

# Highways Communication Strategy

**Highway Infrastructure  
Asset Management Plan**

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# 1 Introduction

This strategy has been developed in accordance with the following:

- Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Guidance May 2013 (Section 3.4)
- Well Managed Highway Infrastructure October 2013 - amended March 2017 (Section A.6.7.)
- Prevention and a Better Cure – Potholes review (Section 2)
- Highways Maintenance Capital Funding - Self-Assessment Questionnaire for the Incentive Fund (Question 2)
- Oldham Council Highways Asset Management Strategy

This strategy will be reviewed regularly and following any major events and updated to incorporate any lessons learnt. A log of reviews will be kept alongside a summary of any resultant changes to this strategy.

Oldham Council recognises that effective communication with residents and its key stakeholders 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 stakeholders may access them.

Engagement raises public awareness of the challenges and issues that Oldham Council, as the highway authority faces, and explains the way services have to be prioritised in order to provide a service which meets our needs but also helps to manage residents' expectations.

Highway stakeholders have been identified and a variety of communication options are used to inform them about the services provided, such as:

- Capital Maintenance Programme
- Formal Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Council communications channels

Consultations help establish and prioritise a 3-year capital works programme based on the community's needs taking into account stakeholders' 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 borough's roads, pavements, structures and street lighting, ensuring that all communications are timely, positive, informative and accessible.

The strategy also fits with the council's priority of investing in Neighbourhood Services and getting the basics right as well as the #ourbit corporate narrative. The message will change as with corporate and operational requirements, but will follow the following example as a standard:

### **#ourbit**

Investing in our highways, repairing potholes and carrying out resurfacing work

### **#yourbit**

Going online and telling us about any potholes and defects you spot on the highway network

### **#result**

Roads that are in a good state of repair to help keep the borough, its residents and visitors, moving

This document details how our stakeholders are engaged with Oldham's highways assets, to ensure that they are aware of, and most importantly, satisfied with, the work taking place to maintain and improve the network.

Information is shared using various methods: including the council website, press releases, media outlets and social media.

## **1.1 Highway Asset Management Guidance and effective communication**

Managing highways is now a critical challenge to Oldham Council, which has 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.

Our highways are increasingly at risk of damage from wear and tear, ageing, increasing traffic and severe weather – due to the borough's geographic position.

This regularly results in visible defects like potholes, damaged road signs, defective street lights and in extreme cases, damage to bridges. These defects can result in negative media coverage.

It is clear that action must be taken to make best use of funding and to communicate this process if our highways are going to continue to provide the service for which they were built, and ensure residents are confident that money is being spent wisely.

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 Oldham 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
- Ensures that residents are kept informed about their highway maintenance service

## **1.2 Highways Asset Management**

The Council is responsible for around 829km of adopted carriageway and more than 1,099km of footways, 21km of retaining walls, 236 bridges and structures, 46,300 gullies, 62km of culverts, 28,930 street lights and illuminated street furniture, 45,000 street and traffic signs and more than 600 grit bins.

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 significant highways assets. These include:

- Carriageways (roads)
- Footways and cycle routes
- Structures, including bridges
- Drainage
- Street lighting, including illuminated signs
- Traffic management

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 the 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 £ spent on safety, the environment and future maintenance costs are considered.

## **1.3 Engagement**

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.

## **2.0 Aim**

The council's aim through communication is to:

- Raise awareness of the services provided by the highway 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
- Reach as many people as possible

## **3.0 Objectives**

- To inform stakeholders of the services the council provides and the quality of service they can expect.
- To help stakeholders/residents 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 people's 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 borough's highways network
- To communicate with businesses, partners, community groups and other organisations – as well as with residents.

## **4.0 Stakeholders**

The council will seek to engage and inform as many people as possible from across the Oldham area, including but not restricted to:

### **4.1 Internal Stakeholders**

- Elected members
- District Executives
- Oldham Council staff
- Contact Centre
- Highways and Transportation staff
- Service providers
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)

### **4.2 External stakeholders**

- Residents
- Local road users

- Local communities and community groups
- Schools
- Local businesses
- Parish councils
- Members of Parliament (MPs)
- Visitors and people travelling through the authority's area
- Interest groups such as freight associations, pedestrian groups, cycling and motoring groups, disability and mobility groups, Public Service Operators
- Emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance and Health services)
- Utilities (gas, water, electricity etc.)
- Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM)
- Department for Transport (DfT)

## 5.0 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 stakeholders:

- Assets managed by Oldham Council
- Condition of assets
- Backlog of highway maintenance work
- Level of available budgets
- Performance management framework

In addition to the above, strategic, operational and specific messages will be communicated as follows:

### 5.1 Strategic Messages

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 asset which balances 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.

## 5.2 Operational Message

Clear and accurate information about current activities and feedback:

- **Programme** – Our elected members play a fundamental part in the decision making process which includes opportunities for communication and stakeholder consultation regarding the capital works programme. The agreed Three-year Capital Programme is published on the Internet and updated annually.
- **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 Oldham 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 (external survey)** An annual 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. The can be found at <http://nhtsurvey.econtrack.com/>

## 5.3 Specific Messages

Clear and accurate information about particular plans or where specific feedback is requested:

- Consultation on potential changes to the highway is an important part of communication with residents to ensure service users' needs are reflected in changes made to the highway network. Consultation is undertaken with stakeholders affected by any proposed work where there is a significant change to the existing layout or a change in materials. For example, where York stone flags are proposed to be taken up and replaced with asphalt.
- Responses to queries, reports and bulletins to District Executives.

## 6.0 How We Communicate

The council will use various communication tools to deliver information and key messages. These include digital platforms as well as traditional channels, such as newspaper articles, statutory notices, telephone and leaflets, which play a fundamental role that must not be underplayed.

### 6.1 Local Media

The media plays a strong role in shaping perceptions of local government, so informed reporting is vital. People are more positive about their council in areas where the council has a good relationship with the local media. The council has corporate guidelines for communications with local media and these will be followed at all times.

### 6.2 Digital Media

The council uses digital platforms to expand on opportunities to communicate more effectively with external audiences. It is important to look at new and innovative methods to keep up with an ever-changing world. We currently use:

- **Website** – This enables communication with stakeholders by providing an A to Z Guide of council 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 capital works programme which is updated to ensure the information is accurate. A link is also included to Roadworks.org - an interactive map showing road works across the borough, including works by statutory undertakers (Telecoms, Electric, Gas companies etc.)
  - Performance data (targets and actual).
  - Facility to report and track the status of highway defects.
  - Electronic consultation on present and future schemes and policies.
  - Specific information during adverse weather conditions.
- **Social media** – The council's main social media platforms are twitter and Facebook and are used for communicating news, information and engaging with our communities. Oldham Council currently uses twitter and can be followed at [@OldhamCouncil](https://twitter.com/OldhamCouncil).

### 6.3 Traditional Methods

Oldham Council has made and will continue to make greater use of digital access to information and social media, traditional methods of communication cannot be underestimated. The Council will use the most appropriate communication method for the audience and the message it aims to convey, these include:

- **Members' briefing sessions/emails** – keeping local members up to date is key to managing people's expectations, especially about more disruptive schemes.



- **The Customer Contact Centre** - is briefed to deal with and signpost any calls regarding the condition of the highway network to the most appropriate officers.
- **District Executives** – Briefing notes will be supplied to the district executives 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/Video** – Carry important notices and events to local and national media.
- **Letter drops** – to households directly affected by 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.

The council will continue to look at new and innovative methods to keep up with the changing media environment

## 6.4 Internal Communications

Staff are crucial in building the council's reputation, whether they are frontline 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:

- Team Brief & Managers' Brief (internal council electronic newsletters)
- Intranet News
- Staff Matters Council-wide newspaper
- Senior Management Forum
- Regular team meetings

## 6.5 Reactive

Oldham Council's communications team always responds to queries about highways from local and national media in an attempt to explain, educate and engage in the issues raised.

The council also responds to queries from members of the public through social media platforms.

## 7.0 Evaluation and Review

It is extremely important that the council measures the success of its highways work and acts on the feedback received. This feedback could be used to set levels of

service, and amend / enhance highway policy and working practices where necessary and to communicate these changes.

What will be measured?

- Awareness of highway services 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 Opinion Survey (NHT).
- Number of retweets, likes and comments on Social media.
- 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
- Staff survey

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