

snow warden and community self help

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information for town and parish councils

Snow Wardens and self help

During periods of extreme weather, such as the heavy snow over the last two winters, communities can do a lot to help themselves and others. Devon County Council's programme of winter service (i.e. roads which are salted) is extensive but our focus is on the major routes which carry the most traffic, which sometimes means smaller communities don't receive as much help as they would like.

Self help is about communities coming together to help each other on a voluntary basis during times of extreme weather, and Devon County Council is offering support to these community groups and parish councils by providing advice, training and salt. Around 30 parishes signed up for the voluntary Snow Warden scheme when it was launched last winter, and the county council is hoping to swell the ranks before next winter arrives.

The Snow Warden is the key point of contact between the local community and DCC. It is primarily a co-ordination role but also provides traceability regarding Devon County Council's public liability insurance by delivering training to community volunteers and through keeping a register of the local volunteers.

A Snow Warden must: ● Be nominated as suitable by the town or parish council or similar body. ● Have received suitable training by DCC. ● Agree to work within the arrangements set forward by the county council. ● Be registered with DCC.



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Parish/town commitment

We would like to encourage parish and town councils to agree to:

- **Register** with the Snow Warden Scheme. This will identify an individual to act as the parish/town contact point for these matters who will be accountable to the local community through the parish/town council.
- **Determine** what the local priorities are in severe weather and how they will be delivered locally, and be accountable to the local community for them. Priorities should be confirmed with County Council Neighbourhood teams prior to winter.
- **Take responsibility** for delivering local self help and where possible refilling the grit bins and salt bags within their parish in a way which fits in with the local priorities e.g. to arrange for local grit bins to be refilled using local resources.
- **Demonstrate** that suitable arrangements are in place to store and manage the salt responsibly, and be accountable to the local community for the way which salt is managed.
- **To use the salt** during severe weather on the public highway only (including footways and footpaths), but not areas treated by the county council as part of the defined salting network.
- **Encourage** responsible local use of the grit bin facility and help to minimise abuse, e.g. people taking salt for use on private driveways.

Devon County Council commitment

We will commit to:

- **Deliver a comprehensive winter service** as defined in the Winter Service and Emergencies plan.
- **Refill** all the county grit bins on the inventory prior to winter.
- **Provide up to 5 tonnes of salt free of charge** (usually in one tonne 'dumpy bags') to be supplied in one delivery to one parish location prior to winter and a small supply of salt bags. Quantity of salt to towns will be negotiated separately and will depend on the services that they wish to deliver, for example clearing High Streets.
- **Offer up to a further 5 tonnes** of salt at the same time if required at £100 a tonne.
- **Provide a mechanism whereby further salt can be purchased.**
- **Train Snow Wardens** as part of the scheme, and provide advice and guidance as required.
- **Provide Public Liability Insurance** (but not other forms of insurance cover) as identified within the scheme.

Training/Health & Safety

Devon County Council will provide workshop training to town / parish council representatives to provide them with the information they need to set up a voluntary self help scheme. It is anticipated that these representatives will be the designated Snow Warden for each parish or town who will be the community co-ordinator of the voluntary self help scheme. Snow wardens are given safety training by Devon County Council, and while they carry out the snow clearance at their own risk, as long as the snow clearance is carried out responsibly and within the guidelines of the scheme, a third party public liability claim would be covered by the county council's public liability insurance (see next section). Snow Wardens will be provided with a fluorescent jacket to ensure visibility when working.

Training will:

- outline DCC's winter maintenance role
- discuss the benefits of a voluntary self help scheme
- consider the legal implications
- consider a model for setting up a voluntary self help scheme
- consider how voluntary work should be carried out in a safe and responsible manner
- consider the purchase, storage and use of salt supplies and winter maintenance equipment
- empower the designated Snow Warden to be able to set up a voluntary self help scheme and to recruit, register and deliver training to community volunteers
- consider when a self help scheme should be implemented.



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Public liability

In the unlikely event of a claim, Devon County Council will cover the public liability aspect of insurance for voluntary work on the public highway or footway, providing it is undertaken in a safe manner according to DCC advice. This, for example, would cover any claims by third party as a result of the clearance, which the county council would defend if clearance was done in accordance with DCC advice.

Devon County Council will not provide any other form of insurance cover for this activity which must be undertaken at the volunteers own risk. So, for example, any damage to one's own person, property or vehicle would not be covered. If vehicles are to be used (e.g. farmers) then they must ensure that the vehicle is suitably insured for any activity undertaken – if in doubt, owners should check with the vehicle's insurer.

If a local council decide to employ a contractor to undertake any winter operation for them then the County Council's public liability insurance will not apply – it only applies to volunteers under this scheme.

Salt supplies and storage

Devon County Council is pledging to provide up to five tonnes of salt free of charge to parishes that sign up to the scheme. Those who register are asked to identify an individual to act as a point of contact during winter and demonstrate that they have arrangements in place to store and manage salt. Parishes/towns must have suitable, dry storage areas for the salt, protected from watercourses.

Parishes will then be free to decide, in the best interests of their community, how they use it on public roads and footpaths in their area. Parishes that join the scheme will be encouraged to take responsibility for the grit bins and salt bags within their community, as it can be difficult during extreme weather to reach some bins and resources are always stretched at these times. They can also encourage responsible use of grit and helping to minimise abuse of grit. DCC is currently replenishing the county's 3,000 grit bins ahead of next winter.

We are also establishing arrangements whereby further salt can be purchased through our own contract supply arrangements in the region of £100/tonne dumpy bag (smaller bags may be an option at a higher price) where parish/town councils wish to purchase more themselves (e.g. if they purchase their own tow-along gritter). **However because of the amount of salt used by tow-along gritters, users must ensure that they have considered the cost and storage requirements of the salt required.**

Parish and Town Councils which register their interest with Devon County Council's local highway neighbourhood teams by the end of August can expect to receive a salt delivery in September or October. For parishes that may apply later, the County Council will endeavour to provide salt before the winter.



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Alternative arrangements

If a parish did not want to sign up to this arrangement, they would have their bins filled initially and then the county council would endeavour to refill during the winter. However in times of severe weather resources will be stretched and bins may not be easy to reach to refill, as was the case in some locations last winter. Where parishes do not wish to sign up to the scheme, there are alternative options for purchasing salt from a variety of local suppliers which include some builders' merchants and agricultural suppliers. The county council does not endorse a particular supplier. Where large quantities are required by individual or groups of local councils, there may be options for purchasing salt through the county's own salt procurement arrangements.

Benefits of self help schemes

- Empowering communities to take local action.
- Being able to co-ordinate local effort to where it is most needed.
- Provide a communication network to feedback to local area DCC staff.
- Linking the voluntary self help scheme to town/parish council emergency plans.
- Supporting other voluntary organisations such as the Devon 4x4 service.

Two parishes who signed up to the scheme last winter gave us the following feedback:

Councillor John Barrow, Chairman of Dunkeswell Parish Council, said:

"The County Council gritter goes through the main road, but it's impossible to go to every road in the village which is where self-help for villages and small communities makes sense. We had started to do something ourselves in the parish with salt spreaders, and when the snow warden scheme came along we thought it was a good idea. I think people are realising that we can't sit back and that we have to do some things ourselves. A lot of rural communities have always been like that and people were pleased last year that we made it possible for them to get about. We'll have to see if we get another winter like it, but we'll be prepared if we do."

Bickington Parish Council snow warden Councillor Sharon Tunnicliffe said:

"We're quite a small parish and we get snowed in because we're on the edge of Dartmoor. We have a lot of steep hills and not a lot of through traffic to help clear the snow, so when the time comes we'll be clearing the two main routes out of the village that join roads that are gritted. Because we haven't got a school we have a lot of residents that need to get out of the village, whether it's taking children to school or going to work. Helping people to travel in and out of the village in winter was our motivation to join the scheme. The training was useful on how to spread the salt and it's brilliant that free salt is being provided."

How to enquire about registering your town or parish

If you already have regular contact with your Neighbourhood Highway Team, please speak to them in the first instance about registering for the snow warden/self help scheme. However if you don't have a local contact, please call the My Devon customer service centre on **0845 155 1004** who will be able to link you with your Neighbourhood Team.

