

Highways Asset Management Communications Plan



Introduction

Kent County Council (KCC) is responsible for maintaining the highway network that not only serves the residents of and visitors to Kent but also plays an essential role in supporting the economic growth of the County. Details of the strategies and methodologies used to maintain the highway asset are included in the document 'Implementing Our Approach to Asset Management in Kent'.

In delivering an asset management approach to maintaining the highway asset it is vitally important that we not only communicate with our stakeholders but also listen to them. For this reason, KCC has developed a Highway Asset Management Communications Plan that aligns KCC's council-wide approach to communications and customer engagement. The aim of this plan is to raise awareness and understanding of Kent's approach to highway asset management and the outcomes that can be expected by outlining the communication channels we will use.

This is a live document and will be reviewed and revised annually by Divisional Management Team.

The messages that need to be communicated:

- Spending on the highway asset – we have finite resources
- How we prioritise where we spend the money – how we spend the money to maximise the outcomes
- Our achievements – what we have achieved in the last 12 months and what have the benefits been to our customers
- Our performance – how we are performing against our targets
- Our forward works programmes – what we will be doing where & when
- Managing expectations – publicise standards and levels of services customers can expect.
- We value customer feedback – not only do we actively seek feedback on how we are performing but also invite customer views when developing plans and levels of service.

Aim and objectives of the plan

The aim of all our communications with staff, residents and everyone who deals with KCC highways is that they are aware of and have a clear understanding of our approach to asset management and highway maintenance. This will:

- inform and support decisions that have been and will be made that affect highways maintenance
- improve the reputation of our highway service
- maintain a high profile and positive perception of our vision, aims, services and achievements
- lead to higher levels of satisfaction and engagement.

To do this all our communications need to be clear, consistent and co-ordinated, with different methods of communication used to inform different target audiences.

Delivering Our Objectives

We will use the following forms of communication.

- Media & PR – We use media and PR to maintain and further improve positive media coverage, recognising the proven link between the public's sense of feeling informed and feeling satisfied with the service. The Kent Communications team manages media relations, supported by Highways, Transportation and Waste (HT&W). This includes writing press releases and editorial for local, national and trade media, organising photo calls, arranging interviews and providing statements.
- Social Media – Social media is an integral part of our communications. We recognise the opportunities that using social media can bring, such as:
 - reputation enhancement and building of advocacy for KCC
 - engaging with the public using their medium of choice
 - ability to engage with customers in real-time about general highways improvements and issues
 - useful insight into customer behaviour and feedback
 - an opportunity to reduce cost versus other communications channels
 - the speed and potential reach of messages.

HT&W manages their @KentHighways Twitter and Facebook accounts, and work with Kent Communications on planning content and messaging.

- Website – KCC's website is the council's most-used contact channel, with more than five million visits each year. The website provides people with useful information about HT&W's policies and services, as well as access to services such as reporting a fault on a road or footway. There is also a feedback mechanism on the website.

HT&W provide information and documents to the Digital Services team, who manage the website and publish information.

We also routinely share information on other websites, for example roadworks.org.

- Internal Communications – play a key role in ensuring staff know the council's plans and priorities and shows how these contribute to its strategic objectives. It ensures that staff are aware of what action is required of them. Engaged and informed staff are more likely to act as advocates for the service and council as a whole. This is done through:
 - Regular briefings and updates to staff, for example, team briefings, emails and internal communication channels, such as the staff intranet (KNet), newsletters (KMail, KMail for Managers and GET directorate newsletter) and building information screens
 - Briefings to councillors, for example, Member briefings, updates through Members Information Point bulletin and updates through relevant Cabinet Committees
 - All asset management information staff need on policies, processes and performance can be accessed through the internal shared drive
 - Director's Question Time sessions

- Print – HT&W routinely provides printed information to the public to inform them of planned works and road projects. This includes information leaflets and resident newsletters which also provide contact information to invite feedback and comments. HT&W write print copy and place orders for printing through the **How to order design and print** section on KNet.

- Public engagement – the needs of local communities are taken into account in the management of highways assets. In addition to conducting Equality Impact Assessments to help inform our approach, HT&W use a variety of methods for engaging with the public:
 - Through our work with parish councils and local Members to identify local needs
 - Annual Parish Council seminars
 - Listening and acting on complaints and other customer feedback collected via our website, social media and Contact Point
 - Annual Highway Tracker survey
 - Engaging with the public on major changes of approach to our highways asset management strategy, such as consulting on our street lighting policy and seeking views on our approach to highways asset management
 - Taking part in the corporate budget consultation with the public that seeks their views on the council's spending plans, which includes spending on highways
 - Through local Joint Transportation Boards

How it happens:

Strategic communications planning, advice, website management and media relations are provided by Kent Communications or through KCC's strategic partner Agilisys. This is particularly for major schemes and roadworks where the works are likely to cause significant disruption to residents and the travelling public and require careful messaging. KCC communications also provide the annual campaigns, such as the pothole blitz.

HT&W is responsible for providing relevant and timely information to the above groups, and for following the guidance on KNet for how to access digital, print and design services.

KCC's Engagement and Consultation (E&C) team provide advice on the best way to keep staff informed and engaged through effective messages via the internal communication channels. This includes the corporate channels KNet, K-Mail and directorate newsletters. HT&W are responsible for providing timely content with a clear scope of what needs to be achieved.

Our E&C team also provides advice and guidance to teams undergoing service changes to create robust and well-formed public engagement. HT&W is responsible for contacting the team in the early planning stage for any consultation.

Levels of approval:

Press releases, web content, parish council updates are to be approved by the Director of HT&W or Heads of Service as relevant, and shared with the communications teams.

Effectiveness of the Communications Plan:

The successfulness of activities included in this communications plan will be measured on an ongoing basis and in-line with the HT&W Business Plan & Performance Management Framework in the following ways:

- The number and reach of social media interactions, and sentiment
- Evaluation of media coverage by tone – positive/neutral/negative
- Number of interactions via internal online channels
- Customer satisfaction with digital services and Contact Point
- Increase in use of online content and services (and fewer calls)