

# Highways Customer Engagement and Liaison Strategy



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Appendix 1 Council Community Engagement Policy 2018 - 2023

Appendix 2 Council Community Engagement Strategy 2018 - 2023

## 1 Foreword

This document demonstrates our commitment to engaging with our customers and putting our customers at the heart of our decision making.

In an ideal world we would want to deliver a service which meets the needs of all our customers, however against the backdrop of budgetary constraints, it is vital we communicate how and why we deliver our services the way we do.



It is imperative that we provide timely responses and responses that are easy to understand rather than technical jargon which leaves the reader feeling frustrated.

Where we get it wrong, we will reflect, we will learn and we will look to change our ways of working.

Where we have to deliver our highway service in line with statutory legislation requirements, we intend to listen and illustrate our decision process to assist our customers to understand why we did what we did.

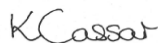
A key challenge is getting our engagement right for everyone. To ensure our engagement is fit for purpose we will continue to review this document annually, listen to our customers through our customer engagement panels and surveys, reflecting on the findings to determine future strategies.



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## **2 Introduction**

2.1 Effective customer engagement is more than purely communicating with people telling them what we are going to do. Customer engagement and liaison refers to any interaction we have with any person who is affected by the services we deliver for them as defined in our Community Engagement Strategy. When delivered well, engagement demonstrates our commitment to making the whole experience of interacting with us as easy as possible and can help to build relationships between ourselves and the communities we serve. It is important that we offer different ways of engaging with each other as the services we deliver are wide ranging. This can range from reporting an issue, raising an enquiry with our Customer Service Centre, responding to a survey we've sent, to taking part in a public consultation about future service developments.

2.2 Like all councils across the UK, Lincolnshire County Council is faced with the challenge of maintaining a safe and reliable road network with less funding available, whilst pressure increases for more funding to be provided to other services we need to deliver to keep people safe. This means that we can no longer maintain our roads the same way we used to when we had more money. As a consequence we now have significant choices to make about how we provide value for money and keep our road network safe and serviceable for our road users.

Our roads are older, more people are using them and severe weather has attacked them more frequently, so maintaining them to a standard has become more of a challenge. At the same time, our customers expect visible defects like potholes, damaged road signs, worn road lines and defective street lights to be fixed quickly to enhance the places where they live and use every day. The expectation of our customers is for us to respond to these on-going challenges immediately continues to rise and we recognise that not always meeting expectations directly impacts upon our reputation. To address this, we have applied an asset management approach which, put simply, means that we prioritise our works on those areas which are the highest risk to our users and programme actions at the best time so that our money goes as far as possible in keeping our roads safe.

2.3 Whilst it will not be possible to go back to the way services were delivered some years ago, we fully recognise that this means we are no longer doing some works which we previously did and that there is more work to do to improve our customers' satisfaction with the services we deliver for them. We are committed to making the improvements needed to address this.

- 2.4 In line with our Community Engagement Policy and Strategy 2018-2023, our Highways Customer Engagement and Liaison Strategy outlines what we will do to engage with our customers so that they are at the heart of everything we do. This will enable us to attain a better understanding of their needs and expectations from us.

### **3 Aim**

- 3.1 Our aim will be to ensure that;

*Our customers are properly engaged in the delivery of the right highway services at the right time in Lincolnshire. This will enable the right decisions to be made and ensure that we are working for a better future for the people of Lincolnshire.*

### **4 Objectives**

- 4.1 In engaging and liaising with our customers we will always try to;
- 4.1.1 Take individual ownership in putting our customers at the heart of the service in everything we do and how we work;
  - 4.1.2 Involve our customers when making significant changes to services. This could be directly with customers or by working with other organisations that represent them, such as supporting organisations, associations, advocates, Town or Parish Councils, networks or forums;
  - 4.1.3 Share our knowledge and expertise with Councillors, supporting organisations and associations, advocates, Town or Parish councils, networks or forums so that our engagement is as good as we can make it;
  - 4.1.4 Work with our corporate engagement colleagues to participate in initiatives that helps communities come together, celebrate achievements and enhance their sense of belonging and value;
  - 4.1.5 Share and/or transfer resources, ideas, funding information and facilities so customers can do things for themselves where appropriate;
  - 4.1.6 Keep customers informed so they know what is happening, how it will affect them and how they can be involved. When customers have taken time to give us feedback we will respond to them in a clear way so that they know what action has been taken, or have an explanation as to why something hasn't or can't happen;

- 4.1.7 Promote and encourage the use of different formats and methods that make sure people are included, regardless of age, ability or ethnicity for example. We'll aim to resolve any queries or complaints as quickly, efficiently and fully as possible.

## **5 Our Customers**

- 5.1 Our customers are anyone that uses the highway, our services, or who are affected by them. That means everyone who either lives, works, visits or travels through Lincolnshire. Engagement needs for each group of customers may be different so, whilst we will be unable to engage in lots of different ways, we will develop an implementation plan to engage in the form most appropriate and effective for each of them

- 5.2 Our customers include, but are not limited to;

- Councillors
- Council colleagues
- District, City and Borough Councils
- Town and Parish Councils
- Associations, e.g. Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils, etc
- Residents
- Businesses e.g. Team Lincolnshire
- Community and voluntary groups and charitable organisations
- Road users
- Central Government Departments, e.g. Department for Transport,, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, etc
- Strategic Agencies, e.g. Environment Agency, Highways England, etc
- Emergency services
- Health services
- Council service providers
- Visitors
- Utility companies

- Interest groups, e.g. disability, cycling, pedestrian, freight, motoring, etc.
- Members of Parliament
- Schools
- Leisure and cultural facilities

5.3 It is likely that in some cases there will be instances of conflict between different customers' needs or expectations. However, through effective engagement, we will be able to identify any differences so that they can be considered and responded to before decisions are made.

5.4 We will continue to provide each of our major projects with a specific communications plan which will identify how we will engage with our different customers during the life of the project.

## **6 Engagement**

6.1 We recognise that the highway network is of significant interest to the public and the media. Weather conditions and damage to the highway network often provide the focus for significant national and local media coverage. This interest will continue with many different customer expectations of how they think the network should function and be maintained.

6.2 Only by engaging with stakeholders can we fully understand their needs and expectations properly. Once undertaken effectively, informed choices and decisions can be made to enable the right forms of highway service to be provided.

6.3 Unfortunately, we will not be able to deliver everything our customers want all of the time. Therefore, whilst engaging with our customers, we will be open and honest about how we make our decisions in the identification, assessment, programming and delivery of our highway services. To do this we need to involve our customers in helping us to make the right choices for their highway service.

6.4 We will strengthen the ways in which we engage with our customers and our implementation plan will explain how we will undertake this within the council's resources available.

## **7 Responding to enquiries**

7.1 Responding to enquiries from our customers is an important aspect in meeting the needs with everyone who uses the Highway. Over the last 25 or so years, the ways in which customers raise enquiry's with us has changed significantly in both form and number.

7.2 Before the internet, mobile phones and social media we would receive enquiries by a posted letter, fixed telephone line or a personal visit to our offices/depots. Now, we receive approximately 100,000 highway customer enquiries a year via our website, by email or telephone.

This equates to approximately 400 enquiries a day that need to be logged, reviewed, actioned and responded to

7.3 We have modernised the ways in which we respond to our customers to meet this increased and change in demand and our Customer Service Centre plays an important role in enabling us to respond as quickly as possible.

7.4 In responding to our customers, we will

- Respond in a way that is clear and approachable and which responds to the enquiry raised
- Advise customers, if it will take a little longer to respond fully, of when we hope to provide a response to them in line with our corporate timescales
- Provide a timescale for when any works will be completed, wherever we can
- Explain the reason when it is not possible to action an enquiry in the way requested, where required

## **8 Liaising and making information available**

8.1 We will make our policies, plans and programmes available for everyone to see so that our customers know what we are doing. We will ensure that these are easy to find and understand on our website or, upon request, be able to provide this to customers.

8.2 This information will include:

- Plans, e.g. winter service, asset management, etc.
- Forward programmes, e.g. schemes, cyclical works like gulley cleaning, grass cutting, surface dressing, etc.
- Major projects, updates and progress



- Licence and permit applications
- Parking permits and enforcement
- Road safety initiatives
- Highway standards and enforcement
- Policies such as the street lighting policy

8.3 We will work closely with our colleagues within the council in development management, countryside services and transport to ensure a joined up response is provided to our customer enquiries and concerns.

## **9 Measuring how we are doing**

9.1 We will collect and use customer satisfaction information to measure how we are doing. In order to obtain a broad spectrum of views from different people, who use the highways throughout Lincolnshire in different ways, we will collate information from:

- National Highways and Transport, NHT, annual public satisfaction survey
- Road users survey
- Bespoke questionnaires designed to inform service improvements

9.2 We will report, quarterly, on all complaints; using this data to identify areas of dissatisfaction and where improvements can be made. We will report biannually on compliments in order to monitor what we are doing well and maintain these standards.

9.3 Monitor any emerging trends in our complaints and compliments in order to take immediate action, where appropriate.

9.4 We will work closely with our Customer Relations Team in order to achieve the earliest possible resolution for complaints.

9.5 We will continue to monitor and measure the quality and timeliness of our customer enquiry responses to ensure that they meet the standards that are expected.

9.6 In partnership with the corporate communications team we will continue to provide communication plans for our major projects', listen to feedback and review the information shared where appropriate.

- 9.7 We will engage with the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils, LALC and Team Lincolnshire to establish a Highways' Customer Panel to review the customer satisfaction results annually and to help prepare an action plan to improve our highway services and address any areas of dissatisfaction.
- 9.8 The Highways' Customer Panel will be chosen by LALC / Team Lincolnshire and consist of a number of different Town and Parish Council representatives as well as businesses from across Lincolnshire.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - [Engagement-Policy-2018-2023](#)

Appendix 2 - [Engagement-Strategy-2018-2023](#)