



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

**Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough**

Telford & Wrekin Council

Communications Strategy

November 2021

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Document Control

Revision:	Originator:	Checked by:	Approved by:
REV 1, 2018	Name:	Name:	Name:
	Tim Evans	Gareth Pegg	Dom Proud
Date:	Signature:	Signature:	Signature:
06/08/2018	T. Evans	G. Pegg	D. Proud
Document Status:	Final – For Website		
Revision:	Originator:	Checked by:	Approved by:
REV 2, 2020	Name:	Name:	Name:
	Tim Evans	Nathan Lyttle	Adam Brookes
Date:	Signature:	Signature:	Signature:
04/08/2020	T. Evans	N. Lyttle	A. Brookes
Document Status:	Final – For Website		
Revision:	Originator:	Checked by:	Approved by:
REV 3, 2021	Name:	Name:	Name:
	Tim Evans	Nathan Lyttle	A. Brookes
Date:	Signature:	Signature:	Signature:
25/11/2021	T. Evans	N. Lyttle	A. Brookes

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Document Status:	Final – For Website -Update document branding.
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Introduction

This communication strategy forms part of the Telford & Wrekin Highway Asset Management Framework and directly supports the Asset Management Policy objective 10:

ASSET MANAGEMENT Policy Objective 10: Stakeholder Communication

We will ensure that key stakeholders and members of the public have easily accessible and direct channels of communication to report issues, provide input into the management of the highway asset, and be kept informed about highway maintenance works and key decisions.

Purpose of this Strategy

'Well Maintained Highways' describes highway authorities as 'stewards' of the highway network. In our role as stewards we maintain the highway network for the benefit of those who use it and our communication strategy aims to provide these stakeholders with the information they need in order to understand the decisions that we make. It also outlines the means by which they can communicate with us, although our aim is to minimise inward scheme-related communication by providing the right information to the right audience at the right time.

The purpose of this strategy is four-fold:

1. To raise awareness and increase understanding of our approach to asset management
2. To outline our approach to communicating decisions and actions
3. To outline how we will gain feedback and opinion from those affected by our work or using our assets.
4. To identify how we will engage with all stakeholders to increase understanding of the ongoing work the Council already does to ensure that the network is safe and serviceable.

In addition it summarises how our approach to communication will enable us to gain the highest possible score in the following questions from the Department for Transport (DfT) self-assessment questionnaire:



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SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS RELATING TO COMMUNICATION

- A. Has your local authority communicated its approach to highway infrastructure asset management?
- B. 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?
- C. 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?
- D. How does your local authority ensure that customers are kept informed about their highway maintenance service?

A. Communicating our Approach to Asset Management

Highway assets such as roads and footpaths are increasingly at risk of damage and deterioration due to age, increasing traffic and severe weather. Damaged and defective assets can be seen and felt by all who use them and this can affect the reputation of the council, leading to an increase in complaints and potentially negative media coverage (traditional and social). In addition they impact on the ability of people to travel and businesses to operate effectively.

We are aware that we do not have sufficient resources to keep every asset in perfect condition and this has led to the identification of levels of service, based on road hierarchy and asset type. These levels of service along with lifecycle planning enable us to make best use of the maintenance funding that we have at our disposal. A key aim of this strategy is to ensure that our stakeholders, including local businesses and road users also understand this and know how and why we make the maintenance decisions that impact on them. Over time this will increase their confidence in us and the asset management decisions that we make.

Despite our financial pressures stakeholders still expect our assets to be maintained to a high level. We aim to help them to understand the cost of maintenance and the challenges the Council faces in managing the network and to explain the standard of maintenance (Level of service) that can be provided within the financial constraints.

Stakeholder Engagement

*"Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit."*¹

¹ National Co-ordinating centre for public engagement

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Our stakeholder engagement takes two forms:

- Consultation – where the views of stakeholders will be taken into consideration in the development of schemes and strategies; and
- Information sharing – where stakeholders are given information about what is being done and why.

Engaging with stakeholders helps us to understand their needs and helps them to understand the constraints that we work within along with the context of the asset management decisions we make. Indeed, because we want stakeholders to be actively engaged we endeavour to be open about how we make decisions, how asset management schemes are identified, assessed, programmed and delivered. We want to provide a highway network that keeps Telford & Wrekin moving by investing wisely at the right time thereby giving stakeholders confidence in the decisions we make. This is underpinned by our highways vision:

Telford and Wrekin Highways Vision

We will keep Telford moving by

- Delivering a safe, efficient and sustainable highway to meet the needs of communities and businesses, providing access to jobs and services, supporting health and wellbeing and catering for future growth
- Maximising and managing investment into the highway network to support the local economy, investing in new technologies and our workforce to promote innovation and creativity

Consultation, collaboration and community engagement will be the key to our success

We will take a number of approaches:

- Informing people about how we spend money appropriately to maintain and improve highway assets using the most appropriate treatments (including why these are the most appropriate treatments).
- Engaging and listening to people’s concerns about the network and providing timely, informative feedback
- Demonstrating that we are maintaining and improving highway assets
- Communicating with all stakeholders, including residents and local businesses.

Through this approach we will demonstrate that people’s views do matter and do make a difference.

Our stakeholder engagement will be ongoing and our approach to engagement is documented throughout this strategy. Local stakeholders are listed in Appendix A.



Overarching messages

1. Our roads, paths and other highway assets have an important role to play in support communities and businesses. The acknowledgement that highways matter greatly to local people.
2. Our maintenance focus on creating a safe, serviceable and sustainable road network
3. The extent and value of our highway assets
4. The economic challenge of asset management and the challenge of maintaining the asset for both current and future generations. This is particularly pertinent in the current economic climate.
5. Our Statutory duty as a Highway Authority and how we aim to fulfil this
6. Our role as protectors of the asset, ensuring that others who work on our assets (such as utility companies) comply with our permit system and carry out repairs to the highest possible standard.

Specific Asset Management Messages

1. Whole life costing and an understanding of how assets deteriorate are the basis of our decision making. This ensures that a long term approach is taken rather than simply focusing on the assets that are in the worst condition. This gives a more effective/efficient approach to highway maintenance by
 - a) Making better use of limited resources
 - b) Delivering efficient and effective maintenance
 - c) Taking a long term view of how highway assets will be managed
 - d) Ensuring funds are spent on activities that prevent expensive short-term repairs
 - e) Making best use of public money whilst minimising risk
2. By using preventative treatments and early intervention we will maximise the life of our highway assets.
3. Through programming our asset maintenance work carefully we ensure that all works on the network are coordinated.
4. Our risk based approach when responding to reported faults and problems means that emergencies are made safe as soon as possible but where the risk is low faults may remain until they can be repaired within a planned programme of work.
5. Short term repairs provide poor value for money (four times more costly than planned, preventative treatments).

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B. Using Customer Satisfaction Information to drive improvement

This section should be read in conjunction with section C (Gathering and using customer feedback).

Sources of customer satisfaction information include:

- Complaints and compliments
- Social media comments
- NHT feedback survey (National)
- Annual scheme specific feedback survey (Local)

Our main tool for understanding customer satisfaction is the annual National Highways & Transport (NHT) survey. The results give us a measure of customer satisfaction across a broad range of transport services, including highway maintenance. This information along with information from stakeholder feedback will be monitored as a key performance measure and will feed into the quarterly Highways & Transport board meetings as outlined in the Asset Management Policy & Strategy.

Where a specific weakness or lack of improvement is highlighted an improvement plan will be developed by the relevant asset manager(s). The implementation of the action plan will be overseen by the asset manager and monitored by the H&T board.

C. Gathering and Using Customer Feedback

Channel Shift

Our incoming communication process is based on the principles of Channel Shift. Highway users will always need to contact us and are encouraged to do so using electronic means such as our website or the Everyday Telford smartphone App which allows highway defects to be reported directly through to the officer who will assess them and arrange for repair. It is our ambition to provide sufficient outgoing information to remove the need for stakeholders to contact us about the delivery of asset management schemes.

Sources of Feedback

Stakeholders are able to communicate with us about our asset management performance in a number of ways including customer feedback requests which are sent to a random sample of scheme frontages (minimum 50%) in autumn each year. This feedback is be used to identify areas where we can improve the quality of the information that we provide to stakeholders along with areas where our contractors can improve their performance. The results of the survey along with any recommended actions will be reported to the H&T board. It is hoped that through this process we will hone our communication approach in order to improve the stakeholder experience.



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D. Keeping Stakeholders Informed

Scheme Delivery Communication Process

We have a well-established, formal communication process (Appendix D) linked to our Pride in Your Community brand. The process is embedded into scheme delivery and incorporates a range of communication types and templates including press releases, emails to stakeholders, letter drops and posters on site as well as the use of web pages and social media to keep stakeholders informed. We are also exploring the use of QR codes. The process is reviewed on a scheme-by-scheme basis and amended whenever improvements are identified.

Web Pages

High level asset management information is provided through our website. We are currently reviewing the content of our web pages to ensure that they provide all necessary information and enable stakeholders to communicate with us. In particular we are developing specific treatment web pages in the form of frequently asked questions (FAQs). These are now linked to permits and are published on our website through one.network.

The website is kept up to date in relation to scheme delivery information with friendly URLs used for larger schemes (e.g. www.telford.gov.uk/ironbridgefootways). Roadworks.org is embedded into the website and through interactivity it enables stakeholders to identify all roadworks on our network, including those being undertaken by other organisations. It also allows users to give us basic thumbs up/thumbs down feedback on the quality of the information we provide.

Feedback to Stakeholders

Stakeholders are able to report issues to us in a variety of ways, including the website, MyTelford, Twitter, Facebook, email, letter and the Everyday Telford smartphone App. We are currently undertaking a 'closing the loop' exercise to ensure that appropriate automatically-generated stakeholder feedback is provided once the issue has been investigated. MyTelford will greatly assist in this by providing all enquiries raised by a specific person or parish in one area.

Social Media

Facebook and Twitter are used for both inward and outward communication and are used to keep road users up to date with changes to schemes, delivery progress, winter service information etc. They are also a source of interactive customer feedback which by their nature demand an immediate response where our more traditional communication channels would not. We have yet to resolve this dilemma.

Innovative Approaches

During 2016/17 we have developed the use of digital media (videos for use on Youtube and other digital channels). We have found these particularly useful when techniques or issues need to be explained to stakeholders.



Stakeholders are encouraged to sign up for 'News for You' in order to receive specific scheme or subject information by email. This was used to great effect on a recent scheme with regular traffic management changes on a strategic route, enabling drivers to keep up to date with the situation on the ground.

Ward Members and Town & Parish Councils

The formal communication process includes regular email updates to Members in wards where work is being carried out. In addition to the regular corporate reporting process briefings will be arranged as and when needed. The purpose of these is to ensure that Members are aware of the importance of asset management and the reason behind particular treatment selections. The first of these took place in August 2016.

Each Town & Parish Council (TPC) has been allocated a highways liaison officer, a manager from the highways & transport team who meets with the TPC or its representatives on a quarterly basis to provide an update on work carried out and to discuss issues that have arisen since the previous meeting.

Consultation and Information Sharing Events

Where work is being carried out for purely safety / technical reasons and can be delivered with minimum impact we communicate through the formal communication process. In these situations we are informing stakeholders of what is planned. Occasionally though there will be a scheme which is either high impact and/or controversial or for which we need input from stakeholders in order to make a final decision. These schemes are subject to wider engagement usually involving drop-in sessions to discuss what is going to happen or to view and comment on options.

We consult with local stakeholders where we have a number of options which are not dependent technically or financially. We occasionally consult over whether or not to deliver a scheme but this tends to be for improvement schemes rather than maintenance ones.

Measuring the Success of this Strategy

The Asset Management Performance Management Framework is currently under development and will be reported to the H&T board. It is our aim to publish this information on the website and share it with key stakeholders as outlined in Appendix A. It will include the following measures:

Measure	Source
Increased satisfaction with highways maintenance	NHT Survey
Increased satisfaction with highways condition	NHT Survey
Increase in percentage of residents saying that communication about schemes is good or very good	Annual feedback survey
Reduction in complaints about preventative maintenance treatments	TWC complaints & compliments process
Number of hits on FAQ and scheme specific web	TWC website



pages	
Number of compliments received about the service	TWC complaints & compliments process

Reviewing and Updating the Strategy

This is a living document and will be amended to reflect changes to our processes and procedures. It will be subject to a formal review on an annual basis. The next review is due in October 2022.



Appendix A: Highways Stakeholders

A. Internal Stakeholders

- TW Council staff (including the Customer Contact centre)
- Members

B. External Stakeholders

- Local businesses
- Local communities
- Local road users
- Arriva
- DfT
- Emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance and Health service)
- Highways maintenance service providers (TWS)
- Interest groups such as freight associations, pedestrian groups, cycling and motoring groups, disability and mobility groups and motoring groups
- Local Schools
- MPs
- Neighbouring highway authorities
- People living in the borough
- People travelling through the borough (including visitors)
- Town and parish councils
- Utility companies
- Voluntary and community sector / community groups

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Appendix B: Key Highways Assets

The assets we manage are outlined within the Asset Management Policy & Strategy.

This strategy focuses on communication in relation to our key assets, these being:

- Roads
- Pavements & cycleways
- Structures (including bridges)
- Drainage
- Street lighting
- Traffic management, including traffic lights



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Appendix C: Stakeholders on Area Working Contact Emails.

An Area Working (AW) group email address has been set up for each of the Borough's 33 wards. Each AW email address comprises the following:

Political

Ward member(s)

Parishes which sit within those wards

Leader of the Council

Cabinet Member for Transport, Customer & Neighbourhood Services

Internal - Senior Managers

Director of Customer, Neighbourhood & Wellbeing Services

Assistant Director of Customer & Neighbourhood Services

Internal – Highways & Transport

Highway Managers & Senior Engineer

Local Highways Inspector

Drainage Officer

Public Transport Officer

Streetworks (team email address)

Internal – Other Service Delivery Units

Service Delivery Managers

CRM users

Corporate Communications Team

Service Development Team (Support)

Local Grounds & Cleansing (Public Realm) Officer

Community Engagement Team (Target Intervention Areas only)

Enforcement Officer

External

Police

Fire Service

Ambulance Service

Other stakeholders as listed in Appendix A are identified on a project-by-project basis as part of project initiation.

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Appendix D: Highways Formal Communication Process

NB: hyperlinks are not activated

MAJOR WORKS	STANDARD WORKS	ACTION	NOTES	Templates and Guidance
During Design Site Survey		'Before' photos	For use on the web page	
In advance of delivery	n/a	Consider the need for a publicity scheme and public engagement	This should be fed into the regular 'Highways Roadworks' liaison meeting with the Corporate Communications Team.	
6 weeks	n/a	Advance information to stakeholders (Major schemes only)	Area Working Group (AW) email address to be used	Advance warning email
6 weeks		Publish 'Planned' web page under 'Roadworks'	Content to be based on Example 1 of the guidance and approved by client or Asset Management and Transport Strategy Group Manager	Standard website guidance
11 working days		Detailed information to stakeholders	AW email address to be used. Letter to stakeholders to be attached.	Detailed AW Guidance
11 w. days	N/A	Ensure press release is produced	Forward the detailed information email to Corporate Communications	

MAJOR WORKS	STANDARD WORKS	ACTION	NOTES	Templates and Guidance
10 working days		Publish 'Final' web page under 'Roadworks'	Content to be based on example 2 of the guidance and approved by client or Asset Management and Transport Strategy Group Manager	Standard website guidance
10 working days		Letter drop to properties that front onto works (must be delivered <u>after</u> the information to stakeholders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use standard letter –printed back to back with Contractor's letter • Include friendly URL if using (see web info) otherwise use Telford.gov.uk/roadworks <p>Client or Project Manager to approve TWC letter</p> <p>Project Manager or client to approve Contractor letter</p>	TWC letter TWS Letter template 16/17 Contractor letter guidance
10 working days		Advance warning signs on site (must go out after the letter drop to residents to reduce customer contact)	Using standard design (Cooperative Council Logo and Pride branding)	Small (Poster) Boards Template Large Scheme Boards Template
Immediately prior to commencement		Sub-Contractor letter to residents (if required)	<p>Specialist sub-contractors will deliver their own letters/cards relating to their work.</p> <p>The project manager must approve these before delivery.</p>	

MAJOR WORKS	STANDARD WORKS	ACTION	NOTES	Templates and Guidance
During works		'during' photos	For use on the web site	
During works		Weekly Progress Updates	Where there are changes ensure that the web page is updated	Weekly update template
Once work is complete		'After' photos	For use on the web site	
Once work is complete		Advise of completion	Ensure the web page is updated/removed.	

