

Essex County Council

Summary Communications Strategy 2023-24



Essex Highways: Summary communications strategy

This strategy describes the approach Essex Highways uses to inform, alert and engage with the wider public, highways users and customers and other key partners including County Members, local residents, supply chain partners and employees, as we develop, improve and maintain the Essex highways network. This strategy also supports the associated annual Highways Maintenance Incentive Fund submission from Essex County Council (ECC).

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

The scope of this strategy covers proposed key business as usual activities, new key projects & priorities and the outputs associated with continued improvement and delivery of the service.

Aims

The strategy seeks to achieve five main aims:

1. Support Essex County Council in delivery of 'Everyone's Essex – our plan for levelling up the county: 2021-2025'
 - Economy – strong, inclusive & sustainable economy
 - Environment – high quality environment
 - Health – health, wellbeing & independence for all ages
 - Family – a good place for children and families to grow

This includes supporting the 'Safer, Greener and Healthier Travel' vision which reflects our statutory obligations under the Environment Act 2021 as well as the the recommendations of the Essex Climate Action Commission to achieve net zero by 2050, through:

- reducing carbon
 - increasing Green Infrastructure
 - supporting active travel and sustainable transport
 - promoting biodiversity net gain
 - aiding local nature recovery
 - improving our use and management of water
2. Provide consultation opportunities on relevant issues by enabling people to provide feed-back on the highways service, and to demonstrate how this feed-back is taken into account
 3. Provide timely, clear, helpful and relevant information to the public, using digital channels to support ECC's digital strategy
 4. Deliver quality communications in recognisable, cost-effective, efficient ways
 5. We will also help to deliver wider ECC efficiencies, mainly by encouraging individuals and organisations to self-serve through the "Tell us Online – tell us about a new highway maintenance issue" and "Track it – track an existing enquiry

or check to see if we already know about an issue” reporting facilities, as well as providing them access to helpful information that minimises follow-up calls.

Specifically, we will:

- Provide understandable highways-related factual information to the public and other interested parties including County Members. This will include information on our operations, constraints, performance, schemes planned or in progress, and our successes, as well as how we use customer feed-back in our decision making
- Improve awareness of the positive works/investments we are undertaking on behalf of Essex County Council. This will include promoting understanding as to the benefits and reasons behind decisions, such as our collection of asset condition data and its use to prioritise works
- Manage expectations and perceptions
- Work to protect, defend and enhance the reputations of Essex County Council and its highways partners, as expressed through the identity of the ‘Essex Highways’ brand
- Act as the brand guardians of the Essex Highways visual identity
- Provide communications in accessible ways, across a range of media but with a bias towards attractive, user-friendly digital channels, supporting ECC’s desire to channel-shift and provide more accessible information
- Help ECC meet their statutory responsibilities answering Highways related FOIs/EIRs and other enquiries within the statutory deadlines
- Work in collaboration with the ECC corporate communications team, who control overall ECC corporate messaging content, distribution, direct media relations and communications budgets
- Monitor the effectiveness of the communications strategy through an annual review process in order to sustain a culture of continuous improvement

