

Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Communications Plan & Engagement Guidelines

February 2017

In order to become a band 3 authority Southend on Sea Borough Council needs to establish high quality communications with residents on highways and asset management activity.

Question 14 in the assessment criteria states that the council should:

- Recognise the need to make highway maintenance policies, standards and service levels publicly available
- Ensure that the role of the highway authority is explained and highway maintenance policies, standards and service levels are easily accessible and understandable to members of the public, e.g. includes details of policies and standards on the authority's website.
- Provide regular service updates on the authority's website, and/or via social media e.g. updates on winter service operations via Twitter.

In addition:

- A pro-active approach is taken to informing customers, and updating them on the authority's performance, e.g. feedback on service delivery performance is accessible on the authority's website.
- Key details about programmes of work, as well as more detailed information about longer-term projects, is published, e.g. on the Council's website.

Questions 12 and 13 refer to community feedback, how this is gathered and how it influences decision making and how the impact of community feedback is communicated back to the community. This should be considered alongside the Council's existing [consultation and engagement toolkit](#) and [consultation portal](#) via the Council's website.

The Audience

Asset Management needs to disseminate information as broadly and as simply as possible to the public at large in order to allow as many residents as possible to hear and understand the messages.

Communication Channels

In order to cover the whole range of services covered by the asset management programme Southend on Sea Borough Council Asset Management will need to communicate across a wide range of existing communications channels.

Asset Management can maximize coverage by disseminating messages across a wide range of channels and by interacting between channels e.g. re-tweeting or sharing information.

Generic/ all messages	Access to channels
Southend on Sea Borough Council website Southend on Sea Borough Council Facebook Southend on Sea Borough Council Twitter Southend Borough Council Highways Twitter/website	Media and Comms team/Place Business Support Media and Comms team Media and Comms team Place Business Support

Highways Southend Borough Council Highways Twitter	Place Business Support
Transport and Major Projects Better Southend website and twitter Cycle Southend website, twitter and Facebook Ideas in Motion website, twitter and Facebook	Place Business Support Place Business Support Sustainable Transport Team Sustainable Transport Team
Cultural assets The Forum Southend Twitter Southend Museums Twitter Southend Theatres Twitter Visit Southend Twitter and Facebook	TBC TBC TBC Southend BID Manager
Community safety and safety perception Southend Community Safety Partnership Twitter and website	TBC

The primary channel for Asset Management communications will be Better Southend but each message should be considered and the most appropriate primary communication channel identified. E.G Messages specifically about Highways improvements may be better promoted initially through SBCHighways; messages about improvements to cycle parking may be best promoted through Cycle Southend or Ideas in Motion; improvements to the Pier may be best promoted through Visit Southend.

The Presence of the Customer

The pronouns we choose in communications will determine the relationship created between the Council and residents. To explore how Southend Council currently positions the customer we have looked at Better Southend, Ideas in Motion and SBC social media feeds.

Messages tend to avoid any positioning at all of the customer or the Council. There is no relationship alluded to and no pronouns are used in the messaging. This keeps messages impersonal and direct. It can create a sense of distance and be useful when referring to something unpleasant or awkward in nature.

Better Southend does not generally use **we** in communications. Using **we** puts the messenger at the centre of the message and is about something **we** are doing.

E.g. We will be closing a lane on the A127 inbound between 9pm and midnight tonight.

Avoiding **we** maintains distance and discourages assignment of blame. However, in the context of Asset Management avoiding **we** means the Council will struggle to benefit from the impact of the positive messages. In terms of Asset Management it is imperative that the messages are clearly linked to the Council and the successes promoted are identified as the Council's successes.

Ideas in Motion

Putting the customer at the centre of the messaging is the most engaging and inclusive approach. It encourages the reader to take personal responsibility and is generally used when we want to encourage someone to act. This approach is favoured by Ideas in Motion as a behaviour change campaign.

Asset Management wants to disseminate information and whilst remaining positive does not seek to engage the public in any activity. A combination of the approaches from Better Southend and Ideas in Motion would suit Asset Management.

We Are Southend

The Council's social media feeds use the pronoun **we** in the title of the feeds. This creates an immediate and strong message that the social media feed is reliable and responsible. The feeds maintain that sense of ownership and responsibility by using words such as our and we throughout their messages and also maintain a friendly tone of voice; e.g.

*It's cold outside! **We'll** be showering the borough with grit from 6pm to keep you all safe tonight*

And

***Our** Civic Choir in festive voice at the annual **#Christmas** Fayre in Civic Centre.*

Asset Management Tone Of Voice

Wherever possible AM communications will highlight a success or a positive change in assets. AM communications will always carry a hashtag that labels them as asset management - **#assetmanagementsbc**

Asset Management communications are:

- Positive
- Informative
- Engaging

Asset Management communications are NOT:

- Negative or critical
- Vague
- Overtly technical

Communications should use accessible language, avoid jargon and present a positive and aspirational view of the Council and the assets it manages.

Technical Language

Whilst some technical terms may be necessary wherever possible use everyday language that the audience will understand. Using simple language that avoids jargon or unnecessary technical speak will increase accessibility and inspire a sense of trust and intimacy with the audience.

Images

Where appropriate before and after images should be used to demonstrate successes.

E.g. Before and after photos of a filled pothole.



Images should only be used to demonstrate a change or a success. Images should not be used to simply set the scene. Humorous images or memes should not be used for asset management communications.

Tone of Voice Characteristics

The following characteristics should be applied to both written and verbal communications.

Voice Characteristic	Description	Do	Don't
Positive	We are positive about the things we are achieving and the changes we are making.	Be celebratory and focus on achievements. <i>E.g. SBC Highways engineers have made great improvements to Highways, speeding up journey times.</i>	Caveat achievements or focus on what hasn't been achieved. <i>E.g. We've still got lots to do to improve local highways and we hope we get the funding to do it.</i>

<p>Can Do (secondary characteristic of Positive)</p>	<p>We celebrate what we can achieve and focus on what we can do.</p>	<p>Be ambitious and respond to queries with what we can do.</p> <p><i>E.g. Thanks so much for getting in touch about public planting in Southend. Our Parks teams have recently made improvements</i></p>	<p>Be negative, make excuses or focus on the reasons why something has not happened.</p> <p><i>E.g. I am sorry you are unhappy with the state of public planting in Southend. We've been able to do some</i></p>
		<p><i>to the planting in Victoria Gateway and the seafront. The Council is exploring how we can improve other areas in the near future.</i></p>	<p><i>areas but we can't do everywhere with the limited funding have.</i></p>
<p>Informative</p>	<p>We tell you what we have done and why it is important.</p>	<p>List and highlight specific achievements and the reasons why we have done it.</p> <p><i>E.g. In November 2016 SBC highways teams filled 20 potholes in Southend roads making the roads safer for drivers and pedestrians.</i></p>	<p>Make vague references to none specific activity.</p> <p><i>E.g. Our highways teams have been working to make roads safer.</i></p>

Engaging	We use accessible language and build a respectful and trustworthy relationship with the public.	Be specific or use pronouns that encourage people to recognise that the Council is responsible for what is being discussed. <i>E.g. In March 2015 SBC officers removed 12 miles of graffiti from public spaces.</i>	Be negative, vague or suggest achievements are down to someone other than the Council <i>e.g. In March 2015 12 miles of graffiti was found in Southend</i> or; <i>In March 2015 12 miles of graffiti was removed.</i>
Accessible (secondary characteristic of Engaging)	We avoid being too technical and we use language that	Use plain English and where necessary	Use technical language that, no matter how specific, does
	most people can understand.	explain terminology used. <i>E.g. As part of the Highways improvements SBC officers have widened the road.</i>	little to enlighten the ordinary reader. <i>E.g. As part of the Highways improvements SBC officers have realigned the nearside radii to incorporate an extension on the nearside carriageway lane.</i>

Implementation – To Be Established

- Who is responsible for doing this?
- Who will monitor it?
- Who will enforce it?