Communication Strategy for Highway Infrastructure Asset Management

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Warwickshire
County Council

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Contents

1. Introduction

If you live, work or pass through Warwickshire whether on foot, cycling, using public or personal transport you will use the largest and most visible asset Warwickshire County Council is responsible for – the highway network.

The Council recognises the vital role played by the local highway network in supporting the Authority's One Organisational Plan. The One Organisational Plan 2020 describes how Warwickshire County Council will rise to the challenge of making Warwickshire the best it can be.

A well maintained and managed network that is safe, serviceable and sustainable is one of the best ways to foster job creation, encourage economic growth and support local communities. It makes an important contribution to social inclusion, community safety, and education and health. The appearance of our streets helps to shape the character and quality of the local environment in which people live.

People, groups of people, or organisations that can affect or be affected by the policies and actions of Warwickshire County 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.

There is a need for local engagement mechanisms to ensure the approach we take to managing our assets is understood. Engaging with stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations provides the information needed to determine and review the service provided.

This strategy sets out how Warwickshire County Council:

• Communicates its approach to highway infrastructure asset management

• Ensures that customers are kept informed about their highway and transportation service

• Undertakes customer satisfaction surveys to make sure this information is used to help drive service improvement

• We will measure the progress and performance in achieving the aims and objectives of this strategy

2.   Aims and Objectives

2.1 Our Aims

• Raise awareness of the services provided by Warwickshire County Highways and Transportation

• Increase stakeholder satisfaction with the services provided

• Improve the level of trust and confidence in the decisions made

• Increase the level of stakeholder engagement

• Use modern technology to reach as many people as possible

• Support elected members in their role as community representatives

2.2 Our 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 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 highway network

3.   Asset Management

People will probably have heard the term 'asset management' before, but many will not have a clear idea of what it is entails.

3.1 What is Highway Asset Management?

Asset management promotes a business-like way to highway development and maintenance. It makes better use of limited resources and helps deliver efficient and effective management of highway assets. 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 maintaining our highway infrastructure.

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

3.2 Why now?

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. Central Government have introduced measures to reward councils who demonstrate they are delivering value for money in carrying out cost effective maintenance and improvements.

3.3 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 essential funding.

Communicating this with stakeholders is key 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.

4. What We Communicate

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

4.1 Specific Messages

The following information will be communicated to all stakeholders;

• What we are responsible for

• Policies

• Performance measures and benchmarking

• Customer satisfaction

• Levels of service and targets

• Level of resilience

4.2 Operational Messages

Clear and accurate information about current activities and feedback;

• **Programme -** The agreed annual works programme will be published on the Internet and updated regularly.

• **Individual Scheme –** 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 will be undertaken with stakeholders affected by any proposed work where there is a significant change to the existing layout.

• **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 Warwickshire County Council and statutory undertakers. Regular meetings are held to discuss any clashes and how best to coordinate any proposed work and for developing future works programmes.

• **Winter** – Information on our readiness, service arrangements and actions. The primary means to inform stakeholders about the Winter Service is on the Warwickshire County Council website. This is supplemented by press releases. We use social media to communicate live treatment information.

• **Customer feedback (external survey) -** A yearly survey is carried out by NHT for the Highways and Transportation Service to determine the public's views on highways maintenance and satisfaction with maintenance activities.

4.3 Strategic Messages

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

• **Transport infrastructure is well managed and maintained within the available budgets by balancing competing needs** - Our focus will be on achieving a safe, serviceable and sustainable network.

• **A lifecycle planning approach for developing forward investment models and for managing decisions** – 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.

• **Improvement in the journey experience of transport users -** provide smoother and safer journeys for road users in Warwickshire.

• **Develop forward works programmes and plans** - to ensure that maintenance and improvements to our roads, pavements, structures and streetlights are carried out in a planned and coordinated way

• **Engagement with communities and consider their feedback to improve the service -** making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them.

• **Provide a resilient network –** to protect economic activity and maintain access to key services.

• **Provide a risk management strategy –** adopt a uniform approach to identifying and prioritising risk to protect employees, assets, liabilities and the community and provide a structured, systematic and focussed approach to managing risk.

• **Develop a continuous improvement approach –** achieve improved outputs and outcomes that are of benefit to customers and stakeholders.

5.0 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.

5.1 Local Media

The media plays a strong role in shaping perceptions of local government, so informed reporting is vital. The Council has corporate guidelines for communications with local media and these will be followed at all times.

5.2 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.

• **Warwickshire County Council website** – the website needs to be kept up to date with information and where possible provide an A to Z of Highways 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. An interactive map showing road works across the County, including works by statutory undertakers (Telecoms, Electric, Gas companies etc.).

• Performance dashboard (targets and actual).

• Facility to report highway defects.

• Specific information during adverse weather conditions.

5.3 Traditional Methods

Whilst the Council will make greater use of web based access to information and social media, there is still a demand for traditional methods of communication. The Council will use the most appropriate communication method for the audience and the message it aims to convey, these include:

• **Members briefing sessions and bulletins** – 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 enquiries regarding the highway network to the most appropriate officers.

• **Community Forums** – 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 WCC 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.

5.4 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;

• Warwickshire Intranet (internal council web based communication site)

• Weekly Council wide electronic newsletter (W4W)

• Regular corporate and directorate broadcasts with Senior Leadership team

• Roadshows

• Staff awards and events

• Regular team meetings

6.0 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

• Satisfaction with highways condition and highways improvement works

• 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 followers, retweets, likes and comments on Social Networking sites.

• Number of visits to Highways and Transportation pages on our website.

• Consultation with directly affected residents – perception and satisfaction surveys