of Hours – Walk in Centre
Wirral GP Out of Hours service provides emergency medical care to patients who are unable to wait for their GP practice to re-open. It is open Monday – Sunday, 6:30pm – 8:00am (including bank holidays).

Wirral Walk-In Centres (WiC) are nurse-led facilities that provide treatment for minor ailments such as infections, lacerations (minor cuts or wounds) and fractures. They can be found at Victoria Central Hospital, Mill Lane, Wallasey CH44 5UF, opening times: Monday – Friday, 8.00 – 10.00pm. Saturday, Sunday (including bank holidays) 9.00am – 10.00pm and Eastham Clinic, Eastham Rake, Eastham CH62 9AN, opening times: Monday – Friday, 2.00 – 10.00pm, Saturday & Sunday, 9.00am – 5.00pm. Both Walk-in Centres offer free car parking.

To access either GP Out of Hours or the Walk-In Centres, contact the Unplanned Care Switchboard on 0151 678 8496.

**Energy Saving Trust**

Free, independent and local energy saving advice to householders. To speak a local advisor, call 0300 123 1234.

**Direct.gov**

Public services, all in one place – [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)