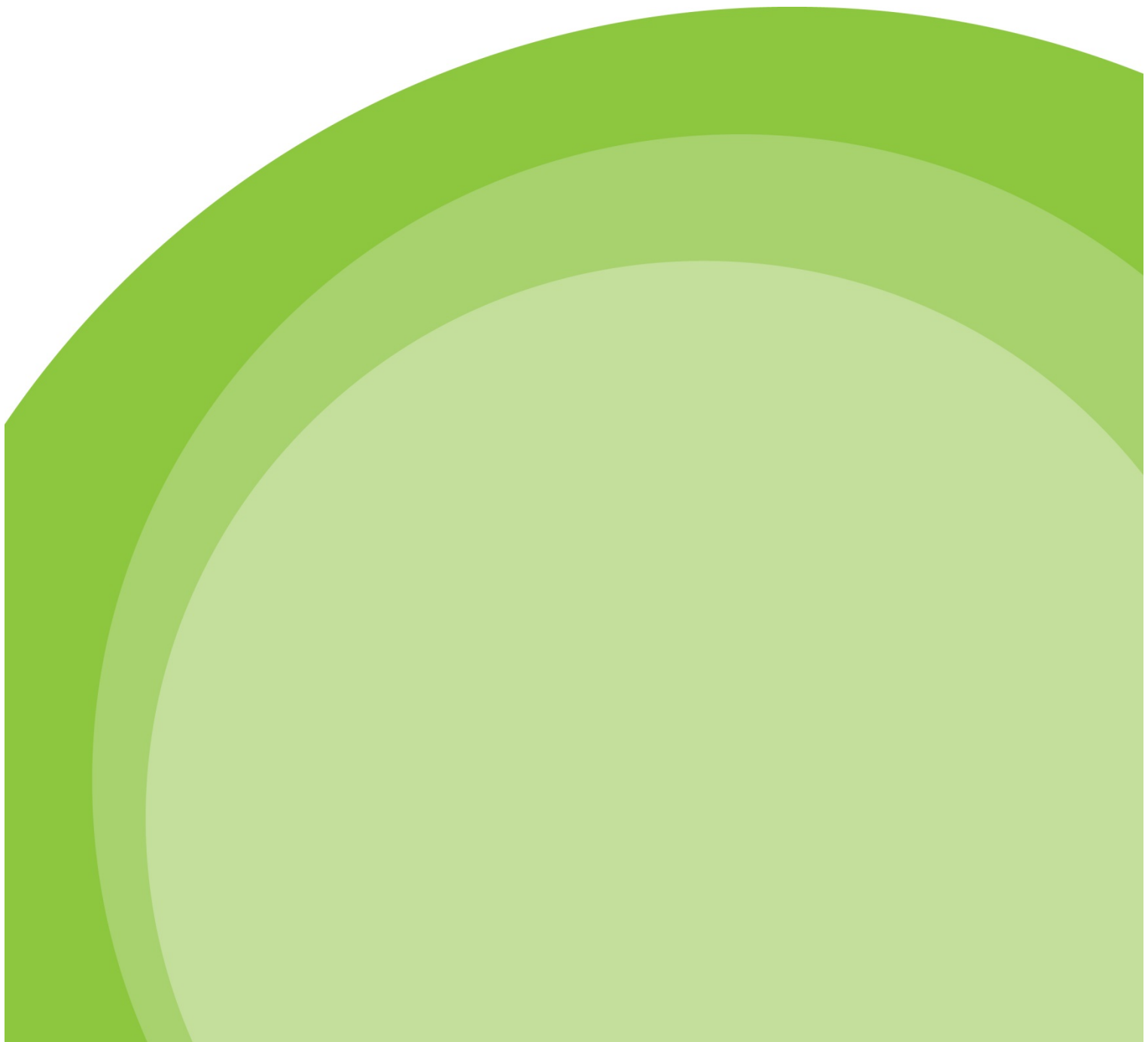




Appendix A

Central Bedfordshire Highways

Communications and Consultation Strategy



Version	Revision Date	Author
Draft	25/05/2018	JB
Draft	03/07/2018	NS (inc. comments from CH)

Introduction

This communications and consultation strategy will set out how we will communicate with our stakeholders and how they can help us to shape our service through consultation and engagement opportunities.

The communications and consultation strategy supports our Central Bedfordshire Highways Asset Management Plan which in turn sets out how we are supporting the overall vision of the council.

Our highways network is the most valuable and visible community asset that Central Bedfordshire Council is responsible for. The network is used every day by most of the council's residents for walking, cycling, and of course travelling by car, bus or taxi. The Highways network and effective management of it is essential to the economic, social and environmental well-being of all members of the community.

Our highways team is responsible for maintaining and keeping over 1400km of roads safe. This includes looking after the road surface itself, but also the footways, over 220 bridges and structures, over 23,000 streetlights, pedestrian crossings, drainage, traffic lights and signs along the road network. The Highways team also manage a wide range of improvement schemes including speed limits, traffic calming measures and parking services. Other public rights of way, such as footpaths and bridleways are also looked after by the highways service.

Other responsibilities of the service include managing third-party roadworks and closures on the highway, winter salting operations, and public road safety campaigns.

Residents, businesses or organisations that can be affected by the decision or policies of Central Bedfordshire Highways Team are all stakeholders. Effective engagement with stakeholders is key to mutual understanding, meeting legal obligations, managing expectations and therefore improving the satisfaction of the highways service.

The National Highways and Transport Survey showed that the condition of our highways network is one of the biggest issues local people are concerned about. This was confirmed in our 2016 residents' survey where 28% of CBC residents said that roads and pavements were in need of repair. This figure was the highest out of all council services which were in need of improvement.

The surveys also show that the asset management approach to managing and maintaining the highway needs to be clearly understood. So that is why, as set out in this document, we are committed to communicate and engage with our stakeholders keeping them informed about how we are managing the condition of our highways network.

This strategy sets out how we:

- Communicate our approach to highways asset management.

- Open up a two-way communication with our stakeholders.
- Consult with residents and other stakeholders
- Ensure that customers and stakeholders are kept informed about highways maintenance.
- Manage and respond to customer feedback, including complaints.

Communications and Consultation Objectives

The overall aim of this strategy is to ensure that stakeholders know what works we are doing, where we are investing our money and how they can have their say. To successfully do this, we have identified the following communications and consultation objectives.

- To give residents and stakeholders the opportunity to have their say and help shape our service and projects.
- To work in an open and collaborative way with our partners to ensure works are carried out on time and to a high standard.
- To ensure stakeholders have an understanding of the duties and constraints on our service, including how we focus resources.
- To raise awareness of the asset management approach of our service and outlining how, why and where we spend money.
- To communicate issues relating to significant schemes, which will have an impact on communities, in a timely way that is easy to understand
- Use regular communication to publicise works programmes and signpost to these.
- To regularly communicate key messages and positive stories to demonstrate the value of the highway to the public.
- To communicate the round-the-clock work our team does especially during the winter months
- To use multiple communication channels to reach target audiences with relevant messages.
- For residents to stay up to date with local highways information

Highways Key Messages

Below are some of our **key messages** which we will communicate regularly through our different channels to stakeholders.

- As the highways authority we have a statutory duty to maintain, operate and improve the highway network.
- We are focused on safety, with the safety of the public, stakeholders and our own staff central to all the work we do.
- We are focused on running a serviceable and sustainable highway network.

- Highways are one of the council's most valuable assets and are vital to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.
- The highways team is responsible for keeping over 1400km of roads safe. We are not the only ones working on the highways – utility companies have to make repairs to their pipes and cables and these are often under our roads and pavements.

As well as our key messages, it is important for us to have specific **highways asset management messages** so stakeholders can understand how we prioritise our works.

- Asset management helps promote a more business-like approach to highways maintenance. It makes better use of limited resources and delivers efficient and effective highways maintenance.
- It takes a long term view of how the highway network can be managed, focusing on outcomes by ensuring that funds are spent on activities that prevent expensive short term fixes.
- Research shows that reactive repairs are much more expensive than preventative treatments.
- We respond to reports according to risk. This approach is expanded upon and explained so customers have a greater understanding of this.
- Emergency faults are made safe as soon as possible.
- We work hard to ensure that maintenance and improvements to our roads, pavements, structures and streetlights are carried out as part of a carefully planned programme of works.

Central Bedfordshire Council Highways Stakeholders

Stakeholders are considered during the planning of works, consultation on works and during the construction. The table below shows our stakeholders and the most appropriate means of communication.

Stakeholder group	Includes	Communication Method
CBC Executive Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader of the council • Deputy Leader of the council • Chairman of the council • Portfolio holder and deputies for Community Services • MP's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Face-face meetings • Council meetings (traffic management meetings) • Reports via the online system • Consultations
CBC Ward Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All other CBC Councillors including leader of the opposition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Face-face meetings • Council meetings (traffic management meetings) • Reports via the online system • Consultations
The Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All CBC residents who use highway services • All visitors to the area who use the highway services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports via the online system • Consultations
Town and Parish Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Town and Parish Councillors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership meetings • Reports via the online system • Consultations
Ringways Jacobs staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ringway Jacobs staff working in partnership with CBC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Telephone • Meetings
Other CBC staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBC Highways • All other CBC staff using road/highways services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Telephone
Neighbouring authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luton Borough Council • Bedford Borough Council • Hertfordshire Council • MK Council • Cambridge Council • Buckingham County Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Telephone • Reports via the online system • Consultations
Emergency services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Ambulance • Fire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Telephone
Utility Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas • Electric 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email to streetworks team

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telecoms • Water 	
Local Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses in Central Bedfordshire • Chamber of commerce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports via the online system • Consultations
Schools and colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All schools and colleges in Central Bedfordshire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Telephone • Reports via the online system • Consultations
Transport Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus companies • Railway companies • Taxi firms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Telephone • Consultations

Communication channels

We use different channels to enable us to communicate with our stakeholders. We understand that people prefer to get their information in different ways; some prefer letters and emails whilst there are people who like to get their information on social media and websites.

Below are the channels that we use to communicate through.

Channel	Includes
<p>Council Publications</p> <p>We have a number of publications we use to reach different stakeholders including residents, members and council staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways Quarterly Newsletter (residents and members) • Highways Herald (staff) • Staff Central (staff) • Members Information Bulletin (members) • Info Central (residents)
<p>Website</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report it System • Highways webpages • Members Portal
<p>Email alerts</p> <p>We have different topics on our email communication system to help us reach different audiences. The box to the right shows how many followers each topic has. These topics were decided by customers in our 2015 email communications survey.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways Updates (8,000 subscribers) • Roadworks and road closures (12,000) • Road Safety News (6,000) • A421 (5,000) • Winter Weather (22,000)
<p>Print Media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dunstable Gazette • Luton on Sunday

<p>There are lots of publications in Central Bedfordshire which provide a great platform to reach our residents and other key stakeholders. Some of these publications have an online edition of the paper too.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bedford Times and Citizen ● Biggleswade Chronicle ● Biggleswade Comet ● The Comet ● Leighton Buzzard Observer ● The Villager ● MK Times and Citizen
<p>Social Media</p> <p>Social Media provides us with a good platform to reach a different audience in real time. We have a specific Highways Twitter but also use the council's main channels. We also set up project specific accounts for major works.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Twitter (@CBC_Highways 500 followers) ● Twitter (@LetsTalkCentral 10k followers) ● Facebook (LetsTalkCentral 6k followers) ● Facebook (Woodside Link 2k followers) ● Instagram (@CentralBeds 500 followers) ● YouTube (Lets Talk Central 200 followers) ● Snapchat (Lets Talk Central 50 followers)
<p>Community/Parish Magazines</p> <p>It's important to have a voice in the community so we often send news and information to smaller town and parish council magazines. This provides a great platform to reach our older rural residents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We have access to over 100 local community publications
<p>Radio Media</p> <p>Radio channels are the voice of the community so it's important we have a good relationship with them to respond to questions as well as providing our own news.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BBC Three Counties ● Heart FM ● Biggles FM ● MK FM ● BOB FM
<p>Broadcast Media</p> <p>For major projects and issues TV broadcast media can be important as it can help to get the message out to a wider audience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BBC Look East ● ITV East Anglia
<p>Other methods of communication</p> <p>These are the other main ways we communicate with our stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Email ● Phone ● Town and Parish Council meetings ● Face-to-face meetings ● Public Council Meetings

Two-way communication and consultation

Our stakeholders play an important role in helping to shape our service; therefore, it is important to open and maintain a two-way communication.

Communication and consultation with Councillors, residents, businesses and other organisations is important to us as it allows us to understand and address key issues to consider in our programme of works. The comments from these groups can influence when we carry out works, for example whether we carry out work in the day or night, or during school holidays as well as specific local issues that can be addressed and add value to the development and delivery of schemes.

Through our Twitter account, @CBC_Highways, we constantly keep the public updated on road closures and travel condition across the transport network. We actively respond to comments on this channel too, making it an effective way to have two way communications. Although the account is relatively new we have over 600 followers and have sent more than 2,500 tweets in the past year.

We also use our email alerts with over 18,000 subscribers, to keep residents up to date with major road schemes, news stories, consultations and more.

In addition, we use more traditional methods to communicate and consult with our stakeholders such as , letter drops, phone calls and placing information on notice boards.

In the next part of this strategy we will outline how communications and consultation differ from day-to-day work, cyclical work, extreme weather and major works. This helps us ensure that timely communication is planned before, during and after the works.

Day-to-day communication

Routine inspections of the highway are carried out daily which includes responding to enquiries and reports through the online system and routine observation.

How we communicate	How stakeholders can have their say
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highways officers talk to councillors, residents and other stakeholders daily.• Our Area Teams are at the forefront of the service following up enquiries, carrying out investigative work and logging work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholders can contact the service by reporting issues online. These online reports go straight to the area team meaning inspections are carried out quicker.

<p>which is needed. Our Area Teams will often communicate with Councillors, Town and Parish Councillors and residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Liaison Team will communicate daily with customers and other stakeholders providing information about the service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If stakeholders are unable to report issue online the can contact us via email or phone. • All key stakeholders are given the chance to have their say on road closure notices for any work on the highway.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Customer Contact Centre will advise customers at the outset what the duration for inspecting and responding to reports on the highway network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report it portal on the Central Bedfordshire Council website is available 24/7 for customers to report issues to the highways team. • There is also the option for customers to provide feedback to the service through the website

Minor works communication and consultation

For some works such as installing a new pedestrian crossing, resurfacing footways and constructing a new cycleway we may need to communicate and consult with more stakeholders than we do on a day-to-day basis.

How we communicate and consult	How stakeholders can have their say
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We inform stakeholders before, during and after minor works by email, letter, on the phone or by face-to-face meetings. • To get the view from the community we liaise with local Councillors and Town and Parish Councils about new schemes or significant changes to something already on the highways. • Advance warning signs inform drivers of the imminent work and notifications are sent out on our Highways Twitter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of consultation varies from scheme to scheme. We adopt a proportionate approach, the more controversial schemes will provide more opportunity for local residents to have their say. • When maintenance work is due to take place on the highways, key stakeholders are notified and letters are posted to residents of houses in the nearby area.

Statutory Consultation

For highways improvement schemes where the council intends to implement vertical traffic calming; Traffic Regulation Orders (restricting access, waiting or parking); or to alter the speed limit under the Highways Act 1980 the council has a statutory duty to communicate and consult specific stakeholders.

These statutory consultees include: The Police and other emergency services; public transport operators, Haulage and freight operator associations, Town/Parish Councils, local Ward Members and the Executive Member for Community Services.

Although not a requirement under the Highways Act, in order to meet other statutory requirements such as the Public Sector Equality Duty, letters are sent to households that are directly adjacent to or potentially impacted by the proposed improvements.

The consultation notices are published on the council website at <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council/public-statutory/notices.aspx>. In addition, where possible improvement notices are often communicated using parish magazines, websites and noticeboards.

The period for consultation is not less than 21 days. At the discretion of the council this is often extended during holiday periods.

It is a requirement that the notices of the consultation are published in a newspaper circulating in the area in which the highway concerned is situated. Also, that notices are placed at appropriate points on that highway.

Our usual procedure for Statutory Consultation includes:	There are a variety of ways our stakeholders can have their say including:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email – we email our statutory consultees listed above.• Public Notices – we display the consultation available for the public in locations on the highway adjacent to the proposed improvements.• Website – we display statutory consultations the Central Bedfordshire Council website• Newspaper Adverts – We advertise notices in all local newspapers• Letters to households in immediate vicinity as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responses to letters – people have the option of responding by letter• Public meetings – people can register to speak at the Traffic Management Meeting to have their objections• Emails – stakeholders can email their thoughts and responses to the consultation

Major Scheme Communication and Consultation

New road construction or major alteration such as the construction of the Woodside Link will generate more communication and consultation than minor works.

How we communicate and consult	How stakeholder can have their say
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resources are dedicated to keeping residents, drivers, businesses and other stakeholders informed about major highways schemes. Any major project will have its own communications plan and structure to ensure stakeholders are kept up to date.• Communication for major schemes will be led by the project team with the communications support through a variety of channels including phone, email, online, face-to-face and traditional media. Customer insight data is used wherever possible to find the best channel to contact the affected community.• Major maintenance schemes are not usually subject to public consultation, although we do provide early warnings to the community and liaise with Councillors and Town and Parish Councils as well as emergency services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New road constructions or essential maintenance will include a 12 week consultation period with all stakeholders. Stakeholders can respond to this consultation.• Residents have an opportunity to contribute to the maintenance programme by reporting any concerns about the highway online.• Residents can also influence the approach to maintenance that the Council has adopted. They can register their feedback about policy decisions through their local councillor as their elected representative.• For major schemes, we will set up a dedicated mail box for customers to have their say.

Cyclical works

Cyclical works include gully emptying, surface dressing seasonal works such as cutting back vegetation and pruning trees, patching work and winter weather maintenance. Cyclical works are of interest to customers so warrant a great deal of communication.

How we communicate	How stakeholder can have their say
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These cyclical works will have their own communications plan which will be carried out by the highways communications team. The works are communicated by email, social media, online and traditional media. • We liaise closely with local Councillors and Town and Parish Councils before, during and after our cyclical works. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report via online Highways Portal • Residents can also have their say on these by emailing us, contacting us on social media or by contacting their local councillor.

Permit Scheme – coordinating utility works

Central Bedfordshire Highways are responsible for coordinating and monitoring around 6,500 schemes undertaken by other parties each year on our network.

Companies have the right to carry out work on our network to maintain utility supplies such as water, gas, electricity and telecoms services. As the highways authority we have a duty to facilitate these work.

How we communicate daily	How stakeholder can have their say
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuing notices about the planned works to stakeholders and placing advertisement of some works in the local papers, on social media and our website. • Advance warning signs • We send out regular email alerts to people who have subscribed for road closure updates • We publish information on the national website roadworks.org to let people know that there will be road closures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We write to residents, businesses and organisation in the affected area so resident can contact us by email or phone to raise any concerns.

Emergency Works

There are times when emergency works are needed. They may need to take place because of a traffic collision or during times of severe weather or if there is an issue with utilities on our roads.

How we communicate daily	How stakeholder can have their say
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Issuing notices advising of the emergency works to stakeholders via our streetworks team• Updates on our online channels• We publish information on the national website roadworks.org to let people know that there will be road closures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholders can report emergencies such as fallen trees and flooding at any time by calling our emergency number 0300 300 8049

Internal Communications

It's important to keep our internal staff and stakeholders up-to-date with the latest news within the Highways Service so we ensure that we speak to them regularly through a variety of channels.

How we communicate with internal staff	How internal stakeholders can have their say
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highways Herald• Away Days• Bulletins• Staff Central• Highways quarterly newsletter• All staff emails• Notice Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email• Staff Survey• Talking to their line-managers• Away Days• Workshops

Customer Feedback and Complaints

As a front line and customer focused service, the quality of our contact and communication with the residents of Central Bedfordshire is important.

The online Highways Reporting Portal has been designed to offer a high standard of customer service. It allows residents to interact with the Council conveniently, simply and quickly, at a time that is most convenient. It is the most efficient way of reporting an issue. It plays a big part in setting realistic expectation. Residents can also contact us by letter.

However, there are occasions when customers are unhappy with the service they have received and the best way to resolve that is by investigating their complaints.

Definition of a complaint

A complaint is... *“an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the council or their staff affecting an individual customer or group of customers”.*

A report is not a complaint. If a resident tells us about a pothole, we should respond to the pothole and communicate effectively with the customer. If we fail to respond according to our policy standards, or fail to tell the customer what we are doing, they are entitled to make a complaint and have it investigated.

Who can complain?

Anyone receiving or seeking a service from the council or anyone acting for those unable to complain personally can make a complaint. A representative can complain on behalf of somebody.

Making a complaint

A complaint can be made to any elected member or member of staff, verbally or in writing. When a person makes a complaint they should be sent details of the complaints procedure, including the role of Customer Relations team. The complaint should be registered with the Customer Relations team and a copy of correspondence sent to them. Councillors should be kept informed of the progress of any complaint that affects them or that was referred by them.

Withdrawing a complaint

A complaint can be withdrawn verbally or in writing at any time by the complainant or representative. The withdrawal will be acknowledged in writing. If at any time a complainant decides not to pursue a complaint further the service must decide if the matter has been satisfactorily concluded.

The Complaint Procedure

The complaints procedure has three stages:

- **Stage 1 – local resolution**
- **Stage 2 – Service Investigation**
- **Stage 3 – Independent Investigation**

The council may decide to combine stages to give the view of a senior officer without unnecessary delay. They may decide not to escalate through the stages of the complaints procedure where the complaints are fully upheld or the issues are no longer in dispute. If the complainant is dissatisfied purely because of the proposed remedy (and the complaint has been upheld) the remedy will be reviewed by the investigator's line manager. Any decision not to escalate the decision will be put into writing with the reasons why.

Stage 1 – local resolution

The council will take all reasonable steps to resolve the complaint at Stage 1. **The timescales for stage 1 responses are five working days from the receipt of the complaint.** Where this is not possible the complainant should be kept updated regularly.

Complainants will be notified in writing of the outcome of the authority's consideration of the complaint; whether the complaint has been upheld or not; the reasons why and the complainants right to further investigation where appropriate.

Stage 2 – Service Investigation

Complaints will process to stage 2:

- At the complainants request where the complaint has not been resolved at stage 1 OR
- The complainant and council are in agreement that the complaint should not be considered at stage 1.

The timescales for stage 2 complaints are 15 working days after the date on which the record of the complaint was agreed. If the council are unable to meet the timescale the complainant will be informed of the reason for delay and a date they can expect a full response.

Complainants will be notified in writing of the outcome of the stage 2 consideration of the complaint; whether the complaint has been upheld or not; the reasons why and the complaints right to independent investigation.

Stage 3 – Independent Investigation

The complaint will be investigated by a senior officer or manager outside of line management of the service complained about.

The investigator will draw up a statement of the complaint for agreement by the complainant. The statement must be signed by the complainant or their representative.

The timescale for responding to Stage 3 complaints is 15 working days after the date on which the record of the complaint was agreed. If the Council cannot meet the timescale the complainant will be informed of the reason for delay and a date when they can expect a full response.

Complainants will be informed of their right to refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied with the response to the stage 3 complaint.

For more information about the complaints procedure please visit our [website](#).

Evaluation

Delivery of the objectives in this strategy will be regularly evaluated in the following ways:

- Annual NHT satisfaction survey results
- Monthly monitoring of all media channels – what we have communicated and the engagement generated.
- Site-specific and scheme-specific feedback from councillors and residents – making sure we learn from successful and unsuccessful communication
- Assessment of customer feedback
- Residents survey feedback conducted in every two years
- Staff cultural survey



**Central
Bedfordshire**

A great place to live and work

Contact us...

by telephone: 0300 300 8000

by email: customer.services@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

on the web: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Write to Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House,
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