

Communications Plan

Project name:	Investing in Your Roads	Client:	CET
Comms Manager:	Warwick Smith (interim)	Client officers:	Rupert Clubb and Karl Taylor

Overview

Brief summary of project	Potential announcement of extra investment in highways, to fund doubling of summer road patching programme.
---------------------------------	---

Plan

OBJECTIVE: What are we trying to achieve?	<p>To demonstrate that the condition of roads is a top priority for ESCC. (Though within a very tight spending programme)</p> <p>To increase the visibility of the work done by ESH and raise understanding of it (as well as the limitations of what is possible).</p>
AUDIENCE: who are we trying to reach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All residents – but especially those with activity in their area • Local members • ESH and ESCC staff • Local media
KEY MESSAGES: What do we want to say?	<p>We're doubling the amount of patching work on East Sussex's roads this summer to repair and protect them.</p> <p>This is part of a £20m extra investment in our highways over three years. <i>[For context: £1m now, £10.7m in 23/24 and £8.9m in 22/23. Total £20.6m.]</i> Work to be carried out this year and next includes drainage and surface dressing as well as patching.</p> <p>This in on top of annual spending on pothole repairs (£2.5m each year).</p> <p>ESCC is making sustained and repeated extra investment in its highways.</p> <p>This summer's patching work not only fixes places where roads are in the poorest condition but also better protects them against future weather damage. An extra £1m will be spent on this work and will double the amount of road to be patched.</p> <p>Cabinet decided to inject the extra funds into patching work in recognition of the difficulty that road damage causes people as they travel around East Sussex. Members took this decision even though they recognise the overall very tough spending decision the council is having to make. It signals the importance of roads to the county's connectivity and economy.</p> <p>The additional funding comes from the council's capital budget for one-off</p>

	<p>projects and so does not remove money from annual spending on other services.</p> <p>Roads across Britain have deteriorated faster than expected in recent years because of extreme weather. We know how frustrating this can be as you travel.</p> <p>But we must be honest. We know the extra investment cannot restore all our roads to ideal condition. That cost more than £300 million, about six times the total funding available (including some government grants).</p> <p>This is impossible because ESCC has to spend the vast majority of our very limited resources to help adults and children who need particular care or support, for example because they are frail and elderly, at risk of abuse or neglect or have particular disabilities or educational needs.</p> <p>To put it starkly, we could only provide perfect roads by stopping care for your family, friends, children and neighbours who need it most. And this care is a legal obligation anyway.</p> <p>Even so, we are still able to improve many roads with our investment.</p> <p>Our partners Balfour Beatty, who operate East Sussex Highways are adding new ideas, techniques and technology to hit high standards of work on your highways.</p> <p>Residents can play their part by quickly and easily reporting highways issues directly to ESH: Report a Problem – live.eastsussexhighways.com</p>
<p>RISKS: What are we doing to mitigate them</p>	<p>Public scepticism (<i>stoked by one-off faults, no immediate repairs in their nearest streets, emerging of seasonal damage, accusations that we’re trying to ‘spin’ the situation.</i>)</p> <p>Clarity and honesty in our messaging and tone. We must acknowledge the reality that people experience on the highways.</p> <p>We will often take a hyper-local approach to communication so that we talk to communities about what is going on in their area and highlight where patching improvements are due. A county-wide approach can inflame things for people without a fix on their street.</p> <p>Maintain a planned calendar of continuous activity so that we manage expectation and get ahead of (or respond quickly) to fresh issues.</p> <p>Improve the customer journey for reporting issues online.</p>
<p>OUTCOME: What do we want to change?</p>	<p>Reduce the proportion of residents who have a generally negative perception of our performance on roads.</p> <p>Increase understanding of the priority the administration attaches to roads.</p> <p>Help increase the number of issues that are reported directly to ESH.</p>

MEASUREMENTS: How will we know?	<p>Sentiment on social media.</p> <p>Media coverage</p> <p>An improved performance in the NHT public satisfaction survey and/or scores which perform more strongly this year than our neighbours.</p> <p>Increase in online fault reporting to ESH.</p>
RESEARCH/INSIGHT: What do we know that might influence any of the above?	<p>The NHT survey shows perception of our performance including relative to other authorities.</p> <p>We have surveyed members to test their preferences about getting information and reporting.</p> <p>We can draw on the experience of staff at Balfour Beatty who already provide a highways service for other local authorities.</p> <p>We can analyse web and social media traffic to the ESH website to understand public engagement and reporting.</p>
BUDGET	<p>NIL</p>
CREATIVE BRIEF	<p>We should focus on repeated investment in roads, with extra investment in each of the last three years. We want people to recognise the additional effort being made to improve many roads, as well as understand the pressures and limitations on us. (But we will not claim an overall improvement in the county's roads).</p> <p>Therefore we'll include the £1m extra in the frame of the total £20m over three years.</p> <p>We should emphasise that investment is not only about present fixes but also about protection for the future.</p> <p>We will share the locations of where patching work will be done this summer (including the extra projects). Ideally we'll do this as a graphic or map as well as a list.</p> <p>We should also publicise these projects locally (e.g. in local social media groups) as well as county-wide.</p> <p>Emphasise that the new funding is capital rather than revenue so does not directly affect regular services.</p> <p>We expect to make the initial announcement of new funding on July 16, following that day's cabinet meeting.</p>
TACTICS AND DELIVERY: What channels will we use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News release on July 16 • Email newsletter to residents on July 16, including this highways item and an update on State of the County/financial situation. • Social media work will take a hyper-local focus, targeting

	<p>communities where patching work will take place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New web content and map/graphic to illustrate where patching work is going on• Use the 'Investing in your roads' campaign logo across content wherever possible
--	---

Evaluation

RESULTS: Were the objectives met?	
ADDITIONAL LEARNING:	