



Communications strategy for Highway Asset Management

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
2. AIM.....	5
3. OBJECTIVES	5
4. AUDIENCES	6
5. KEY MESSAGES.....	7
6. CHANNELS	8
7. CREATIVE CAMPAIGN IDEAS.....	9
8. TIMESCALES	10
9. EVALUATION	10

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1. INTRODUCTION

This communications strategy aims to raise awareness and understanding of the council's highways asset management outcomes, as outlined in the policy:

- A safe network
- A serviceable network
- A sustainable network

This includes the work that goes into maintaining and improving the county's roads, pavements structures and street lighting, ensuring that all communications are timely, positive, informative and accessible.

This strategy also details how we are going to engage with people about the condition of Shropshire Council's highways assets to ensure that they are aware of, and most importantly, satisfied with the continual work that takes place to maintain and improve the network.

It is a live document which will be revised periodically as work progresses.

1.1 Highway Asset Management Guidance Document

The Highways Asset Management Guidance Document 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 funding highways maintenance.

In response to this, the council has created a Highways Alliance for Shropshire. It means that Shropshire Council, Mouchel and Ringway now work together to follow good practice.

The self-assessment questions relevant to this communications strategy are:

- Has your local authority communicated its approach to highway infrastructure asset management?
- Does your local authority undertake customer satisfaction surveys into the condition of its highway network and if so how does it use this information to help drive service improvement?
- Does your local authority have a mechanism in place to gather customer feedback on its highway maintenance service and if so how does it use this information?
- How does your local authority ensure that customers are kept informed about their highway maintenance service?

1.2 The national picture

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 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 often 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 our customers are confident that we are spending money wisely.

1.3 Highways asset management in Shropshire

We aim to fulfil our duty under Section 41 of the Highway Act to maintain the highways and take such care to secure that the highway is not dangerous to traffic (Section 58).

In Shropshire we are responsible for around 6,500 km of adopted roads and pavements, 1,000 bridges and structures, over 85,000 gullies and almost 19,000 street lighting columns.

We are also responsible for the maintenance of grass verge and trees by our roads. However, for the purpose of this communications strategy we are going to focus on our most significant highways assets. These include:

- Roads
- Pavements and cycleways
- Structures, including bridges
- Drainage
- Street lighting, including illuminated signs
- Traffic management, including traffic lights

Asset management is a structured approach to roads maintenance. It means that maintenance and improvements are mainly carried as part of a planned programme of works.

This way of working allows us to effectively invest in our network to maintain it for road users of today and tomorrow. Structural maintenance is prioritised to maximise the benefit of investment over many years. We consider the impact of every pound spent on safety, the environment and future maintenance costs.

We carry out regular inspections and reactive repairs to faults, reviewing our procedures and frequently monitoring the condition of our network.

We respond to faults according to risk; emergency faults are made safe as soon as possible, whereas some low risk faults may remain until attended to within the planned works programme. Most repairs are carried out within 28 days of notification, with the majority of basic faults in streetlights being repaired within five

days.

Highway maintenance teams' main duties include:

- regular highway inspections
- planned maintenance schemes
- reactive maintenance work
- winter maintenance activities

As with many other local authorities, Shropshire Council faces significant financial pressures. However, people continue to have an expectation that journeys should be reliable, and with all residents using the network, it means that people's satisfaction with it is closely linked to the council's reputation as a whole.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that councillors, customers, partners and organisations value and feel engaged in the work that we do to maintain and improve the network, but also understand the financial challenges we face.

1.4 Engagement

Engaging with stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations provides the information needed to determine and help shape the service that we provide.

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 we need to be open and honest about how we make decisions in the identification, assessment, programming, delivery and completion of asset management activities, including maintenance works, and how people are involved in making decisions for the service provided by the network.

2. AIM

To provide a highway network that enables Shropshire to flourish by investing to give great value now and in the future and giving our customers' confidence in the decisions we make.

This underpins Shropshire Council's vision 'A flourishing Shropshire'.

3. OBJECTIVES

- To gain political commitment and senior officers support for effective and efficient asset management.
- To inform people how we spend their money wisely on maintaining and improving the highways network, using the best 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 county's network.
- To communicate with businesses, partners, community groups and other organisations – as well as with residents.
- To communicate with people of all ages, in all locations, including children.
- To demonstrate that people's views do matter and do make a difference.

4. AUDIENCES

We will seek to engage and inform as many people as possible from across the Shropshire Council area, including but not restricted to:

4.1 Internal

- Shropshire Council staff
- Customer Service Centre
- Ip&e staff
- Members
- Ringway staff
- Mouchel staff

4.2 External

- DfT
- Local road users
- Local communities
- Local businesses
- Emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance and Health service)
- People travelling through the county
- Visitors
- Highways maintenance service providers (Ringway)
- Utilities
- Interest groups such as freight associations, pedestrian groups, cycling and motoring groups, disability and mobility groups and motoring groups
- MPs
- Residents
- Leisure services
- Schools
- Shropshire Rural Community Council
- Shropshire young people, including Shropshire MYPs
- Shropshire businesses (Shropshire business board, Shropshire business ambassadors, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Shrewsbury BID)
- Shropshire voluntary and community sector / community groups
- VCSA
- Town and parish councils (SALC)
- Local Joint Committee Chairs

- Neighbouring highway authorities

5. KEY MESSAGES

General messages

- As a highway authority, Shropshire Council has a statutory duty to maintain, operate and improve the highway network on behalf of all its customers. We aim to do this through providing high value services in a legally and environmentally compliant and sustainable manner, without compromising the health and safety of our employees or customers.
- Our focus will be on achieving a safe, serviceable and sustainable network.
- We maintain and clean around 5,500 km of adopted roads and pavements, 1,000 bridges and structures, cut 1.2 million m² of amenity grass and maintain 4,157 km of verges, including 30,000 trees near our roads.
- The current tough economic climate poses big challenges to councils to make the best use of limited resources in providing an acceptable highway service to the public, yet critically to maintain the integrity of our highways for future generations.
- Highways are our most valuable asset. They are vital to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. They provide access for business and communities, as well as contribute to the area's local character and people's quality of life. We know that highways really do matter to people.
- We are not the only ones working on our highways – utility companies have to make repairs to their pipes and cables and these are often under our roads and pavements. We do have a permit scheme in place which gives us more control over when these works take place. It also allows us to, within reason, ensure that any repairs made to Shropshire's roads are to the highest possible standard. However, unfortunately repairs are not always as good as we would expect.

Highways asset management messages

- Whole life costing is used to drive our decision-making, ensuring that the right choices are made in the long term. Leading on, we do not maintain and improve the roads on a worst-first approach. This has been proven to be costly, instead preventative treatments and early interventions are used to maximise the life of our roads, pavements and structures.
- We work hard to ensure that maintenance and improvements to our roads, pavements, structures and streetlights are carried as part of a carefully planned programme of works.
- We respond to faults according to risk; emergency faults are made safe as soon as possible, whereas some low risk faults may remain until attended to within the planned works programme.
- Public pressure can result in just short-term fixes, to potholes for example, rather than properly planned and implemented longer-term solutions. Short-term repairs can provide poor value for money and often undermine the long-term structural integrity of the asset.

- Research has shown that reactive repairs are four times more costly than preventative treatments.
- Asset management promotes a more 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.

6. CHANNELS

The communications channels that are used should strive to increase people's understanding of the work that we do to maintain and improve the highway network.

All communications should be timely, positive, informative and accessible.

To do this tailored communications tools need to be used to inform the different target audiences.

6.1 Local media

- **Press releases and media relations** - Regular press releases should be written and published. These will be essential to keep a consistent flow of accurate information in the media, including relevant specialist publications, and ensure that all audiences are kept up to date.
- **Media briefings** - The media are briefed and kept up to date on key schemes. This will ensure a co-operative relationship that fosters understanding between the media and the council and it will help to form a positive partnership to alleviate any negative coverage.
- **TV and radio interviews** – Regular contact should be made with television and radio journalists to arrange interviews, features and debates.
- **Parish newsletters and other community publications** - These newsletters offer another useful channel to reach communities.
- **'You said, we did' case studies** – written and filmed case studies. A lot of positive activity takes place on a regular basis across the different elements of highways maintenance, and we need to communicate these in a coordinated way.

6.2 Digital media

It is important to use the latest technology developments to expand on opportunities to communicate more effectively with external audiences.

- **Social media** - The use of social media such as Twitter is a good way to communicate, engage and educate people. Whilst it is important that it is current and responsive, there should also be a degree of planning to it. Other social media channels to consider include Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+.
- **Shropshire Council website** – the website needs to be kept up to date with information. Roadworks.org is an interactive map which is used to inform

people of roadworks across the county. It's clear on the highways homepage how people can report highway defects but it may be worth making the process clear so that they know what will happen to their enquiry, and also when they will expect to hear back from us. We intend to publish our performance information on the website, but will need to ensure that this is easy to understand. We can perhaps use infographics.

6.3 Face to face and telephone

- **Members briefing sessions and members bulletin** – keeping local members up to date is key to managing people's expectations, especially about more disruptive schemes.
- **Staff briefings** – The Customer Service Centre (CSC) needs to be well briefed in order to deal with and signpost any calls regarding the condition of the highway network.
- **Local Joint Committees** – Briefing notes could be supplied to the committees to warn people of works taking place, how they are progressing and when they are completed. This will also allow 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 we can manage expectations and keep them informed.

6.4 Marketing materials

- **Marketing and design** - marketing materials could include posters and signage informing people before, during and after larger schemes have been completed.
- **Door drops** – to households to be affected by roadworks.
- **The National Highways and Transport Public Opinion Survey (NHT survey)**

7. CREATIVE CAMPAIGN IDEAS

The use of creative campaigns can help to prompt attention, engage, incentivise and influence target audiences.

- **BBC Radio Shropshire as our main media partner** - inviting them to run a series of features to help stimulate debate around the condition of the network and what people feel we could do to improve it, within the resource that is available to us.
- **A mobile app** – introducing a mobile app to simplify the process of accessing information about roadworks, enabling people to get the information or support they need quickly.
- **Sponsorship of radio travel reports** - Ringway could sponsor the local travel reports through the innovation fund. A promotional message could be tailored for large schemes or winter maintenance etc.

8. TIMESCALES

This communications strategy will be delivered over two years.

11 September 2015	Documents, including the communications strategy, highways asset management strategy to be ready.
October 2015	Cabinet

9. EVALUATION

Evaluation of this work would be carried out on an ongoing basis to ensure that communications are delivering the aims and objectives in this strategy. This will include the regular monitoring of media coverage and direct feedback from residents and partners.

Success of campaign to be measured by:

- Increased satisfaction with highways condition via the National Highways and Transport Public Opinion Survey.
- Increased satisfaction with highways maintenance via the National Highways and Transport Public Opinion Survey.
- Number of retweets, likes and comments on social media.
- Amount and nature of media coverage.
- Comments and complaints raised about highways.
- Number of hits on the website.
- Number of calls to the Customer Service Centre Service and time taken to respond to requests.

Activity (table to be added to)

Date	Activity	Audience	Further information/progress	Lead
24 – 26 August 2015	Resurfacing at Chapel Lane junction in north Hodnet – road closure	Local residents, local member(s)		
26 August – 1 September 2015	Drainage at Stottesdon Road junction in south Bridgnorth – road closure	Local residents, local member(s)		
31 August – 18 September 2015	Bridge maintenance of Pont Rhyd-y-Croesasau Bridge – two-way traffic signals	Local residents, local member(s)		
2 – 22 September 2015	Drainage from the pumping station to Mickley Lane Road in north Hodnet – road closure	Local residents, local member(s)		
7 – 9 September 2015	Kerbing and resurfacing at Callaughton in south Bridgnorth – road closure	Local residents, local member(s)		
7 – 11 September 2015	Bridge maintenance of Canonbury Bridge in south Bridgnorth – stop and go boards	Local residents, local member(s)		
7 – 25 September 2015	Bridge maintenance of Coybrook Bridge – Road closure	Local residents, local member(s)		