

Shropshire highways asset management strategy

Communications strategy – November 2019 to October 2020

Overview

Shropshire Council works with our partners WSP and Kier in the Shropshire Highways Alliance to maintain and improve the county's adopted roads, pavements and cycle paths, plus bridges, street lights, traffic lights, signals and crossings.

We carry out regular inspections, plus planned and reactive maintenance to make sure that our roads, pavements and bridges are safe for road users now and in the future.

We're also responsible for winter maintenance, keeping the county's road safe and accessible during spells of ice and snow.

Shropshire Council's highways asset management strategy

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).

Our highways asset management strategy provides an integrated framework for the delivery of highways maintenance services across Shropshire Council's highways network, and defines our objectives for the management of highway assets in Shropshire. We are moving ahead to implement this strategy as a core part of the way that we provide our highway maintenance services.

The strategy has been developed by the Shropshire Highways Alliance, which consists of:

- **Shropshire Council** – the highways authority
- **WSP (formerly Mouchel)** – Shropshire Council's engineering consultant
- **Kier** – Shropshire Council's maintenance contractor.

To view the highways asset management strategy, go to:

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/highways-and-traffic/highway-maintenance/highways-asset-management/>

This strategy should be used alongside and in conjunction with the Shropshire Highways customer and stakeholder engagement plan (CSEP)

The Shropshire Highways Customer and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (CSEP) – see appendix B

This new document – drafted by Kier with the support of Shropshire Council and WSP - sets out the processes that the Shropshire Highways alliance should use when we interact with our customers and those affected by our works. This mainly involves the distribution of information and how we use feedback on the service we provide and the product we deliver.

Objectives of the CSEP

- To provide all employees with the correct resources and procedures.

- To notify customers concisely, consistently and clearly .
- To get feedback from our customers and use it to improve our service.

Benefits of the CSEP

- To provide a better service.
- To improve public awareness.
- To improve public perception.

Note: this document is currently being reviewed by WSP

The DfT incentive fund – and this communications strategy

The Government has made £6 billion available between 2015/16 and 2020/21 for local councils to spend on highways maintenance.

Of this, £578 million has been set aside for an **incentive fund** scheme, to reward councils who demonstrate they are carrying out cost effective improvements throughout all aspects of the service. For example, policy and strategy, communications, data managing data, decision making.

Councils in England, excluding London, receive different amounts of cash depending on how they perform, based upon a self-assessment exercise.

Each year councils are invited to complete a self-assessment questionnaire.

The answers to the questions determine whether a council is rated as level 1, 2 or 3 – which determines how much incentive funding they will receive, towards improvements in highways, street lighting, bridges and structures.

In 2016/17 Shropshire Council was rated as a level 2 highways authority. In 2017/18 and 2018/19 we were rated as a level 3 authority.

We are working hard to retain a level 3 rating for 2019/20 – and every year after that - to ensure that we receive the maximum amount of funding available.

From 2017/18 the amount received by level 1 and level 2 council will decrease in each subsequent year. Only level 3 councils will be awarded their full share of the funding.

If we were to return to level 2 we could receive around £420,000 less in highways maintenance funding each year (compared to remaining level 3).

The communication strategy details how the service will engage with customers and stakeholders to ensure they are aware of, and most importantly, satisfied with, the continual work that is undertaken to maintain and improve the highways network, and have opportunity to feedback.

This strategy focuses on our most significant highways assets, namely roads; pavements and cycleways; bridges and structures; drainage, street lighting, plus traffic lights and signals, and winter maintenance.

It is a live document that will be updated as appropriate, and will be fully reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

Aim

The main aim of this communications strategy is to meet – and to demonstrate that we meet – the level 3 communications requirements of the incentive fund. – ie. to communicate and engage with stakeholders and customers about the work that Shropshire Council and its partners carries out under the highways asset management strategy.

Objectives

The objectives of this communications strategy are:

- To gather customer feedback on its highway maintenance service, and to use this information to drive service improvement.
- To ensure that stakeholders have opportunity to make their views known, and understand what happens as result.
- To increase knowledge and awareness of the work that Shropshire Council and its partners carry out under the highways asset management strategy.
- To increase understanding of the work that Shropshire Council and its partners carry out under the highways asset management strategy.
- To ensure that communications is timely, positive, interactive and accessible.
- To engage with stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations, to shape and mould the service provided.
- To ensure that all proactive communication is timely, positive, informative and accessible.
- To review and update the communications strategy on a regular basis and incorporate lessons learnt
- To be open and honest about how we make decisions in the identification, assessment, programming, delivery and completion of asset management activities.
- To demonstrate the positive work being carried out to maintain and improve the county's network.
- To raise awareness and understanding of the council's highways asset management outcomes, as outlined in the highways asset management strategy: ie. a safe network; a serviceable network; a sustainable network.
- To demonstrate that people's views do matter and do make a difference.
- To raise awareness of the Shropshire Highways alliance through proper and appropriate use of the Shropshire Highways name/brand.

Messages

1. 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.

- Shropshire Council works closely with our partners Kier and WSP in the Shropshire Highways Alliance.
- Our focus is 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
- Highways are our most valuable asset. They are vital to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. 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.

2. Highways asset management messages

- 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.
- We value and encourage feedback from our stakeholders – particularly customers and residents – and provide every opportunity for people to ask questions, make suggestions and have their say about our highways maintenance work.

3. Service specific messages

- Messages specific to the seven main service areas - resurfacing; potholes; bridge maintenance; winter maintenance; traffic lights and signals; street lighting; drainage - will be communicated as and when appropriate.
- Messages specific to individual schemes/projects will be included in communications relating to that scheme/project.
- Messages specific to the Shrewsbury Highways Improvement Programme, and the Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package will be included within communications relating to the SHIP / SITP.

Audiences / stakeholders

The following have been identified as our key stakeholders and will be communicated with under this strategy, using the means shown.

Stakeholders	Main communication method/s
Shropshire residents / visitors / road users (also referred to as 'customers')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Shropshire Council website • GovDelivery email alerts • Letters to residents • Direct contact with divisional office • Shropshire Council Newsroom • Local media • Road signs
Shropshire Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shropshire Council website

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email from divisional office • Direct communication with officers • GovDelivery email alerts • Shropshire Council Newsroom • Councillors' bulletin
Shropshire parish and town councils (chairmen, clerks and councillors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email from divisional office • Direct communication with officers • GovDelivery email alerts • Shropshire Council Newsroom
Shropshire Council's partners – WSP / Kier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways asset management project board meetings. • Highways asset management leadership meetings • Direct communication with officers. • Kier contract meetings
Utilities companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrewsbury Highways Improvement Programme meetings • Emails from Streetworks team/divisional office
Emergency services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email from Streetworks team/divisional office
Local / regional media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases added to Shropshire Council Newsroom • Media briefings • Responses to media enquiries • Responses to interview requests • Proactive supply of information • Proactive suggestions for features/reports. • Social media
Highways trade press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuing of press releases • Responses to media enquiries • Responses to interview requests • Responses to interview requests • Proactive supply of information • Proactive suggestions for features/reports. • Social media
Shropshire Council staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff intranet • Staff newsletter
MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly MP briefings

Activity

Communications activity is carried out throughout the year and falls into four main categories

1. Ongoing communication and engagement with customers and stakeholders.
2. Communication and engagement around major schemes and projects.
3. Campaigns around individual services areas.
4. Annual customer/stakeholder surveys.

Within these areas a wide range of communications tools will be used, including: website, social media, blogs, video, news media, email updates, letters and more, to help us achieve our communications objectives.

Where appropriate all activity is carried out under the Shropshire Highways brand and delivered in partnership by Shropshire Council, Kier and WSP.

1. **Ongoing communication and engagement.** Throughout the year a wide range of information is made available to keep stakeholders and customers informed about current or forthcoming highways maintenance activity – and about the highways maintenance work carried out by Shropshire Council and its partners. The Shropshire Council website, email updates, and the blogs/videos referred to below play an important part in this. A range of means are available to give people the opportunity to raise comments and questions, and report concerns. See appendix A.
2. **Communications around major schemes and projects.** For major highways maintenance schemes (particularly resurfacing and bridge maintenance schemes) a communications framework is followed. This ensures that key stakeholders are made aware of the work and have the opportunity to comment before plans are finalised. Once plans are agreed, public communications takes place, with a letter to residents, press release and dedicated webpage prepared and issued. To ensure consistency of message, these three items are prepared together. Regular updates are then added to the webpage while work is underway.

This **framework** has been developed to ensure effective communications around *all* highways schemes, from those classed as having a 'low' impact on road users to those classed as having a 'severe' impact. **See appendix E.**

Note: in early 2017 a series of blogs/videos were produced to help raise awareness of the work carried out in seven key areas from within the strategy, namely:

- Blog -- [how we maintain and grit Shropshire's roads in winter](#)
- Blog -- [how and why we resurface Shropshire's roads](#)
- Blog -- [how we inspect and maintain Shropshire bridges](#)
- Blog -- [how we inspect and maintain Shropshire's street lights](#)
- Blog -- [how we protect Shropshire's roads from flooding](#)
- Blog -- [how we identify and treat potholes on Shropshire's roads](#)
- Blog - [How we inspect and maintain Shropshire's traffic lights and signals](#)

These blogs are now permanently hosted on Shropshire Council's online Newsroom and replicated on the council's website. They are reviewed and updated on a regular basis. In **2019** the blogs will continue to be highlighted/promoted as when topical/appropriate. Eg the winter maintenance blog will be promoted during spells of wintry weather; the drainage blog will be promoted during times of flooding, and so on. This will have added impact and help to better promote and raise awareness of the work being carried out.

3. Standalone campaigns

Throughout the year individual campaigns are carried out to raise awareness of individual service areas.

4. Annual surveys

- a) Each year Shropshire Council participates in the NHT satisfaction survey. The survey is sent to 3300 Shropshire residents and is used to gauge opinions/satisfaction with highways and transport. It will be used as a benchmark for this communications strategy.
- b) In November 2016 we launched a new, annual, online survey (on Shropshire Council's website) asking people if they're aware of, and understand, the highways maintenance work that the council carries out, and seeks their views about how we measure and publish the progress of our work. The survey continues to be run annually. The findings of this survey will help us to understand if we're communicating effectively, and if we're recording and reporting the right information about our work. It will also help to influence and improve how we communicate in future about our highways maintenance work. See appendix D.

Note: Since April 2018 all work carried out by Shropshire Council, WSP and Kier under the Shropshire Highways Alliance has carried the new 'Shropshire Highways' branding. New Shropshire Highways communications and customer service protocols have been developed and implemented.

Evaluation

The success of this communications strategy – and the extent to which we have achieved our communications objectives – will be measured in the following ways, which will also inform future communications activity.

- The NHT highways survey 2018 will be used as a benchmark – the 2019 NHT survey findings can then be used in our evaluation. The survey is sent to 3300 Shropshire residents and is used to gauge opinions/satisfaction with highways and transport.
- Our annual online survey asks people if they're aware of, and understand, the highways maintenance work that the council carries out, and seeks their views about how we measure and publish the progress of our work. The findings of this survey will help us to understand if we're communicating effectively, and if we're recording and reporting the right information about our work. It will also help to influence and improve how we communicate in future about our highways maintenance work.
- Feedback, comments and questions received from stakeholders during the campaign will be evaluated and used to inform future communications activity.
- The extent and nature of media coverage generated throughout the year will be monitored and recorded.
- Customer feedback, comments and questions received throughout the year – for example via email, social media and online forms - will be recorded.
- Stakeholder feedback (i.e not including customers), comments and questions received throughout the year – for example via email, social media and online forms - will be recorded.
- Social media will be monitored and likes, retweets and comments will be noted.
- The number of views of the highways webpages will be recorded.
- The number of views of the highways videos will be recorded.

Evaluation 2019/20 – some headlines

1. Roads and highways section of the Shropshire Council website
1 January to 25 October 2019
Page views = 192,879; unique page views = 133,035
2. Roadworks and road closures section of the Shropshire Council website
1 January to 30 July 2019*
Page views = 99,447; unique page views = 64,932
3. New network management section*
(replaced 'roadworks and road closures' section in summer 2019)
31 July to 25 October 2019
Page views = 18,367; unique page views = 13,299
4. Video views – up to and including 25 October 2019
 - a. how we maintain and grit Shropshire's roads in winter
Total views = **1460** – an increase from 1039 in the past 12 months.
 - b. how and why we resurface Shropshire's roads
Total views = **2365** – an increase from 1844 in the past 12 months
 - c. how we inspect and maintain Shropshire bridges
Total views = **304** – an increase from 238 in the past 12 months.
 - d. how we inspect and maintain Shropshire's street lights
Total views = **8057** – an increase from 5634 in the past 12 months.
 - e. how we protect Shropshire's roads from flooding
Total views = **176** – an increase from 127 in the past 12 months
 - f. how we identify and treat potholes on Shropshire's roads
Total views = **723** – an increase from 622 in the past 12 months
 - g. How we inspect and maintain Shropshire's traffic lights and signals
Total views = **587** – an increase from 494 in the past 12 months.
5. Shropshire online survey
 - 2016 – **21** responses received
 - 2017 – **38** responses received
 - 2018 – **167** responses received
 - **2019 – to be added following closing date [31 October 2019]**

Note: This communications strategy is a working document and will be reviewed on a regular basis, and reviewed/updated annually. The above will be used to inform and guide this review. An annual summary of successes and lessons learned will be produced and attached to this strategy as an appendix. **See appendix F.**