

# **Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council**



## **Highway Asset Management Communication Strategy**

## Document Information

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| <b>Title</b>          | <b>Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council<br/>Highway Asset Management<br/>Highways Communication Strategy</b>                        |
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| <b>Description</b>    | The following document outlines Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Councils approach to Communications in regards to Highways Maintenance |

## Document History

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## 1. Introduction

Knowsley Council's Communications Strategy recognises that the Highway Network is one of our largest and most valuable assets and is very important to our residential and business customers. Knowsley Council acknowledges 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 faced by Knowsley 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 services such as:-

- Annual Planned Maintenance Programme
- Scheme consultations
- Proposed high quality streetscape improvements
- Results of formal customer satisfaction surveys

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 boroughs roads, pavements, structures, street lighting and traffic signals, ensuring that all communications are timely, positive, informative and accessible.

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

The Council will strive to communicate with our customers during the onset of any adverse weather conditions brought on by freezing, flooding, extreme wind and high temperatures related issues during the summer using various methods including online, printed media and through embracing a range of new digital media solutions.

## 2. Highways 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 the processes in decision making 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 in the most effective manner.

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 the 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

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.

### 3. Highways Asset Management

The Council is responsible for approximately 607km of adopted roads, 804km of adopted footways, 148 bridges and structures, over 27,700 highway gullies and around 19,762 street lighting columns.

Council responsibility also includes the maintenance of grass verges and trees within the adopted highway. However, for the purpose of this communications strategy the focus will be on our most costly 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 is considered.

### 4. Aims and Objectives

Knowsley Council's aim through communication is to:

- Raise awareness of the services provided by the Highways 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

The Council's objective is:

- 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 cost appropriate treatments
- To engage and listen to peoples 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 boroughs highway network
- To communicate with businesses, partners, community groups and other organisations – as well as with residents

## 5. Target Audience

The Council will seek to engage and inform as many people as possible from across the borough on the aims and objectives of the highway service, including but not restricted to:

### Internal Stakeholders

- Elected Members
- Community Committees
- Knowsley Council staff
- Customer Contact Centre
- Service Providers
- Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) including Merseytravel
- Chambers of Commerce

### External Stakeholders

- Residents
- Local road users
- Local communities and community groups
- Schools/Colleges
- Local businesses
- Town and Parish Councils
- Members of Parliament (MPs)
- Visitors and people travelling through the borough
- Interest groups such as pedestrian groups, rambler groups, cycling and motoring groups, disability and mobility groups
- Emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance and Health service)
- Utilities (gas, water, electricity, etc.)
- Department for Transport (DfT)

## 6. 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 Knowsley Council
- Condition of assets
- Backlog of highway maintenance work

- Level of available budgets
- Performance management framework
- Customer Satisfaction
- Resilient network
- Policies

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 MESSAGES**

Clear and accurate information about current activities and feedback;

- **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 the Council and statutory undertakers and quarterly 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 in terms of the information they received, the standard of the work and the contractor's performance. The Customer Satisfaction Survey can be found at [\(insert link\)](#)
- **Customer feedback (external survey)** – A yearly survey is carried out by the National Highways & Transport Network (NHT) for the Council's Transport and Highways Services to determine the public's views on highways maintenance and satisfaction with maintenance activities. The results of the survey can be found at [\(insert link\)](#)

## 7. How We Communicate

The Council's Corporate Communications Team manages a number of established external and internal facing channels and can contribute content to networks managed by other council teams;

- **Local Media** - the Council has established relationships with local and national journalists and there are corporate guidelines for communications with local media and these will be followed at all times. The Council also publishes Knowsley News Online which includes a monthly newsletter to subscribers. The Knowsley Chamber newsletter is used to communicate with businesses.
- **Knowsley Council Website** – this enables communication with stakeholders by providing an A to Z Guide of Council Services. For the Highways Service, 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. A link is also included to <http://knowsley.roadworks.org/> - an interactive map showing roadworks across the district, including works by statutory undertakers (Telecoms, Electric, Gas companies, etc);
  - Facility to report highway defects;
  - Winter and gritting;
  - Specific information during adverse weather conditions.
- **Social Media** - including Twitter and Facebook and can be followed at @knowsleykmbc
- **Elected Members briefing sessions** – keeping local members up to date is key to managing people's expectations, especially about more disruptive schemes.

- **Customer Contact Centre / One Stop Shops** – staff are briefed to deal with and signpost any calls regarding the condition of the highway network to the most appropriate officers. There are four One Stop Shops with large Plasma TV screens displaying constant messaging.
- **Community Committees/Messaging** – briefings are supplied to the area committees to inform people of works taking place, how they are progressing and when they will be completed. Over 9,000 subscribers receive an email notification service.
- **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.
- **Letter drops** – to households directly affected by roadworks.
- **Signs** – are placed in advance of major works starting, to allow users of the network in Knowsley to change their travel plans, and for local residents and businesses to adjust their arrangements to accommodate the works, with minimum inconvenience and disruption.
- **Internal Communications** - staff are crucial in building the Council's reputation, whether they are frontline staff or officers representing the Council externally. Internal communication channels used include;
  - Bertha (internal Council web based communication site)
  - Council wide electronic newsletter
  - Senior Management and team meetings
  - Chief Executive Blog

Our annual scheduled communication plan can be found at the end of this document.

## 8. Evaluate 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. We will measure;

- Awareness of the Highway Service 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 Satisfaction Survey (NHT).
- 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 Contact Centre and time taken to respond to requests.
- Consultation with directly affected residents – perception and satisfaction surveys

This document will be reviewed annually to ensure effective mechanisms to communicate service standards and outcomes are in place to manage customer expectations.

## 9. Planned Communication Activity

| Who                               | Activity   | Frequency   | How             |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------|-----------------|
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish the Asset Management Policy & Strategy  | Annually    | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish the Highway Safety Defect Policy  | Annually    | Council Website |
| Traffic / Network Management Team | Review and publish the Skid Resistance Strategy  | Biennially  | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish the Communication Strategy  | Annually    | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish the Asset Information Strategy  | Regularly   | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish the Major Asset Lifecycle Plans   | Regularly   | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish the Resilient Highway Network approach/map  | Biennially  | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish the Additional Pothole Allocation - Statement of Spend  | Annually    | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish document explaining the authorities approach to Highway Maintenance schemes and treatment types.                                    | As required | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish document explaining the authorities approach to Repairing Potholes, including the prevention, identification, reporting of potholes | As required | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish document explaining the authorities approach to Cyclic Gully Cleansing  | As required | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish document explaining the authorities approach to Road Markings   | As required | Council Website |
| Highways Maintenance Team         | Review and publish document explaining the authorities approach to Safety barriers and Fencing   | As required | Council Website |

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|--|--|-------------|--|
| Highways Maintenance Team                    | Review and publish progress against the annual Highway Maintenance Programme   | Quarterly   | Council Website  |
| Highways Maintenance Team                    | Review and publish the NHT Survey results  | Annually    | Council Website Knowsley News article, Social Media (Facebook and Twitter), Bertha |
| Streetscene                                  | Winter maintenance updates regarding gritting  | As required | Social Media (Facebook and Twitter), Knowsley News, Bertha                         |
| Communications Team                          | Customer Satisfaction Survey   | Continual   | Council Website, Knowsley News, social media, Bertha                               |
| Network Management Team                      | Roadworks.org updates  | Continual   | Council Website  |
| Network Management Team                      | Network Bulletin   | Weekly      | Internal and External Email  |
| Scheme Project Officer & Contractor          | Letter drops to all property owners and tenants of properties located on a road that the work relates to is residents with advanced information about maintenance works being closed or subject to TTRO, to advise them of the works   | As required | Letter   |
| Scheme Project Officer & Contractor          | Advance notification signs placed in advance of major works starting, to allow users of the network in Knowsley to change their travel plans, and for local residents and businesses to adjust their arrangements to accommodate the works, with minimum inconvenience and disruption. | As required | Signs  |
| Scheme Project Officer & Communications Team | Advance notification to external stakeholders 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   | As required | Local Media and Social Media (Facebook and Twitter), Knowsley News, Bertha         |
| Communications Team / HMT                    | Regular communications meetings  | Monthly     |  |