

# Swindon Borough Council Highway Asset Management Communication Strategy



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## 1.0 Framework

The Vision for Swindon 2030 sets out how the Council will shape the Borough and deliver growth that allows communities to prosper, families to live healthy and happy lives, and children to fulfil their potential. In order to deliver the Vision, the Council has developed four priorities and thirty pledges, which will enable Councillors and officers to prioritise their work.

The priorities and pledges championed within the Vision are effected through a series of objectives in the Council Plan and the ancillary Departmental Business Plan for Highways and Transportation.

These documents are supported by a Highway Infrastructure Asset Management (HIAM) Policy and Strategy which identify how efficient and sustainable management of highway assets can contribute to the overall Vision.

Swindon's current Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy were approved by Cabinet in October 2015 and are available to view on the Council's website. They cover the period 2016-20 and will be reviewed periodically as required.

The Strategy called for the development of a suite of linked documents including a:

- Performance Management Framework,
- *Communication Strategy*;
- Highway Information Strategy; and,
- Individual Highway Asset Management Plans for each core asset group.

A summary of the framework and hierarchy of these documents is depicted in figure 1 (page 2).



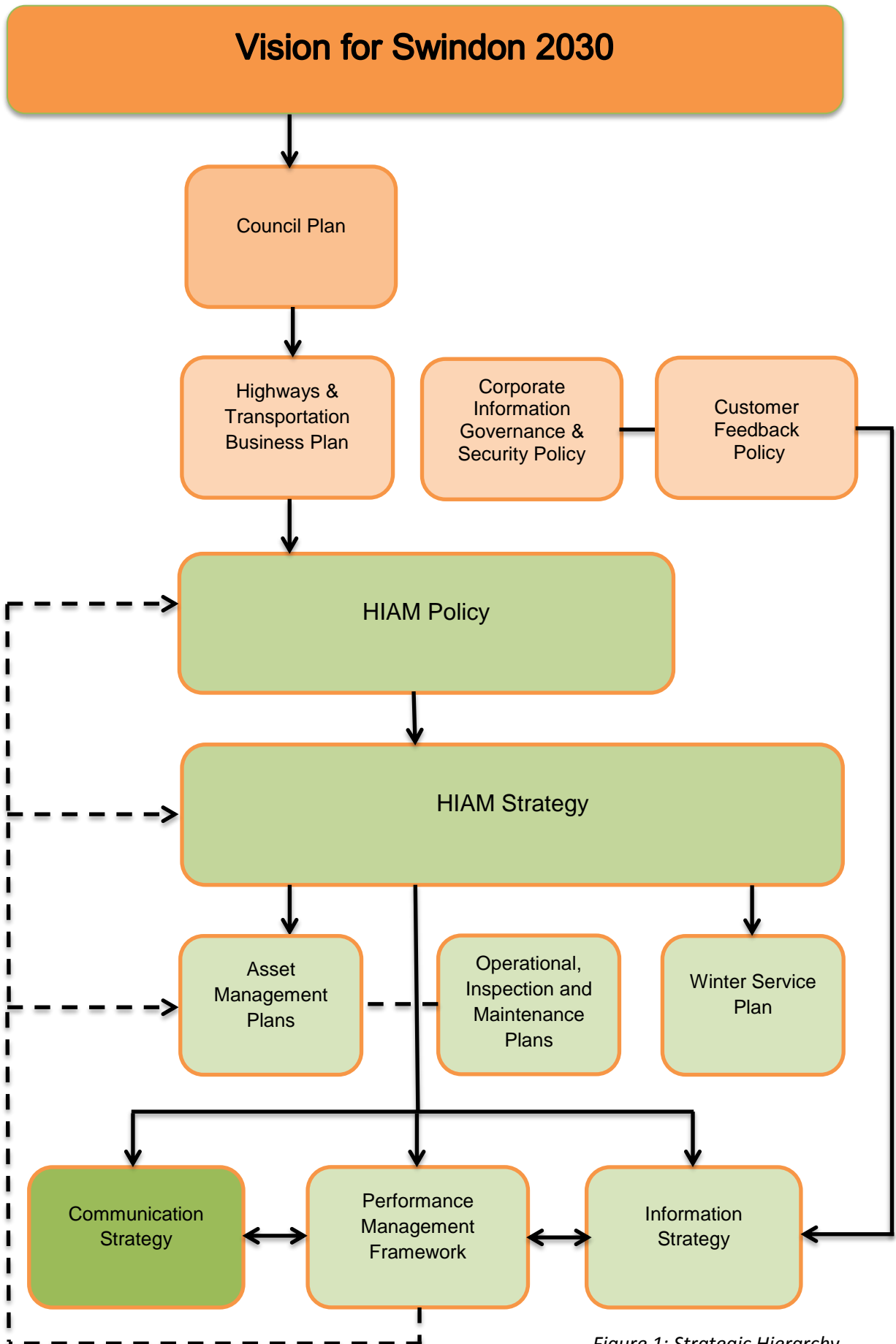


Figure 1: Strategic Hierarchy

## 2.0 Purpose

The Highway Asset Management Communication Strategy sets out the framework for how the Council shares and communicates information to key stakeholders and captures the lessons learnt to influence service improvements and future works programmes.

Swindon's highway infrastructure is the biggest capital asset that the Council owns and is vital to the town's economic and social prosperity. Our highway network is growing as new businesses and residents are attracted to Swindon.

The financial pressures we face in ensuring our network is fit for purpose in serving the needs of the wider community mean that we must become smarter, more flexible and innovative in our approach to managing these assets within the funding that is available to ensure that they continue to support our aspirations for the town. Involving our key stakeholders through good communication is fundamental to that success.

## 3.0 Communication aims and objectives

The aim of the Highway Asset Management Communication Strategy is to provide clarity and transparency in the Council's approach to highway maintenance by identifying:

- Who we communicate with, both internal and externally;
- What we communicate, sharing information and requesting feedback; and
- How we communicate, considering all communication channels.

## 4.0 Principles of good communication

The following core principles should be considered at all times:

- All key stakeholders to be kept informed of work on the network;
- Use a variety of communication channels appropriate to the target audience;
- Use plain English, avoiding technical and engineering terms where possible; and
- Safeguard and maintain the reputation of the Council.

## 5.0 Benefits of stakeholder engagement

Effective stakeholder engagement enables better planned and more informed policies; projects; programmes and services.

This can be mutually beneficial for the Department and our stakeholders. The earlier stakeholders are engaged in the planning process, the more likely that significant benefit may be realised.

Some of the benefits of the stakeholder engagement are summarised in figure 2 (page 4).

Benefits for the Department	Benefits for the Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher quality decision-making</li> <li>• Increased efficiency in and effectiveness of service delivery</li> <li>• Improved risk management practices – allowing risks to be identified and considered earlier, thereby reducing future costs</li> <li>• Streamlined policy and programme development processes</li> <li>• Greater engagement with stakeholder interests – ensuring services are delivered in collaboration with stakeholders and provide outcomes to meet community needs</li> <li>• Enhance community confidence in projects undertaken</li> <li>• Enhanced capacity to innovate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater opportunity to contribute directly to policy and programme development</li> <li>• More open and transparent lines of communication – increasing accountability and driving innovation</li> <li>• Improved access to decision making processes, resulting in the delivery of more efficient and responsive services</li> <li>• Early identification of synergies between stakeholder and Government work, encouraging integrated and comprehensive solutions to complex policy issues.</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Benefits of Stakeholder Engagement

## 6.0 Key messages

Information to be communicated shall include key messages published in the Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy, including links to the corporate plan; sub-policies and plans; works programmes and the results of public consultations and feedback.

Key messages to be considered when developing individual project communication plans or responses to stakeholders include:

- A well-maintained highway network is a vital part of Swindon's economic development and future prosperity;
- Swindon takes an asset management approach to highway maintenance by specifying the right treatment in the right place at the right time (as opposed to worst first);
- Investing in planned maintenance aims to reduce the need for more costly reactive repairs later;
- A resilient network is at the core of our maintenance strategy; and
- Communication with key stakeholders is central to our approach.

## 7.0 Key stakeholders and methods of engagement

Providing information to our key stakeholders is crucial to helping people understand where and why our roads are being repaired, as well as demonstrating that the asset management approach is the most effective in the long term and offers good value for money. A list of key stakeholders and methods of engagement is provided in appendix 1.

## 8.0 Leadership and commitment

Investment decisions related to maintaining the highway asset are agreed annually by Cabinet as part of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan will include a 3 year indicative programme of works, subject to the annual resource decisions of the Council.

A survey is commissioned annually from the National Highways and Transport Network (NHT) to determine the level public satisfaction with Council Highway Services. A summary of the results, together with any public comments received and trends will be fed into future Implementation Plan reports or Cabinet Member Briefings and used to refine Council services and inform investment decisions where appropriate.

Sub-policies and plans that underpin the Policy and Strategy will be subject to Cabinet Member Briefings and reports to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee. Briefing Notes and Committee minutes are published on the Council's website.

Senior decision-makers have identified and appointed the person responsible for leading asset management and approved a plan of action for the implementation and improvement of asset management.

Terms of reference to direct meetings for parties involved in the delivery of asset management have been approved by Senior Decision makers and are detailed in appendix 2. Regular reviews will be held in accordance with the Terms of Reference and any lessons learnt will be documented and fed into staff appraisal and development discussions or used to refine policies; strategies and plans as appropriate.

### 9.0 Risk management

Key risks linked to highway asset management will be recorded in the H&T Risk Register and published on the Council's website.

### 10.0 Information and feedback

Feedback to stakeholders will be provided in accordance with the Corporate Customer Feedback Policy. This provides guidelines for responding to complaints, comments and compliments and is published on the Council web-site.

Feedback from stakeholders is captured via the Council's customer reporting management system. Relevant customer comments will be fed into the Implementation Plan report and used to refine Council services; inform investment decisions and prioritise works where appropriate.

All relevant policy, standards, service and project information will be published on the Council's website and reviewed regularly as appropriate.

### 11.0 Efficiency monitoring

Swindon Council is an active member of a number of regional and national benchmarking and improvement groups, including:

- The NHT network - Where Customer Quality Cost (CQC) methodology is used to monitor and compare service efficiency;
- The South West Highway Alliance - Where local and national key performance indicators of performance and efficiency are compared and benchmarked; and
- The Ringway Client Forum – Where opportunities for partnership working and innovation are discussed and shared between like-minded authorities.

Participation in these forums will help the authority to contextualise customer feedback with regional and national trends and identify best practice and successful improvement measures.

## 12.0 Communication roles and responsibilities

Communications regarding significant projects or initiatives which may be of interest to a wide audience will be planned in consultation with the corporate communications team.

Communications concerning publically held information will be released after consultation with the departmental freedom of information representative with reference to the Corporate Information Governance & Security Policy and other legislation and policy as appropriate.

## 13.0 Evaluation and review

The Communication Strategy will be reviewed annually and updated as required in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member.

