

City of York Council Highways Communication Strategy

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1.0 Introduction

City of York Council recognises that effective communication with its key stakeholders and customers, at various stages in the asset management and highway maintenance process is essential. The aim of this document is to advise and give guidance on the provision of highways services and how customers may access them. Engagement raises public awareness of the challenges and issues that City of York Council, as highway authority, and explains the way services have to be prioritised in order to provide a service which meets our needs but also helps to manage customer expectations.

Highway stakeholders have been identified and a variety of communication options are used to inform them about the services provided, such as:-

- Annual Maintenance Programme
- Winter Maintenance Programme
- Ward Highway Maintenance Programmes
- Customer Satisfaction Survey

Consultations help establish and prioritise an annual works programme based on the community's needs taking into account the stakeholder's most important considerations.

This strategy aims to raise awareness and understanding of the council's approach to highway maintenance. This includes the work that goes into maintaining and improving the City's roads, pavements, structures and street lighting, ensuring that all communications are timely, positive, informative and accessible.

It details how our stakeholders are engaged with about the City's highways assets, to ensure that they are aware of, and most importantly, satisfied with, the work taking place to maintain and improve the network.

Information is shared using various methods including online, printed media and through embracing a range of new digital solutions.

Highway Asset Management Guidance and Effective Communication

Managing highways is now a critical challenge to local councils, who have to manage an ageing network with high public expectations for safe, reliable and comfortable travel. At the same time, resources are reducing, with less funding available, increased and competing pressure for other local government services and skills shortages.

Highways are increasingly at risk of damage from wear and tear, ageing, increasing traffic and severe weather. This regularly results in visible defects like potholes, damaged road signs, defective street lights and in extreme cases, damage to bridges. These defects are seen and felt by all and can result in negative media coverage.

It is clear that action must be taken to make best use of funding and to communicate this process if our highways are going to continue to provide the service for which they were built, and ensure our customers are confident that money is being spent wisely.

Highways Asset Management Guidance 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.

The Guidance recommends that, City of York 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
- Have a mechanism in place to gather customer feedback on its highway maintenance service and if so how does it use this information
- Ensures that customers are kept informed about their highway maintenance service

Highways Asset Management

The Council is responsible for over 1,800km of adopted roads and around 800km of associated footways, bridges and structures, over 40,000 gullies, over 18,500 street lights and traffic signal installations.

Council responsibility also includes the maintenance of grass verge and trees within the adopted highway. However, for the purpose of this communications strategy the focus will be on our most significant highways assets. These include:

- Carriageways (roads)
- Footways and Cycle Routes
- Structures, including bridges
- Drainage
- Street lighting, including illuminated signs
- Traffic management, including traffic lights

Asset management provides a structured approach to road maintenance by ensuring that maintenance and improvements are carried out as part of a planned programme of works.

This allows us to make best use of our investment in our network to maintain it for the road users of today and the future. Maintenance is prioritised to maximise the benefit of investment over many years. The impact of every pound spent on safety, the environment and future maintenance costs are considered.

Engagement

Engaging with stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations provides the information needed to determine and help shape the 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 Aim

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 people's 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 City's 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 York area, including but not restricted to:

Internal Stakeholders

- Elected Members
- Community Committees
- City of York Council staff
- Customer Contact Centre
- Highways and Transportation staff
- Service Providers
- West Yorkshire Combined Authorities (WYCA)

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 City 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.

The following information will be communicated to all stakeholders;

- Assets managed by City of York Council
- Condition of assets
- Highway maintenance work
- Level of available budgets
- Performance management measures

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

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** – 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.

Operational Message

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 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 City of York Council and statutory undertakers and regular 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 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.

Specific Messages

Clear and accurate information about particular plans or where specific feedback is requested;

- 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.
- Ward Committee's hold budgets to deliver locally important highways schemes within their areas, a range of workshops are held with councillors to develop this programme and visits and presentations are made by the Highway Asset team at ward meetings as necessary.

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.

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.

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. City of York Council 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. Performance data (targets and actual). All formal communications are recorded on our website under the democracy pages or highways notifications pages.
 - 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. City of York Council extensively use Twitter to communicate winter maintenance activities.

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 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 roadworks.
- **Signs** – are placed in advance of major works starting, to allow users of the network in York 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.

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;

- Regular reports to council committees
- Member briefings
- Ward forum meetings and newsletters
- 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 Service and time taken to respond to 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.