



Communications Strategy for Highway Infrastructure Asset Management

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Kirklees Council - Communications Strategy for Highway Infrastructure Asset Management

1. Introduction

Kirklees Council is responsible for maintaining a highway network of both major and minor local roads. It totals some 1200 miles and includes assets such as carriageways, footways, cycle tracks, structures, street lighting and traffic management systems. It is our most valuable asset. It is vital to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. It provides access for business and communities, as well as contributing to the area's local character and people's quality of life.

People, groups of people, or organisations that can affect or be affected by the policies and actions of Kirklees Council are all stakeholders of the highway network. Effective engagement with stakeholders is a key issue in managing expectations and therefore satisfaction with the highway service.

The Council recognises the vital role played by the local highway network in supporting the Authority's Corporate Planning Framework – The Corporate Plan, Our Vision and Our Shared Outcomes.

There is a need for local engagement mechanisms to ensure the asset management approach is understood. Engaging with stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations provides the information needed to determine and review the service provided by highway infrastructure assets hence the asset management activities.

This strategy sets out how Kirklees Council:

- Communicates its approach to highway infrastructure asset management
- Undertakes customer satisfaction surveys to make sure this information is used to help drive service improvement
- Has a mechanism in place to gather customer feedback on its highway maintenance service and how it uses this information
- Ensures that customers are kept informed about their highway maintenance service

2. Key Messages

The following key messages outline what we're doing, why and how

2.1 What is Highway Asset Management?

Asset management promotes a business-like way to highway maintenance. It makes better use of limited resources and delivers efficient and effective highway maintenance. It takes a long term view of how highways may be managed, focusing on outcomes by ensuring that funds are spent on activities that prevent expensive short-term repairs. This makes the best use of public money whilst minimising the risk involved in investing in highway maintenance.

The Council advocates an asset management approach for the maintenance of the local highway network in order to help deliver the best long term outcomes for local communities.

2.2 Why now?

The demand for a more efficient approach to the management of highway infrastructure assets has come to prominence in light of the fiscal challenges faced by both central and local government. Managing highways is now a critical challenge to local councils, who have to manage an ageing network with high stakeholder expectations for safe, reliable and comfortable travel in the overall context of increased pressure and unavoidable reductions in council services.

2.3 How will we achieve this?

We are following Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Guidance that has been developed under the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP), a sector-led transformation programme designed to maximise returns from highways investment and deliver efficient and effective services. The Guidance is designed to help all those delivering highways services to embed asset management principles in their organisations and make the case for highways maintenance funding.

We are working to the National Code of Practice 'Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure'. This is a guide to deliver an efficiently managed and maintained network which contributes to the local economy and achievement of common goals.

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.

3. Stakeholders

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

Internal Stakeholders

- Elected Members
- Highways Service staff
- Other Kirklees Council staff
- Service Providers
- West Yorkshire Combined Authorities (WYCA)

External Stakeholders

- Residents
- Local road users
- Local communities and community groups
- Schools / colleges / university
- Local businesses
- Town and Parish councils
- Members of Parliament
- Visitors and people travelling through the Kirklees
- Interest groups such as freight associations, pedestrian groups, cycling and motoring groups, disability and mobility groups, Public Service Operators, British Horse Society,
- Emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance and Health service)
- Utilities (gas, water, electricity etc.)

- Department for Transport (DfT)
- Other adjacent Authorities
- Highways England
- Network Rail
- Environment Agency
- Public Sector Organisations – health trusts, education
- National Parks

4. Contributors and Governance

The following will help form the content, approach and approvals for Highway Infrastructure Asset Management communications.

Service Director (governance and approvals)
Head of Operational Services
Operational Manager
Asset Management Group Engineer

5. What We Communicate

Specific, operational and strategic messages will be communicated as follows:

5.1 *Specific Messages*

The following information will be communicated to all stakeholders;

- Assets managed by Kirklees
- Performance management framework
- Performance measures and benchmarking
- Policies
- Funding
- Customer satisfaction
- Levels of service and targets
- The resilient network

5.2 *Operational Messages*

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.
- **Individual Scheme** – Stakeholders are consulted throughout the delivery of specific named road schemes. Consultation on potential changes to the highway is an important part of communication with customers to ensure service users' needs are reflected in changes made to the highway network. Consultation is undertaken with stakeholders affected by any proposed work where there is a significant change to

the existing layout or a change in materials. For example where York stone flags are proposed to be taken up and replaced with bitmac or verges are proposed to be hardened or removed to provide additional parking.

- **Disruption** - Communication with statutory undertakers is also crucial to effectively managing the highway network. Works on the highway are coordinated through our Network Management 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 Kirklees 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.
- **Winter**
- **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.

5.3 *Strategic Messages*

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 assets which balance user and stakeholder needs and expectations for each asset against the council's financial resources.
- **Employs Lifecycle Planning in scheme selection** – 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.

6.0 **How We Communicate**

The advances made in information technology offer exciting new ways of communicating. At the same time, for many people, traditional methods – 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. Kirklees 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 roadworks across the City, 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 used by organisations, as well as individuals, as a means of developing online communities for gathering and disseminating information that is of mutual interest. Highways currently use twitter and can be followed [@KirkleesWinter](#)

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 Service Centre** - is briefed to deal with and signpost any calls regarding the condition of the highway network to the most appropriate officers.
- **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 roadworks.
- **Signs** – are placed in advance of major works starting, to allow users of the network in Kirklees 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

Staff 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;

- Kirklees Intranet (internal council web based communication site)
- Weekly Council wide electronic newsletter – Our Week
- Senior Management Forum
- Regular team meetings

7.0 Evaluation and Review

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.

What will be measured?

- Awareness of highway services and the services it provides
- Increased 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

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 and time taken to respond to

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requests.

- Consultation with directly affected residents – perception and satisfaction surveys
- Staff survey

This document will be reviewed bi-annually to ensure effective mechanisms to communicate service standards and outcomes are in place to manage customer expectations.