Communications Strategy 2017/18

Highways Maintenance & Asset Management

WARRINGTON
Borough Council

Foreword

Warrington Borough Council's communications strategy for highways, transport, transport planning, street lighting and public realm management involves a holistic approach to engage with customers and partners in a thorough and timely manner.

Any issues or developments on our highways network are quickly and accurately communicated across an array of media platforms

The Communications Strategy recognises that the Highways Network is one of our largest and most valuable assets and is vital to residential and business customers and to the North West's transport infrastructure as a whole.

**Executive board member
Cllr Hans Mundry**

We are actively raising awareness of and fully explaining the Council's approach to highway maintenance to customers through media channels and signage.

We provide information about how complex the role of asset management is and the work that is involved in maintaining and improving roads, footways, street lighting and structures. We aim to ensure that we meet customers' expectations but also manage those expectations to ensure they are realistic in the current climate.

The key element is that all communications will be accessible, accurate, informative and timely.

We will engage with residents, businesses and other stakeholders to better understand their needs and expectations during the undertaking of projects and to encourage them to provide positive or negative feedback as to how our projects have actually been delivered. This will enable us to better shape and continue to improve our services.

We will strive to communicate with our customers during the onset of any adverse weather conditions. We are involved in a cross-partnership delivery structure for communications with partner agencies such as the Environment Agency and Highways England.
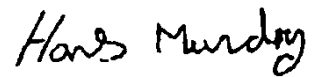
We target our messages using the most appropriate and cost-effective media platforms available.

With more than 15,000 Twitter followers and 4,000 on Facebook we can target messages quickly and directly and refer people to our website for more details or to partner agencies where appropriate. Our communications department has excellent relationships with our local media and can make use of their print and online facilities and to advertise when necessary.

Issues raised at our Contact Centre (either by phone, email or walk-in customers) are referred to the appropriate team for them to action in good time. In addition, Warrington subscribes to the NHT surveys. Feedback from customers is assessed and the survey results help us to focus our strategies towards the needs of our customers.

Every major development or consultation is released via our media channels to local media partners. This is also published on our authority news website and circulated via social media.

Any immediate or emerging problems with bridges, roads and transport generally are communicated instantly through our social media and our media partners including local radio.
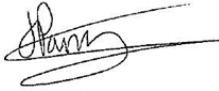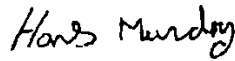
Hans Mundry

Councillor Hans Mundry

Warrington Borough Council

Executive board member for Highways, Transportation and Public Realm

Revision Schedule

Document Title:	Communications Strategy 2017/18

Revision	Name	Signature	Position	Date	Stage
Final01	Jonathan Dawson-Parry		Asset & Flood Risk Engineer	November 2018	Prepared by
	Jim Turton		Asset & Engineering Manager	November 2018	Checked & Reviewed
	David Boyer		Assistant Director Transport & Operations		Approved
	Councillor Hans Mundry		Executive board member for Highways, Transportation and Public Realm	March 2018	Approved

Revision	Name	Signature	Position	Date	Stage

Notes:	

NOTE: This document should be read in conjunction with the Highways Maintenance & Asset Management Communications Action Plan 2017/18.

Contents

1.0 Introduction

A Communication Strategy is a way of describing how the Highway Asset Management approach is actively communicated through engagement with relevant stakeholders in setting requirements, making decisions and reporting performance.

This Communication Strategy sets out how Warrington Borough Council will communicate its asset management approach to identified internal stakeholders and external wider audiences.

1.1 Highway Asset Management

Warrington Borough Council recognises the importance of its highway infrastructure and how an effectively maintained and managed network contributes to the achievement of its corporate goals. It understands that effective Asset Management is a platform to deliver clarity around standards and levels of service, and to make best use of its available resources.

Asset Management is defined as "a strategic approach that identifies the optional allocation of resources for the management, operation, preservation and enhancement of the highway infrastructure to meet the needs of current and future customers". (County Surveyor's Society, 'Framework for Highway Asset Management (2004)).

1.2 Engagement

Engaging with stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations provides the information needed to determine and help shape the level of service provided.

The highway network is often of significant interest to the public and the media. This interest is likely to continue with robust public expectations of how the network should function. In addition, weather conditions and possible resulting damage to the highway network often provide the focus for significant national and local media coverage.

To ensure that people are actively engaged the council needs to be transparent about how decisions are made in relation to the identification, assessment, programming, delivery and completion of asset management activities. This includes maintenance works and how people are involved in making decisions for the service provided to maintain the highway network.

2.0 Aims

The Council's aim through communication is to:

- Raise awareness of the services provided by the highway service.
- Increase stakeholder satisfaction with the services provided.
- Improve the level of trust and confidence in the decisions made.
- Support elected members in their role as community representatives.
- Use modern technology to reach as many people as possible.

3.0 Objectives

To inform stakeholders of the services the Council provides and the quality of service they can expect.

- To help stakeholders understand how to get involved with or influence our work.
- To gain commitment and support for effective and efficient asset management.
- To inform how the council spends highway maintenance money wisely, using the most appropriate treatments.
- To engage and listen to customer concerns about the network and feedback our progress on a regular and timely basis.
- To demonstrate the positive work being carried out to maintain and improve the highway network.
- To communicate with businesses, partners, community groups and other organisations – as well as with residents.

4.0 Stakeholders

The council will seek to engage and inform as many people as possible from across the borough, including but not restricted to:

4.1 Internal Stakeholders
- Elected Members.
- Community Committees.
- Council staff.
- Customer Contact Centre.
- Highways and Transportation staff.
- Service Providers.
- Neighbouring Authorities.

4.2 External Stakeholders
- Residents.
- Local road users.
- Local communities and community groups.
- Schools.
- Local businesses.
- Town and Parish Councils.
- Members of Parliament (MPs).
- Visitors and people travelling through the Council area.
- Interest groups such as freight associations, pedestrian groups, cycling and motoring groups, disability and mobility groups, Public Service Operators.
- Emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance and Health service).
- Utilities (gas, water, electricity etc.).
- Department for Transport (DfT).

5.0 What We Communicate

Effective asset management will deliver an efficient and effective approach to the management of highway infrastructure assets through longer term planning, ensuring that standards are defined and achievable for available budgets.

Communicating this with stakeholders is essential in aiding greater understanding of the contribution highway infrastructure assets make to economic growth, improvements to health and wellbeing and the needs of local communities.

In addition to the above, specific messages will be communicated as follows:

5.1 Key Messages

- The Council owns and maintains many assets beyond just the roads. They all need maintenance and investment.
- Many of these assets are largely invisible but exist to keep people safe.
- Warrington Borough Council works on a long term basis with its contractors to get better discounts and benefit from economies of scale.
- The Council has to make sure roads and infrastructure don't deteriorate so much that they end up needing large costly repairs.
- The Council is experiencing an increase in demand for its services and less money from Central Government.

5.2 Strategic Messages

Strategic level messages are primarily concerned with policy, service levels and strategy decisions made by the Council. The communications actions are contained within the accompanying action plan.

Clear and accurate information will be made available to ensure all stakeholders understand, how the council;

- **Will deliver its services in the future** - Our focus will be on achieving a safe, serviceable and sustainable network.
- **Defines Levels of Service** – to successfully manage the highway asset which balances user and stakeholder needs and expectations for each asset against the Council's financial resources.
- **Employs Lifecycle Planning** – to make the right investment at the right time to ensure that the asset delivers the required level of service over its full expected life at the minimum cost.
- **Produces Forward Works Programmes** - to ensure that maintenance and improvements to our roads, pavements, structures and streetlights are carried out in a planned and coordinated way.
- **Controls contractors working on our network** - Utility companies have to make repairs to their pipes and cables and these are often under our roads and pavements. A permit scheme is in place giving us more control over when these works take place.

5.3 Operational Message

Operational level communication actions are primarily concerned with scheme delivery aspects. The communications actions are contained within the accompanying action plan.

Clear and accurate information about current activities and feedback;

- **Programme** - Local authority, elected members play a fundamental part in decision making process which includes opportunities for communication and stakeholder consultation regarding the forward works programme. The agreed Annual Works Programme is published on the Internet and updated regularly.
- **Disruption** - Communication with statutory undertakers is also crucial to effectively managing the highway network. Works on the highway are coordinated through our Street Works team in order to minimise disruption on the highway in line with network management requirements of the Traffic Management Act 2004. Forward works programmes are produced and shared between Warrington Borough Council and statutory undertakers and quarterly meetings are held to discuss any clashes and how best to coordinate any proposed work and for developing future works programmes.
- **Customer feedback (post completion surveys)** – Where time and resources allow, residents affected by a scheme on the Annual Works Programme will be given the opportunity to comment on schemes in terms of the information they received, the standard of the work and the contractor's performance.
- **Customer feedback (external survey)** – A yearly survey is carried by NHT for the Highways and Transportation Service to determine the public's views on highways maintenance and satisfaction with maintenance activities.

6.0 How We Communicate

The advances made in information technology offer new ways of communicating. At the same time, for many people, traditional methods such as newspapers, telephone and leaflets still play a fundamental role that must not be undervalued.

6.1 Local Media

The media plays a strong role in shaping perceptions of local government, so informed reporting is vital. People are more positive about their Council in areas where the Council has a good relationship with the local media. The Council has corporate guidelines for communications with local media and these will be followed at all times.

6.2 Digital Media

The Council use the latest technology developments to expand on opportunities to communicate more effectively with external audiences. It is important to look at new and innovative methods to keep up with an ever-changing world. We currently use;

Website – This enables communication with stakeholders by providing an A to Z Guide of Council Services. For highways services, this includes but is not limited to:

- Access to appropriate documentation explaining asset management strategies and policies.

- Details of the current highways annual works programme which is updated to ensure the information is accurate. A link is also included to Roadworks.org - an interactive map showing road works across the Borough, including works by statutory undertakers (Telecoms, Electric, Gas companies etc.)
- Performance data (targets and actual).
- Facility to report highway defects.
- Electronic consultation on present and future schemes and policies.
- Specific information during adverse weather conditions.

Social Networking - is increasingly utilised by organisations, as well as individuals, as a means of developing online communities for gathering and disseminating information that is of mutual interest.

Warrington Borough Council currently uses Facebook and twitter (@WarringtonBC).

6.3   Traditional Methods

Whilst the Council will make greater use of web based access to information and social media, traditional methods of communication cannot be under estimated. The Council will use the most appropriate communication method for the audience and the message it aims to convey, these include:

Members briefing sessions – keeping local members up to date is key to managing people's expectations, especially about more disruptive schemes.

The Customer Contact Centre - is briefed to deal with and signpost any calls regarding the condition of the highway network or current schemes to the most appropriate officers.

Community Committees – Briefing notes will be supplied to the area committees to inform people of works taking place, how they are progressing and when they will be completed. This allows for further engagement with people as the work is planned and progressed.

Meetings with external groups and organisations – to inform and engage. By building good relationships with external groups and organisations on particular schemes, and keeping them informed of developments or work within their area, expectations can be managed.

Media releases – convey important notices and events to local and national media.

Letter drops – to households directly affected by road works.

Signs – are placed in advance of major works starting, to allow users of the network to change their travel plans, and for local residents and businesses to adjust their arrangements to accommodate the works, with minimum inconvenience and disruption.

The Council will continue to look at new and innovative methods to keep up with an ever changing world.

6.4   Internal Communications

Colleagues are crucial in building the Council's reputation, whether they are frontline staff or officers representing the Council externally. The way they behave and how they talk about the Council can

have a huge impact. Good internal communications are therefore very important in helping a council achieve its objectives.

Internal communication channels used include;

- Winnie (Council intranet).
- Council wide electronic newsletter.
- Senior Management Forum.
- Service specific newsletter.
- Regular team meetings.

6.5   Complaints

Complaints are normally received via the Contact Centre, who then passes them onto the appropriate Officer to respond to.

Complaints are occasionally received direct to the appropriate Officer as scheme notification letters contain the appropriate contact details.

Complaints when received are dealt with as a matter of urgency and in accordance with corporate policy and response timescales.

6.6   Compliments

Compliments when received from customers are circulated to all involved.

Acknowledgment of compliments is returned to sender with gratitude.

7.0 Evaluation

We will regularly monitor and evaluate activity and capture the feedback and levels of engagement we receive. Number of visits to infographic and relevant web page.

It is extremely important that the Council measures the success of this strategy and acts on the feedback received to amend or enhance it where necessary and communicate these changes.

7.1   What will be measured?
- Quality and quantity of media coverage achieved.
- Number of visits to webpages and levels of social media reach and public engagement.
- Feedback from members and residents.
- Media coverage.
- Awareness of highway services and the services it provides
- Satisfaction with highways condition and highways maintenance works
- Satisfaction with any contact with highway services
- Participation and engagement with council projects, initiatives and consultation Processes

7.2   How will this be measured?
- National Highways and Transport Public Opinion Survey (NHT).
- Number of retweets, likes and comments on Social Networking sites.
- Amount and nature of media coverage.

- Comments, compliments and complaints received about highways.
- Number of visits to our website.
- Number of calls to the Customer Service Centre Service and time taken to respond to requests.
- Consultation with directly affected residents – perception and satisfaction surveys

8.0 Strategy Review

This document will be reviewed annually alongside the Communication Plan to ensure effective mechanisms to communicate service standards and outcomes are in place to manage customer expectations.