Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

From mountain to sea

OP12
Appendix 12 - RECONNECT



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1 Introduction

Aberdeenshire Council operates a well-established Winter Maintenance Operational Plan throughout the winter season to maintain the road network and support the safe movement of people and goods.

Where forecast weather conditions indicate a prolonged period of severe winter weather that is likely to result in significant and sustained disruption to the road network, the arrangements set out in this Appendix may be implemented.

RECONNECT provides the strategic framework for the management and delivery of winter maintenance services during severe winter weather events. It supports a coordinated approach to maintaining access to essential services, critical infrastructure, settlements and communities when normal operational arrangements are likely to be affected.

Severe winter weather can place significant pressure on resources and may impact the Council's ability to maintain normal service levels across the road network. As each event presents different challenges and operational requirements, circumstances will be continuously assessed, with decisions informed by prevailing and forecast conditions. RECONNECT provides the framework for prioritising available resources, directing operational activities and supporting affected settlements and communities throughout periods of prolonged severe winter weather.

In determining the appropriate deployment of resources, consideration will be given to a range of factors, including the severity of conditions, the weather forecast, the anticipated duration of disruption, network conditions, and the availability of both internal and external resources.

During severe winter weather, the operational priorities set out within RECONNECT will guide the deployment of available resources. The focus will be on maintaining and restoring essential access and supporting affected settlements and communities. As conditions evolve, priorities and resources will be reviewed to ensure the most effective response is provided to areas experiencing disruption.

2 Purpose

The purpose of RECONNECT is to provide a clear, coordinated and prioritised framework for responding to periods of severe winter weather that place exceptional demands on available resources. It supports consistent decision-making and the effective deployment of resources to maintain access to essential services and critical infrastructure, reconnect connectivity to affected settlements and communities, and support recovery during sustained periods of disruption. Where operational demand exceeds available capacity, RECONNECT provides the basis for prioritising resources to achieve the greatest overall benefit across the road network and communities of Aberdeenshire.

The initial aim is to reconnect our towns and villages by restoring access along key routes before focussing on clearing our road network within our communities.

RECONNECT aims to:

- Reduce the impact of severe winter weather on the road network;
- Restore access to isolated settlements and communities as quickly and safely as practicable;
- Support the delivery of essential services;
- Prioritise resources where they will provide the greatest benefit to communities;
- Promote community resilience and self-help during periods of prolonged disruption;
- Support recovery and the restoration of normal service levels; and
- Keep Elected Members and the public informed.

3 Scope

The scope of RECONNECT is limited to the carriageway network. When activated, RECONNECT provides the framework for prioritising and deploying available resources to maintain and restore access in accordance with the network restoration priorities set out within this Appendix.

This Appendix sets out the trigger points for activating RECONNECT, the road network priorities and the response timelines that may be implemented during severe winter weather. It outlines how available resources will be prioritised to restore access, maintain community connectivity and support the safe and effective recovery of the road network.

4 Delegations, Roles & Responsibilities

Roads and Infrastructure employees may be temporarily redeployed from their normal duties during periods of severe winter weather to support RECONNECT. Any redeployment will be managed in line with service priorities, competence and health and safety requirements.

The specific roles and responsibilities for the delivery of RECONNECT are outlined below.

Head of Roads and Infrastructure Services

The Head of Roads and Infrastructure Services will:

- Be responsible for activating RECONNECT. In the absence of the Head of Roads and Infrastructure Services, the decision will be made by a delegated manager;
- Once a decision has been made to activate RECONNECT, the Head of Service (or delegated manager) will contact the Duty Emergency Response Coordinator (DERC) to advise of the activation and reason(s) for doing so, and if appropriate suggest they may wish to stand up the Incident Management Team if this is not already in place;

- Provide situational update to Incident Management Team;

- Provide feedback/requests from Incident Management Team to the Roads & Infrastructure Services Management Team for appropriate action;

- Approve Briefing Note(s) to Members; and

- Be familiar with the details of RECONNECT.

Roads and Infrastructure Services Management Team

The Roads and Infrastructure Services Management Team will:

- Be familiar with and will implement RECONNECT;

- Identify a Service manager to take on role of Project Lead to manage the incident, set daily situational update meetings, create Wrike Weather Event project, identify and assign tasks. The identified lead will also arrange to meet with Roads Managers, Roads Management & Maintenance Principals, Quality & Resources Principal, Roads Seniors and Winter Duty Officers for a preparation session so that duties are clearly laid out of what is expected from who and when, how the updates are to be completed etc, arrange with Support Services a new project code required to capture costs for event (labour, plant, external contractor costs, salt and sand);

- Identify leads for specific areas/hubs required by Incident Management Team. Hubs, such as Welfare/Care for People, will be set up following an instruction from Incident Management Team and Services will be asked to identify an officer to provide input;

- Inform the Strategic Finance Team (Insurance) of the expected impact the severe winter weather event is likely to have on service delivery eg delays in repairing potholes due to resources delivering snow clearing activities and following event advise the Strategic Finance Team (Insurance) that service delivery has resumed; and

- Support teams and ensure that plant and resources are made available in areas which are priority.

Principal Roads Engineer

The Principal Roads Engineer will:

- Identify 7 Engineers/Technicians who will provide support and contact for the Depot Supervisor;

- Liaise with each other and agree who will contact Neighbouring Authorities to check if they can offer assistance. (Contact Details provided in Appendix 1 of the Winter Maintenance Operational Plan);

- Meet daily with Supervisor and Engineer/Technician to;

- Review and assess the condition of the network, including live updates from the public (Quality & Resources team will arrange for link to portal to be created and issued to the Public); and

- Identify gaps in resources (plant and frontline). Any gaps identified during these meetings, consideration will be given to pulling resources from other areas if possible and safe to do so. If this is not possible, arrangements shall be made by the Engineer/Technician to bring in additional contracted farmers and contractors.

- Review/Approve/Request further information on Purchaser Order(s)/Invoice(s) raised including any additional contracted farmers/contractors;

- Review identified resources gaps and approve the use of additional contracted farmers and contractors where required.

- Support the Manager, Supervisor and the team.

Senior Roads Engineer

The Senior Roads Engineer will:

- Review staff rotas to ensure sufficient operational cover is in place in the areas of greatest need and that appropriate rest breaks are scheduled and taken in accordance with working time and safety requirements.

- Where staffing shortfalls are identified, issue a request for additional support to all eligible staff, clearly setting out the required duties, expected commitment, and any applicable payments or allowances; and

- Support the Principal and the team.

Engineer/Technician

The identified Engineer/Technician will:

- Act as a link between what is frontline operations and management;

- Contact Depot Supervisor once identified as support where possible and if safe to do so, be based out of the depot;

- Where resource gaps have been identified and resources are not available internally;

    - Liaise with Fleet re any broken down plant and obtain an indicative timeframe for repairs;

    - Contact additional farmers and contractors (see **Appendix 12A**) to establish availability and rates. Following approval from the Principal Roads Engineer, record the resource details and deployment locations within **Appendix** 12D; and

    - Coordinate with Support Services regarding Purchase Orders to be raised and IR35 for additional hired in resources.

- Act as the main point of contact for farmers and contractors and coordinate the deployment of approved additional resources;

- Collate situational update for area and provide a daily updates at 09:00 and 14:00 (unless alternative reporting times are agreed). Updates will be provided in the format set out in **Appendix 12B**;

- Act as the main point of contact for salt deliveries; and

- Liaise with Contractors engaged to support snow clearing operations at priority locations.

Winter Duty Officer (DO)

The Winter Duty Officers role does not change during a severe weather event.

Winter Duty Supervisor

The Winter Duty Supervisor will focus on delivery of the priorities laid out in this plan.

Roads Supervisor

The Roads Supervisor will:

- Meet with the Principal and Eng/Tech on a daily basis to provide updates on the current situation of the network, highlighting any gaps; and

- Support and supervise the frontline, ensure all welfare (including breaks) are available and utilised.

Network Management Team

The Network Management Team will:

- Coordinate the issue and collection of information relating to additional resources, in liaison with the identified Engineer/Technician

Quality & Resources Team

The Quality & Resources Team will:

- Manage public communications for pre, during and post event – examples of text advising of what we expect, how ready we are etc are provided from **Appendix 12F & 12G;**

- Use information collated for 09:00 and 14:00 meetings to provide comms to the public with situational updates via Social Media;

- Arrange for public to be able to report live updates via a portal (see **Appendix 12C**) and advise Roads & Infrastructure Services Management Team, Principals, Seniors and Eng/Technicians of the link to the portal.

- Monitor salt stock, trigger levels and order as appropriate;

- Provide the Salt Contractor with the relevant contact details for coordinating salt deliveries to the depots during a severe snow event and advise the contractor when the severe weather event has been stood down and normal contact arrangements will resume; and

- Review RECONNECT following any event for feedback and make any amendments as required.

R & I Comms Team

The R & I Comms Team will:

- Following instruction from the identified Project Lead, prepare an automated message to be issued via FixMyStreet in response to complaints relating to the severe winter weather event providing contact details for emergency cases; and

- Following event arrange for the automated messaging relating to the severe winter weather event to be removed.

5 Activation of Plan

RECONNECT will be activated by the Head of Roads & Infrastructure Services, or a delegated manager, based on advice provided by the Winter Duty Officer/Principal Engineer.

RECONNECT may be activated where forecast weather conditions indicate a prolonged period of severe winter weather that is likely to cause widespread disruption across Aberdeenshire, affect access to settlements and communities, impact the road network, and place exceptional demands on available resources.

The severity, duration and likely impact of each weather event will be assessed by the Winter Duty Officer/Principal Roads Engineers on a case by case basis, recognising that no two events are identical.

For example, a period of heavy snowfall over four days may have a similar impact to a weather event lasting ten days with lower but persistent snowfall. Decisions will therefore be based on the overall anticipated impact on settlements and communities, the road network and essential services rather than the snowfall levels alone.

In most cases, a weather warning is likely to be issued, which should also be taken into account when considering a recommendation to the Head of Roads & Infrastructure Services for activation of RECONNECT.

6 Network Restoration Plan

In the event of RECONNECT being activated, the tiered approach to restoring the network will be as follows:

RECONNECT Tier 1

The initial priority will be the routes identified as RECONNECT Tier 1. These routes connect Aberdeenshire's major settlements to the Trunk Road network and Aberdeen. The objective is, where reasonably practicable, to restore these routes to a condition suitable for use by motorised vehicles within 24 hours.

RECONNECT Tier 2

The objective of RECONNECT Tier 2 is, where reasonably practicable, to restore these routes to a condition suitable for use by motorised vehicles within 48 hours of restoration activities commencing. These routes provide key links between Aberdeenshire's major and medium-sized settlements and are a priority within the network restoration process. Resources will continue to be directed towards maintaining and restoring Tier 2 routes until they are considered operationally sustainable. Resources may then be deployed to RECONNECT Tiers 3 to 6, which focus on restoring access to all remaining settlements and communities and addressing the carriageway network within those locations.

The target timescales set out within each RECONNECT tier are indicative and may be adjusted depending on the severity, extent and anticipated duration of the severe weather event. Where circumstances require a change to the target timescales, updates will be provided as soon as reasonably practicable.

RECONNECT Tier 3

RECONNECT Tier 3 focuses on restoring access to settlements with a population of more than 20 residents. Priority will be given to restoring routes to a condition suitable for use by motorised vehicles, with particular consideration given to settlements served by a single point of access. The objective is, where reasonably practicable, to restore access to these settlements within 7 days.

RECONNECT Tier 4

RECONNECT Tier 4 comprises carriageways within settlements classified as Category 4a and with a population of more than 500 residents. The objective is, where reasonably practicable, to restore these carriageways to a condition suitable for use by motorised vehicles within 7 days.

RECONNECT Tier 5

RECONNECT Tier 5 comprises carriageways within settlements classified as Category 4a and with a population of between 20 and 500 residents. The objective is, where reasonably practicable, to restore these carriageways to a condition suitable for use by motorised vehicles within 10 days.

RECONNECT Tier 6

RECONNECT Tier 6 the remaining carriageway zones within settlements, based on the Scottish Government Data Zones 2011. The objective is, where reasonably practicable, to restore these zones to a condition suitable for use by motorised vehicles within 14 days.

Appendix 12D provides further detail.

7 Additional Resources

Where severe winter weather is forecast or experienced, additional resources may be deployed to support snow clearing operations and maintain service delivery.

Additional resources will be used to supplement Council resources and existing contracted farmers and contractors where operational requirements cannot be met through existing arrangements.

Available Council resources and existing contracted resources will be assessed and prioritised to areas of greatest operational need. Where these resources are unavailable, fully committed or insufficient, additional resources may be engaged. This may include farmers, contractors, individuals, Partner Organisations or Mutual Aid resources.

The deployment of additional resources will be based on operational requirements, prevailing weather conditions, resource availability and the priorities set out within the RECONNECT Network Restoration Plan.

The Farmer or Contractor shall ensure that all drivers and operators hold the appropriate licence, are appropriately trained and are competent to operate the vehicle, plant or equipment used during the snow clearing operations. This information is to be retained within the Sharepoint project folder established for the event.

7.1 Pre Season – Additional Resources

The Network Management Team will invite expressions of interest from farmers, contractors and other suitably equipped individuals who may be willing to assist with snow clearing operations during periods of severe winter weather.

The provision of these details does not guarantee that work will be offered. However, it will enable the Council to maintain a register of potential resources that may be engaged where operational requirements arise during severe winter weather events.

The information required in the first instance will include:

- Contact Name
- Number
- Email Address
- Type of Vehicle, Plant and/or equipment available
- Location/area available to carry out snow clearing operations
- Any unavailability during the winter season

7.2 Activation of RECONNECT & During Event – Additional Resources

When it has been identified that additional resources are required, contact will be made by an officer from Roads and Infrastructure Services to verbally discuss and agree proposed arrangements.

Confirmation will be issued, by email where possible, together with a letter confirming the agreed arrangements, Terms and Conditions, IR35 requirements and a timesheet (see **Appendix 12E**). Farmers and contractors will be required to provide vehicle registration details, insurance company details, policy numbers and return a signed copy of the letter.

It is important that the full name and address, including post code, is obtained as early as possible to allow new suppliers to be set up on the Council's financial system. Failure to obtain or provide this information may result in delays to payment of invoices.

It is also important to agree a rate and clearly define what is included within the rate avoid any unexpected costs. Agreed rates should be recorded in the Network Restoration Plan (see **Appendix 12B**).

Where existing contracted farmers are deployed alongside additional resources during a RECONNECT event, they will be paid in accordance with the rates agreed for the event. This will ensure a consistent and equitable approach to payment for comparable activities undertaken in support of network restoration and snow clearing operations.

A Purchase Order should be raised at the earliest opportunity with the total value being based on an estimated duration of the works.

8 Communications Plan

During an event, communications will be issued as per Appendix 9 of the Winter Maintenance Operational Plan. In addition, **Appendix 12F and 12G** provide a communication timeline and example messages that may be used to notify members, other Council Services and the public in preparation for an event, upon activation of RECONNECT, throughout the event and during the recovery phase.

8.1 Internal Communications Plan

Appendix 12F provides a summary of when member briefings should be issued and the information that should be included within each update. It also includes a template for each stage of RECONNECT – in preparation, upon activation, throughout the event and during the recovery phase.

The templates may also be adapted and issued to provide updates to other Services, such as Education.

8.2 External Communications Plan

Appendix 12G provides a summary of the type of communications that may be issued to members of the public via social media, radio or newspapers in preparation for an event, upon activation of RECONNECT, throughout the event and during the recovery phase.

9 Grit Bin Prioritisation

During RECONNECT, demand for the refilling of grit bins is likely to exceed resources. Therefore, as with our road network, we will prioritise refilling our grit bins based on factors such as:

- The traffic volume using the road on which the grit bin is located;
- The gradient of the road. Steeper roads present a greater risk to vehicles and pedestrians during icy conditions;
- Whether the road provides the sole means of access to and from a community; and
- The location of the grit bin in relation to the junction, including junctions connecting to A & B class roads.

By considering these factors available resources will be directed to locations where they can deliver the greatest benefit to public safety and network resilience.

10 Health, Safety & Welfare

The health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce remains a priority throughout any prolonged period of severe winter weather. Winter maintenance operations often require staff to work in challenging conditions, over extended periods, and under significant operational pressure to restore access across the road network.

To ensure that services can be delivered safely and effectively, employees are required to comply with established health and safety procedures, including taking appropriate rest breaks and reporting any concerns relating to fatigue or wellbeing with their line manager. Workloads and working arrangements will be monitored by line managers to ensure staff remain fit to undertake their duties and that working time arrangements comply with the Working Time Directive.

11 Recovery

The recovery phase of a severe snow event is the period following the restoration of access to settlements and communities and the reopening of priority routes, during which resources continue to work towards the restoration of normal service levels across the road network. This phase may include the ongoing treatment and clearance of residential streets and other locations where snow and ice continue to affect accessibility.

Recovery activities may also include the removal of significant accumulations of snow where these are causing ongoing disruption to the road network, access to settlements and communities, or the delivery of essential services. Snow removal will be prioritised at locations where it is considered necessary to support recovery and restore network functionality.

As temperatures rise and snow begins to thaw, there is a potential risk of localised flooding. Recovery operations may therefore include monitoring conditions and responding to flooding impacts where required.

During the recovery phase, an assessment will be undertaken to determine when routine maintenance activities and normal service delivery, including pothole repairs, can resume.

12 Review, Feedback & Continuous Improvement

Following any severe winter weather event that results in the activation of the RECONNECT a formal review will be undertaken by the Quality & Resources team.

The purpose of the review is to assess the effectiveness of RECONNECT, identify lessons learned and ensure that future responses continue to meet the needs of our communities during periods of prolonged severe winter weather. Whilst every severe winter weather event presents its own challenges, the purpose of RECONNECT remains consistent - *to provide a clear, prioritised and coordinated approach to restoring access and returning the road network to normal service levels when exceptional demands are placed on available resources.*

Reviews will consider operational performance, resource deployment, communication and stakeholder feedback. Data gathered throughout the event will be analysed to assess whether priority levels and associated timescales were appropriate and achievable and highlight any factors that may have influenced delivery, ie further unexpected snowfall. Where opportunities for improvement are identified, these will be incorporated into future revisions of RECONNECT.

The review process will consider both areas for improvement and examples of good practice. Recognising successful approaches and the commitment shown by employees, Contractors, communities and partners is an important part of ensuing that lessons learned are shared and embedded.

The findings from each review will be used to inform future planning, strengthening operational resilience and support the continuous improvement of winter maintenance and network restoration and recovery arrangements.

Appendices

The supporting appendices to RECONNECT are not included within the published version of this document. Certain appendices contain personal information, while others contain supporting operational information.

12A Farmers & Contractor Details (Additional Resources)

12B Situational Updates

12C Intelligence Picture

12D Network Restoration Plan

12E Additional Resources during Severe Winter Weather – Letter, Terms & Conditions and Timesheet

12F Internal Communications - Timeline & Templates

12G External Communications