



Essex County Council Essex Highways Summary Communications Strategy

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Document Control Sheet

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Table of revisions

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Essex Highways Summary Communications Strategy

This strategy describes the approach Essex Highways uses to engage with residents, Members, staff and other key partners as we develop, improve and maintain the Essex highways network.

Essex Highways is a partnership between Essex County Council (ECC) and Ringway Jacobs, responsible for managing Essex County Council's highways network and services, maintaining and improving the highways infrastructure across the county, using a prioritised, asset data led, whole-life approach.

The scope of this strategy covers priority areas for communications, proposed routine key business activities, new key projects and priorities, and the outputs associated with continued improvements to service delivery.

Objectives

The primary objectives of the Essex Highways communications team are:

1. To tell the story of why work is being delivered, using plain English to explain what will be happening and the benefits to residents when works are completed.
2. To use the Essex Highways communications channels to engage with and inform our audiences, tailoring the messages to ensure we maximise the reach and impact of our content. For instance, publicising additional investment in highways across channels, acknowledging that this information needs to be told differently in a press release, social media content or blog post. This approach will capture the attention of audiences consuming the information either via a newspaper, on social media or while visiting the Essex Highways website.
3. To promote the proactive works being delivered, including if funding is sourced from additional funding from ECC or the Department for Transport (DfT).
4. To work collaboratively with colleagues within the service and in ECC Communications and Marketing team to respond to reactive enquiries and maintain the service's reputation by responding clearly and in a timely manner.
5. To explore and test new and emerging methods of communicating with audiences, in line with advice from ECC's Communications and Marketing team, to help expand the reach and impact of our communications with our primary audiences.
6. To make it easy for our customers to provide feed-back and engage with us, and to demonstrate how important their views are to us in helping us shape the services we deliver, by publishing information that reflects clearly how their views have been considered.

Strategy

Our strategy and approach to communications has developed further over the last couple of years, moving away from public service style announcements, and focusing more on our audiences and what we want them to think, feel and do as a result of interacting with our content, i.e. ensuring communications focus on the positive aspects of our activities, rather than leading with negative messages such as warnings of traffic disruptions and inconvenience.

Noticeably, this shift has been implemented on our social media channels to ensure our posts and content focus on the benefits of the works being delivered, such as safer roads or reduced risk of flooding, but also acknowledging that to get these benefits there will be some disruption and we're grateful to residents for their patience.

The change in approach helps create a customer focus and also supports the Cabinet Member's ambition to instil 'pride in place' among residents when highway improvements and repairs are delivered, as well as supporting the Safer, Greener, Healthier travel vision.

Specifically, we will:

- Engage effectively with our customers to understand better what is important to them and use this information to guide service delivery.
- Provide clear and engaging content for our key audiences, which include residents and County Council Members, about the work being delivered by Essex Highways.
- Improve awareness of the positive works/investments Essex Highways is undertaking and that these are being delivered thanks to residents and Members telling the service where there are areas of concern.
- Manage the reputations of Essex Highways and Essex County Council, with the objective to enhance reputations where practicable and achievable.
- Act as a centre of expertise on communications, including supporting teams with engagement with the public and County Council Members, provide advice on messaging and style, and acting as brand guardians of the Essex Highways visual identity.
- Ensure content is accessible where possible, striving for continuous improvement across the team's work and communications strategy so it best reflects the behaviours of key audiences. This will be achieved through a flexible approach that can respond quickly to changes in how residents use social media, through regular

monitoring of audience behaviours and by acting on advice from Essex County Council's Communications and Marketing team.

- Ensure ECC meet their statutory responsibilities answering Highways related FOIs/EIRs and other enquiries within the statutory deadlines.
- Work in collaboration with the ECC Communications and Marketing team, who manage ECC corporate messaging content, distribution, direct media relations and communications budgets.