# Kirklees councillors call for review of gritting policy amid severe winter challenges



Councillors in Kirklees have raised concerns about the preparedness and response to severe winter conditions, particularly focusing on the impact these have on new housing estates within the borough. Their discussions followed significant flooding, snow, and icy weather that affected the area at the start of 2025.

During this period, the district faced widespread disruption with parts of Kirklees submerged due to flooding while snow and ice caused further chaos. In a notable display of resource deployment, the council spread 5,470 tonnes of grit across the road network over just eight days—a volume typically used over six months.

Winter maintenance budgets had previously been cut, leading to a policy where grit bins are filled once at the start of the season and only refilled under exceptional circumstances, dependent on available resources. This year’s extreme conditions qualified as such, prompting a replenishment of grit bins across Kirklees.

At a meeting of the council’s Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Panel, an evaluation of the council’s response to both flooding and snow was presented, identifying successes and areas requiring improvement. While councillors praised the tireless efforts of council workers during the harsh conditions, concerns remained, especially regarding winter services provision for new housing developments.

Councillor John Taylor (Conservative, Kirkburton) highlighted a particular issue about gritting policies for new estates. He said, “You can’t say that we’ve got an ambitious target in terms of housing growth but you’re never going to grit any of these roads or estates that are built.” He recounted feedback from residents of these new developments, who questioned why their roads were not gritted despite paying council tax like others. “Yes, there are financial challenges but we need to recognise that there is an expectation of our residents that we support all residents across the district, and if you’re just unfortunate enough to have moved into a house that’s been built in the last few years, you’re not going to get any help from the council because that’s effectively what the policy says and that policy isn’t sustainable.”

Councillor Taylor requested that the council review its policy in light of the recent severe weather and the additional £0.5 million allocated to winter maintenance in the latest council budget. He also asked if there could be a planning mechanism that places some responsibility on management companies of new estates to handle gritting.

Katherine Armitage, Service Director for Environmental Strategy and Climate Change, explained that the gritting policy is reviewed annually and may be presented again to the scrutiny panel. She added she believed that new developments situated on priority routes would be gritted but promised to verify and explore how planning regulations might address responsibilities for estate management companies.

Another topic raised was the snow warden initiative, a volunteer scheme wherein community members are trained and equipped to assist during snowy conditions. Councillor David Longstaff (Liberal Democrat, Almondbury) reported that some volunteers felt “unloved” after interactions with the council during this winter and had even considered resigning. Ms Armitage, however, countered that this feedback did not align with the official annual survey outcomes, which inform improvements to the scheme. Councillor Taylor suggested the council missed an opportunity to promote the snow warden initiative more effectively immediately after the winter events while public interest remained high.

Council officers informed the panel that multiple weather forecasting sources were successfully utilised to prepare for and respond to the extreme conditions. The council’s social media communications during this period were also deemed well received by the public.

Additional measures were taken during the snow events to support schools and the community, including targeted highway gritting, pavement clearing, and activating the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). This scheme provides shelter for rough sleepers when temperatures fall to freezing or below, a critical service in harsh conditions. However, challenges were identified, such as the need to pay for more costly Bed & Breakfast accommodations when council-provided shelter capacity was insufficient. While there are enough council beds for six people, 31 individuals required housing following the January SWEP activation.

In response to criticisms from some residents regarding inconsistent gritting of roads and pavements, the council plans to clarify its gritting policy on its website. This update will detail what the council will, may, or will not do depending on available resources.

On lessons learned from the flooding, councillors were told that some residents moved road closure signs or ignored them, thereby putting safety at risk. The council intends to enhance public communication about the dangers of ignoring such notices and is considering introducing flashing beacon warnings at known flood hotspots to deter unsafe behaviour and better alert the public during road closures.

These discussions and reviews reflect Kirklees Council’s ongoing efforts to evaluate and improve its management of severe winter weather, balancing available resources, public expectations, and safety priorities across the borough’s communities.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://democracy.kirklees.gov.uk/documents/s63262/January%202025%20Severe%20Weather%20Response.pdf> - This document likely details Kirklees Council's emergency response to severe weather events in January 2025, aligning with discussions about reviewing preparedness and response strategies.
2. <https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/winter> - This webpage provides general information on Kirklees Council's winter maintenance activities and preparations for adverse weather, supporting claims about gritting policies and public health concerns.
3. <https://kirkleeslocaltv.com/news-and-affairs/kirklees-council-activates-severe-weather-emergency-protocol-amid-cold-snap/> - The article discusses the activation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) by Kirklees Council in response to cold snaps, which is also mentioned in the context of supporting rough sleepers during harsh conditions.
4. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/forecast/gcxoezuvbh> - While not directly linked, this URL represents the Met Office's winter weather guidance, which is referenced in various local council preparations for winter.
5. <https://www.flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/warnings-and-alerts/live> - This national flood information service is crucial for residents in areas like Kirklees, helping them stay informed about potential flood risks, a point raised in discussions about flood management.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/severe-weather-emergency-protocols-for-rough-sleepers> - This government guidance on Severe Weather Emergency Protocols supports the claims about Kirklees Council's efforts to provide shelter for rough sleepers during extreme weather conditions.
7. <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/if-you-move-new-house-31495256> - Please view link - unable to able to access data