

Kent Highway Services – The Director’s Update

A report by Geoff Harrison-Mee, Director, Kent Highway Services, to the Highways Advisory Board on 4th March 2008.

Introduction

1. This Director’s Update sets out some of the key issues and developments in KHS that I think the Board will be interested in.

Key issues and points of interest

2. **Traffic Management Centre** - the recent heavy rain gave us an unexpected insight into life without the Traffic Management Centre (TMC) and the effects it has on Maidstone town centre. The heavy rain led to flooding and the evacuation of our Traffic Management Centre on 15th January and as a result we were not able to change the traffic signal timings to respond to varying traffic flows and prevent queues building nor to use the roadside variable message signs to inform people. This led to pretty big queues in and around Maidstone. Fortunately we were back up and running in two days. This shows the benefit of the system that is now being rolled out into Canterbury and Kent Thameside. At a recent Maidstone Business Forum meeting with the Town Centre Manager, Borough Council Members and business representatives all agreed the TMC was helping and a real benefit. This is good news and a real sign of approval of the hard work of staff and investment by KHS. Caroline Bruce, acting Head of Network Management is leading on this.
3. **Public satisfaction tracker survey** - Kent Highway Services latest residents survey is showing increasing levels of public satisfaction. Every year 1200 residents from across Kent are asked their views on the condition of roads, pavements and streetlights in the County. The headline 2007 results are set out in the table below and we traditionally measure our progress through something called 'Net-Satisfaction'. This is a figure calculated by taking the % of people who are dis-satisfied with our service from the % who are satisfied. This gives a true reflection of the service and a balance between the those happy, those un-happy and those who are not sure. Members will remember that we achieved positive net satisfaction in 2006 for the first time since surveys began 20 years ago.

	% of residents who are . . .							
	Satisfied		Neither satisfied or dissatisfied		Dissatisfied		Net satisfaction	
	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007
Condition of roads	46%	51%	12%	16%	41%	32%	+5%	+19%
Condition of pavements	44%	48%	16%	17%	40%	32%	+4%	+16%
Streetlights	59%	64%	13%	15%	27%	20%	+32%	+44%

So progress to raise the profile of the highway service is going well with branded KHS vehicles and the page every week in the Kent on Sunday paper, increased press releases about the service and not forgetting the 15,000 calls each month handled by the Contact Centre. There is still more to do and the new shaped KHS will be ready for the start of the new financial year. But, through all the change that has been going on in KHS over the last year, staff from across all the Alliance partners (this includes Jacobs, Ringway and TSUK who make up the KHS Alliance) have shown how dedicated and committed they are by delivering a service that is recognisably better than last year, as

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measured by the residents who receive the service. The full report will be available shortly and presented to the next Board.

4. **Dealing with service requests and calls** – we are now reporting our progress on dealing with service requests on a weekly basis to managers and staff. This reporting by the new seven service groups ensures managers get regular information about how their teams are performing. Over the last few months we have reduced the number of service requests that were still open after 28 days from over 2000 to under 500. We still have more to do however to meet the answering letter target within the 10 working day target. Again we are reporting results on a weekly basis but are currently achieving around 85% replied in 10 working days. More still has to be done to provide a more responsive service to the public and as the new teams are fully in place we will be driving this harder.
5. **Annual Operating plan** – the draft of the 2008/9 KHS Operating plan is well underway and a draft is available for any member of HAB who would like to review and comment on the draft document. David Beaver, acting Head of Business, Performance and Communications is leading on this.
6. **Inspector Vans and IT ‘handhelds’**– The new highway and RASWA roadworks inspector vans will be rolled out during March and April. We will have 60 KHS branded vehicles out and about across the County. Pictures of the van livery will be available at the Board. Inspectors are now being trained on their new ‘handheld’ devices which are mini computers that can be used on their inspections to speed up communications and the logging of faults. One of the ‘handhelds’ will be on display at the Board. Kim Hills, Head of Community Operations is leading on this work.
7. **Response to Insurance Claims** - Over the last year the performance of processing insurance claims has been patchy. With potential changes to legislation proposed requiring shorter time scales, a review of the system is necessary. Initial meetings have been held with the corporate insurance team and the authority’s insurer, Zurich. A small working group has been established and some areas of improvement already identified. These include a new electronic claims form (ensuring appropriate information is provided by the claimant), greater use of the contact centre and the new KHS IT systems and earlier site visits. Kim Hills, Head of Community Operations is leading on this work
8. **EDF and connections for streetlights** – we continue to be affected by EDF failure to deliver a responsive service for power supply faults and new connections. Norman Bateman the Head of Technical Services is leading the work to get a better service and EDF are committed to a ‘Excellence in Un-metered Connections’ project to meet and exceed Ofgem targets. The project will cover connections, faults and emergencies in relationship to street lighting, targeting timescales and reporting procedures. We are keeping a close eye on this project and monitoring connection times to ensure that it delivers improvements.
9. **Highway Drainage** – a paper on highway drainage was presented to this Board at the last meeting. Information on highway flooding is still being collected and this will be the basis of future improvements to the drainage system and asset. The new Drainage team within Norman Bateman’s Technical Services Group are reviewing all programmed gully cleansing activity to ensure we have better information about when work is planned and better cyclic maintenance of known hot spots.
10. **A229 Bluebell Hill, Aylesford resurfacing** – We are putting in place a weekend closure on the uphill stretch of the A229 between 28th and 31st March to resurface this

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road. This will be from 21.00 hrs on 28th March until 05.00 hrs on 31st March. We have decided on a short, sharp hit over a weekend to ensure disruption is kept to a minimum. Our crews will be working 24 hours a day for both days laying 6,400 tonnes of material using 3 paving machines on the 3km scheme length. We will be putting in place an extensive publicity campaign to advise residents and road users as this is a key strategic route and the closure will cause disruption. Behdad Haratbar, Acting head of Countywide Improvements is leading on this.

11. **Traffic Management Act update** – The Traffic Management Act 2004 has offered the opportunity for local highway authorities to introduce a permit scheme across their networks. These schemes have been designed with the aim of improving the management and co-ordination of all activities on the highway therefore minimising disruption and providing more reliable journey times for the travelling public. Kent County Council (KCC) has taken the decision to make a bid to the Secretary of State for Transport to run a permit scheme across the highway network in Kent. Our formal bid will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport and the Department for Transport in May 2008. It is our intention to begin the introduction of our Permit Scheme in the last quarter of 2008 by permitting our own works for a 4 month period. It must be stressed that these dates can be only indicative at the current time. KCC will be one of the first authorities across the country to make an application for a permit scheme and there are many processes and guidance documents to be put in place. All local highway authorities are reliant upon the IT software providers to release the necessary applications around August time. Until these packages are released, installed and tested we will not be in a position to confirm the roll out date of our full permit scheme system. Caroline Bruce, acting Head of network Management is leading on this.
12. **Speed Management in Kent** - a successful launch of a new ‘Understanding’ leaflet and the PIPKIN process to assess schemes that ‘change’ the highway layout was held with Members and Parish Town Councils on 10th January. The conference chaired by Keith Ferrin was designed to explain KHS’s new policy on local speed limits and traffic management schemes. In future any request for us to make improvements to the road must be supported by the local community in the area (for example through a known group, parish or town council). Information has been sent out to Members and Parishes who were unable to attend the conference and copies of the leaflet are on display. David Hall. Head of Transport and Development is leading on this.
13. **New Quiet Surfacing** – following the successful trial of a new low noise surfacing on the A26 at Tonbridge we will be developing a policy and priority system to ensure sites for resurfacing are chosen fairly and prioritised in a quantitative manner. I will be bringing this policy to the next Board. Behdad Haratbar, acting head of Countywide Improvements is leading on this.
14. **Re-organising KHS** – the new KHS structure is now around 75% populated with on-going recruitment processes both internal and external to fill the remaining posts by April. Two recruitment fairs have been organised to attract new talent to the Alliance. The changes to the Environment and Regeneration Directorate Resources Division will have an impact on the Business, Performance and Communications Group and the Finance Group and I am working closely with Adam Wilkinson to ensure this does not affect service delivery on the front line. The organisation structure and posts currently filled is detailed on the attached Appendix.

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15. **Graduate programme** – I am pleased to announce that a new engineering stream has been added to the successful Corporate ‘Kent Graduate Programme’. This will roll out in June and we hope to have two graduates working across the Alliance and ultimately taking up full time employment with us. This first phase is focussed on Transport and Development where there currently is a skills shortage. David Beaver, acting head of Business, Performance and Communications is leading.

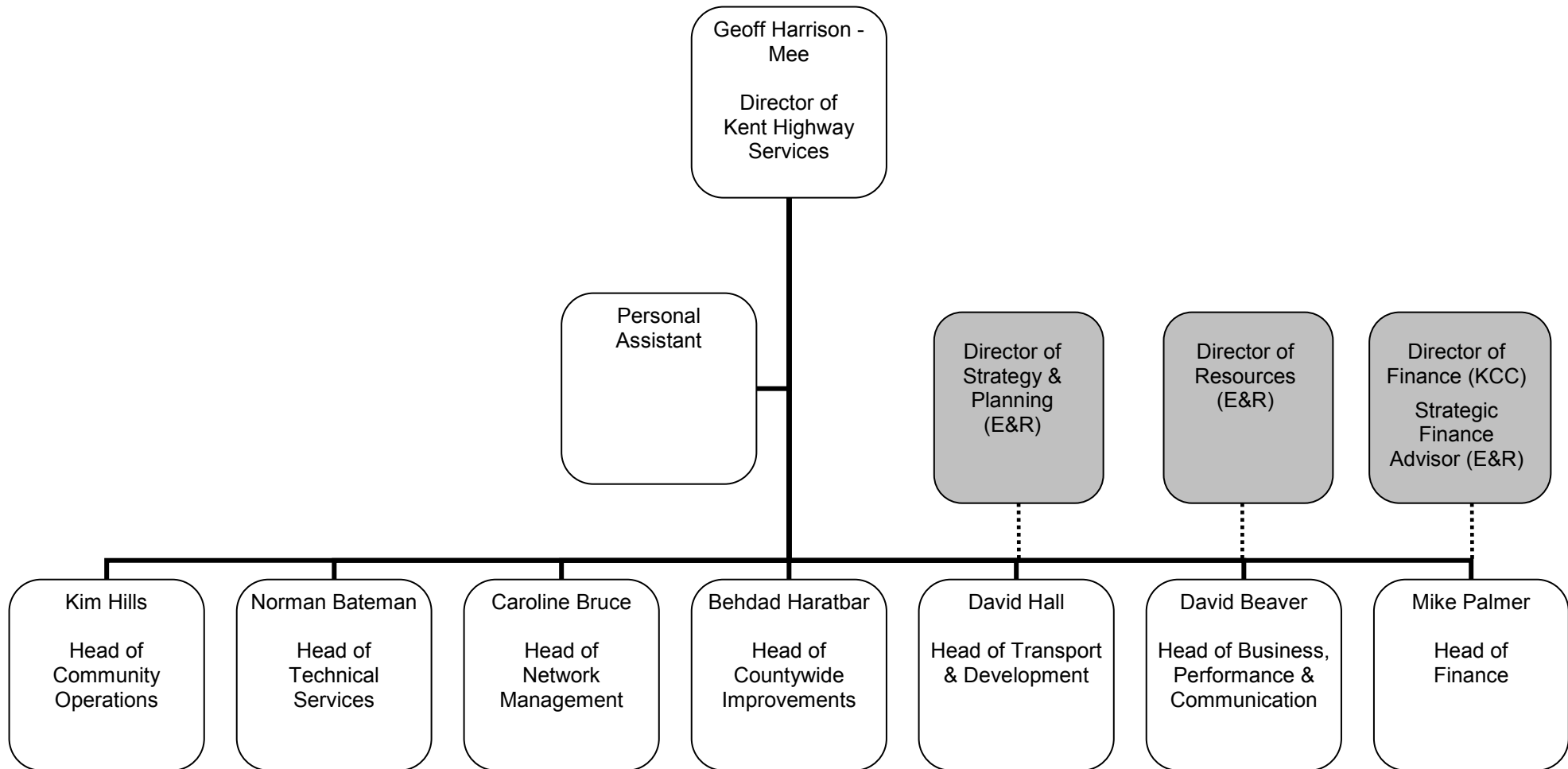
Conclusions

16. This Highways Advisory Board report is for information and Members are asked to note and comment on the positive progress being made to improve service delivery and are asked to give their support to staff through the period of significant change that lies ahead.

Contact Officers:

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Director and Heads of Services

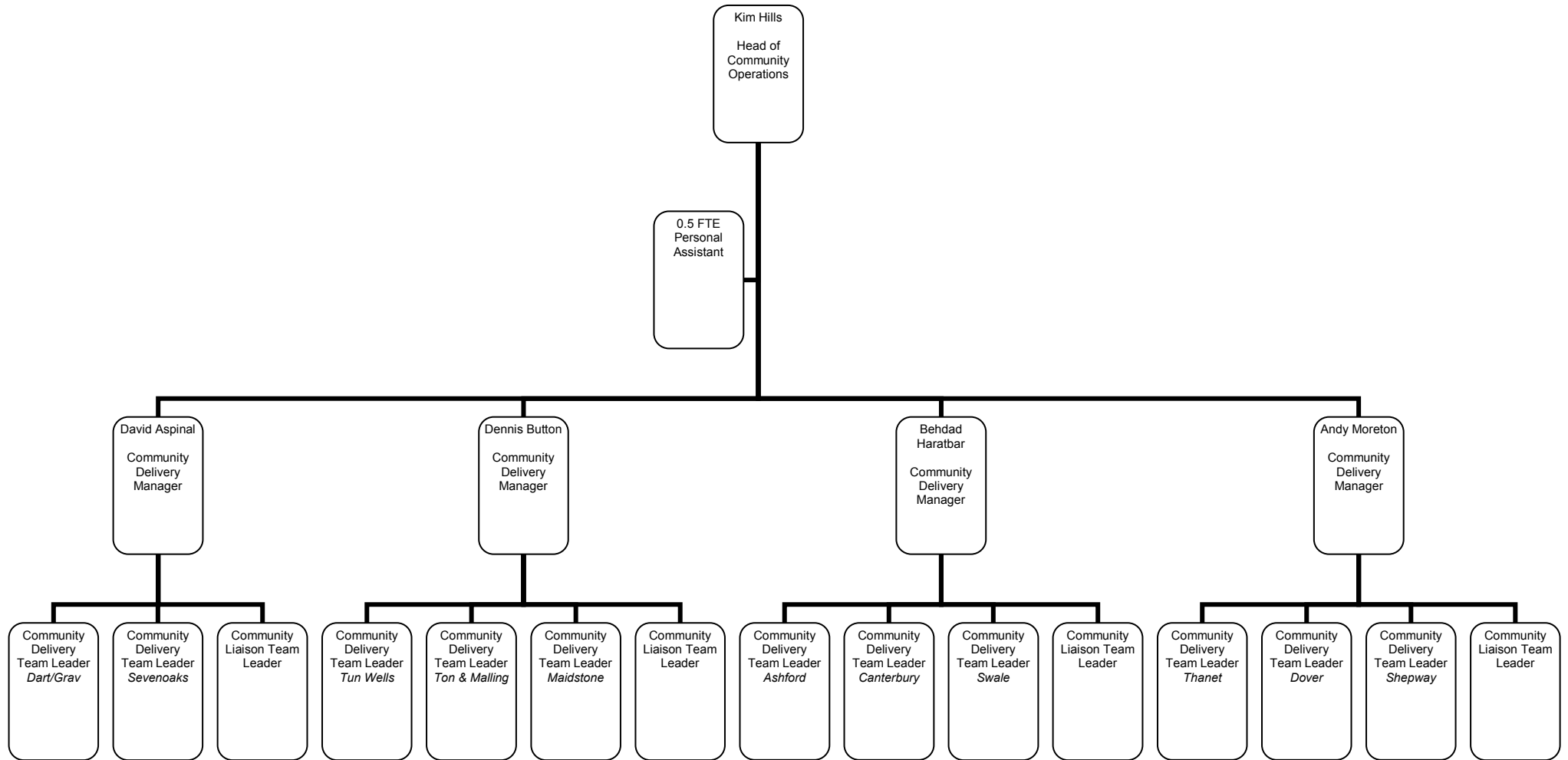


Detail by service group:

KHS Staff will be working within one of the seven service groups – Community Operations, Technical Services, Network Management, Countywide Improvements, Transport and Development, Finance and Business, Performance and Communications.

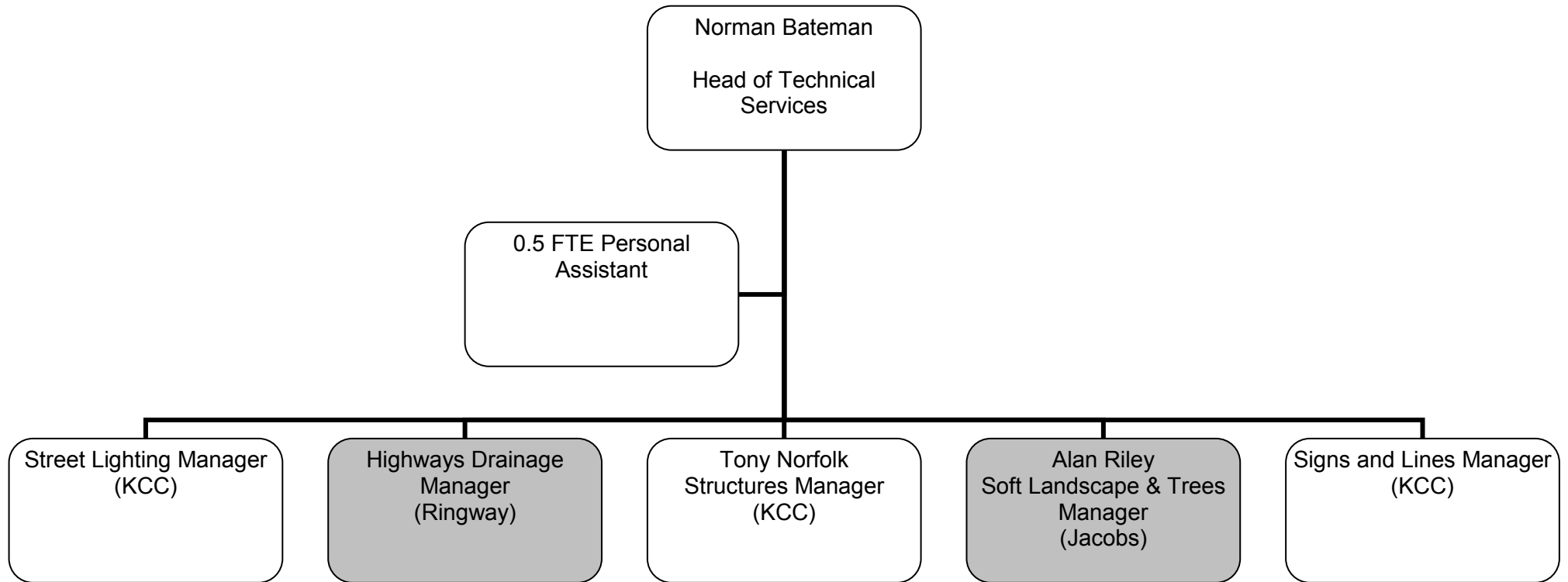
Each service group will be led by a Head of Service, who will have full accountability and control for their area of the business.

Community Operations Service Group



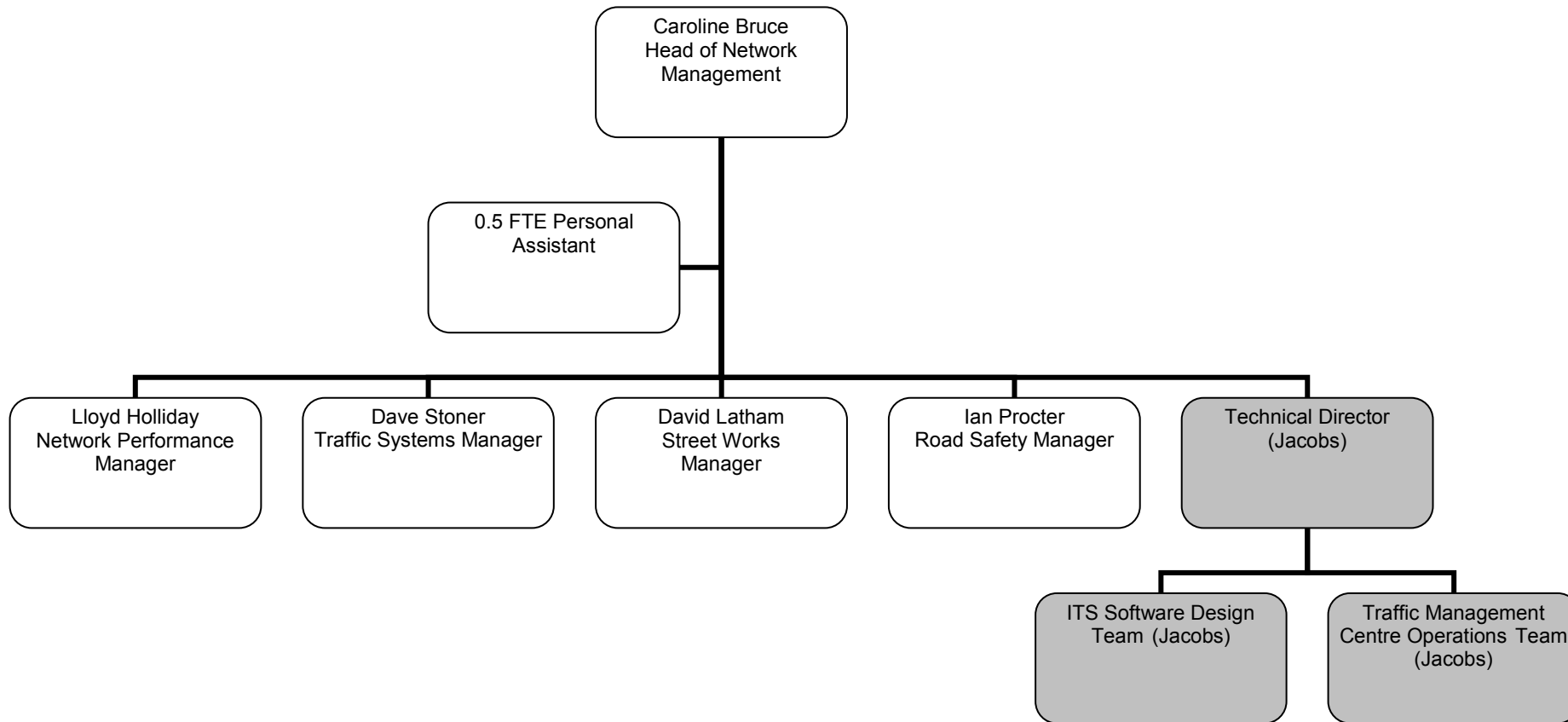
Community Operations - This service group will be the public face of Kent Highway Services and will be delivered by teams structured around district boundaries. Staff in Community Operations will be responsible for inspecting and maintaining roads and pavement, but they will also be the focus for regular contact with parish councils and locally-accountable bodies such as the Joint Transportation Boards. The four community liaison teams will also ensure that the service provided to the public, Members, Boroughs, Parishes and other key stakeholders is consistent across the county and meets the high standards our customer expect.

Technical Services Service Group



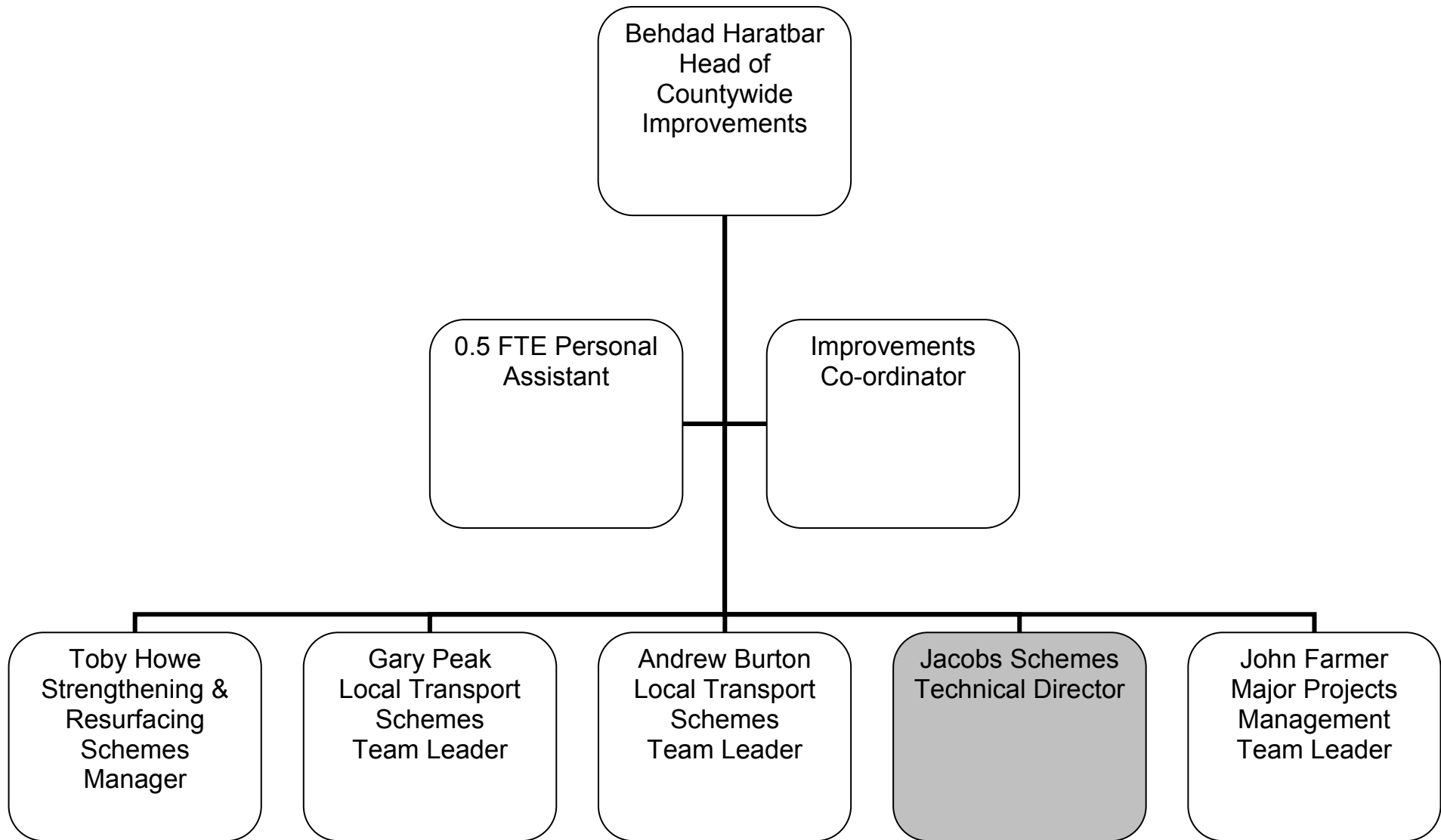
Technical Services - This service group will manage the street light, drainage, structures, trees and soft landscaping, and signs and lines assets. It will operate countywide in teams focusing on one asset type. In a radically new way of delivering the service, there will be a strong Alliance approach with responsibility being with the Alliance partner best placed to manage the asset.

Network Management Service Group



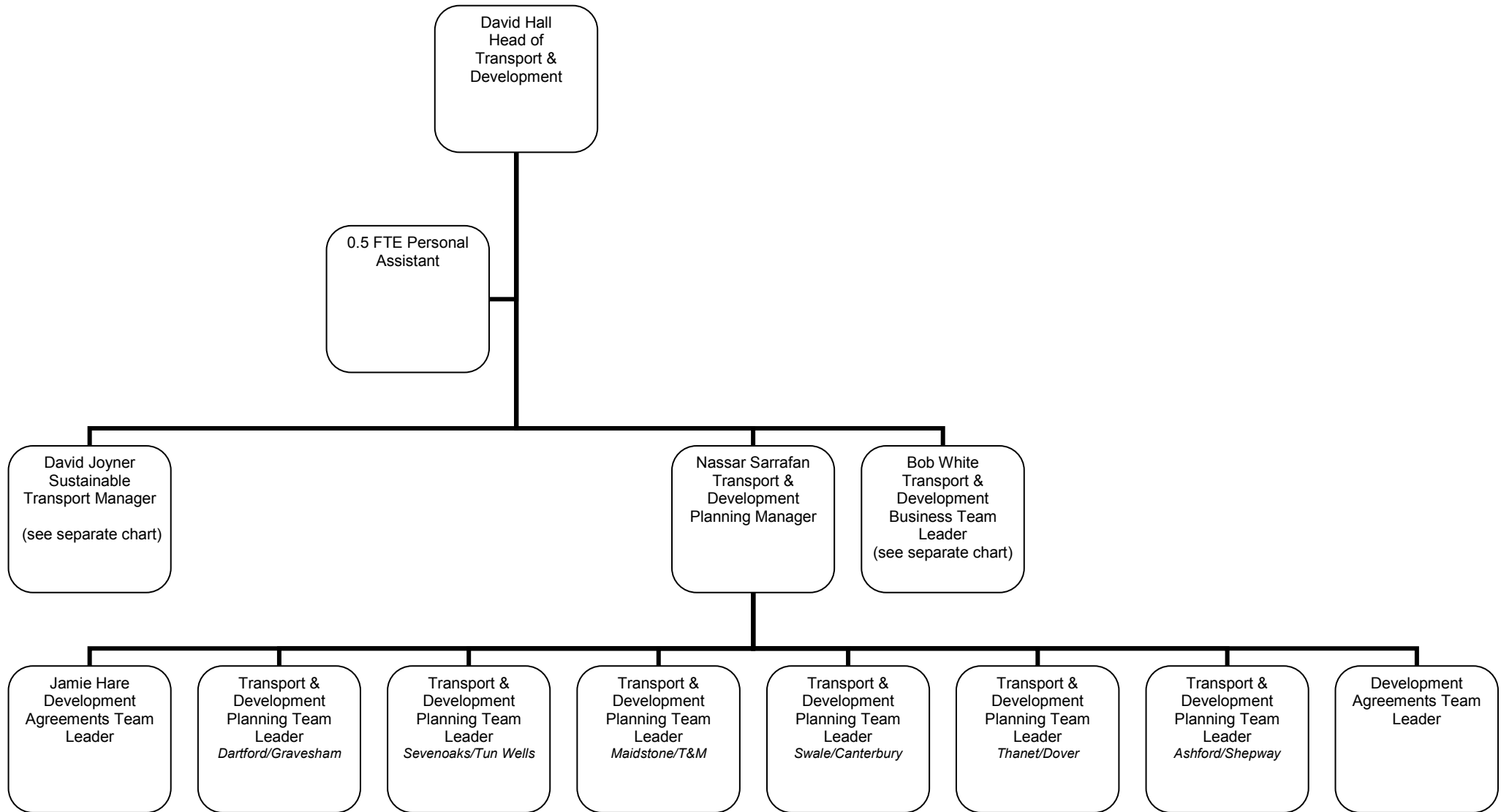
Network Management - This service group will be responsible for the safe movement of the public on our road networks, proactively managing congestion and improving journey time reliability. This includes exploiting the benefits of innovative traffic systems and influencing the behaviour of the travelling public to improve road safety and providing information on alternatives to the car. The Traffic Management Act will provide new opportunities to manage congestion which KCC will be piloting along with two other local authorities.

Countywide Improvements Service Group



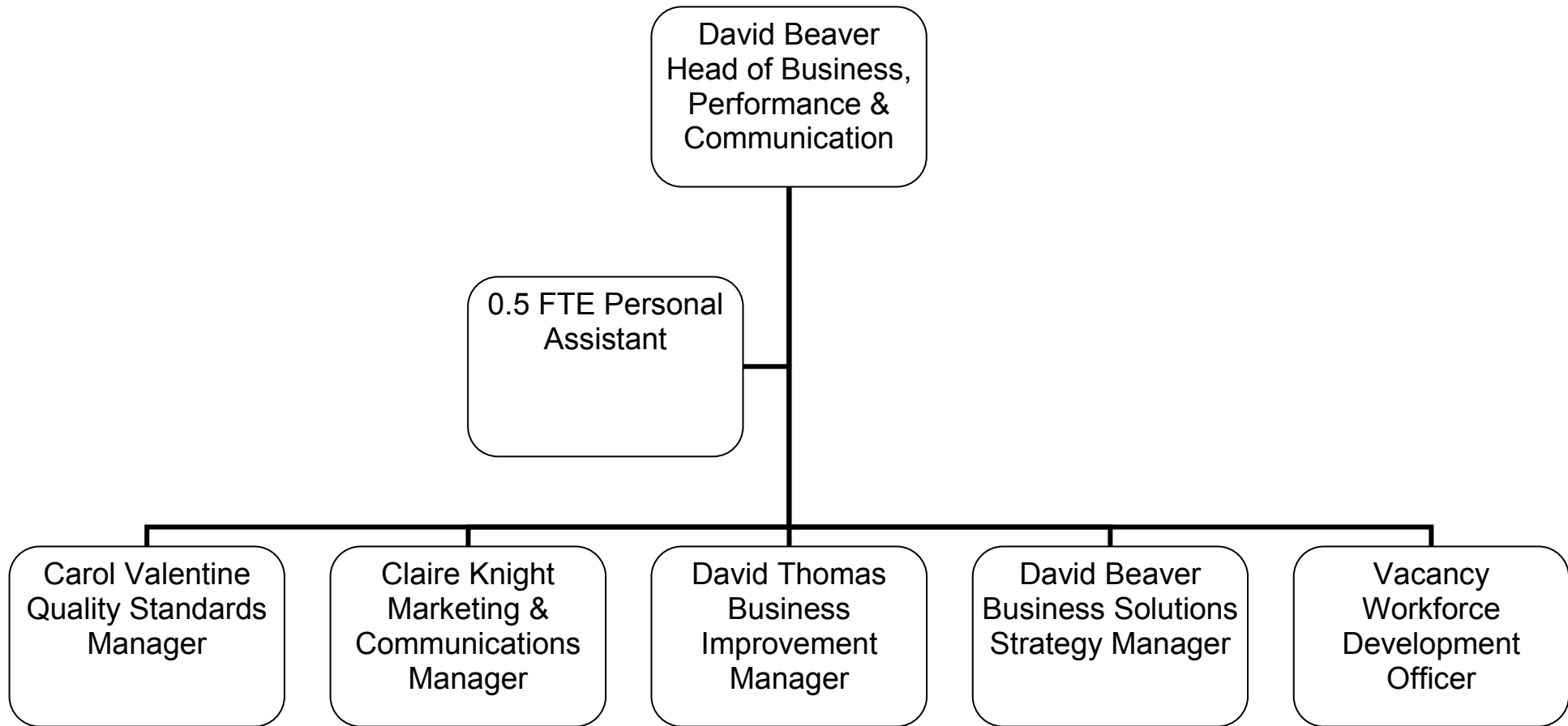
Countywide Improvements - This service group will provide a disciplined and programmed approach to schemes and major projects. Schemes will include major road maintenance enhancements i.e. strengthening and resurfacing, as well as transport enhancement schemes such as traffic calming and junction improvements.

Transport & Development Service Group



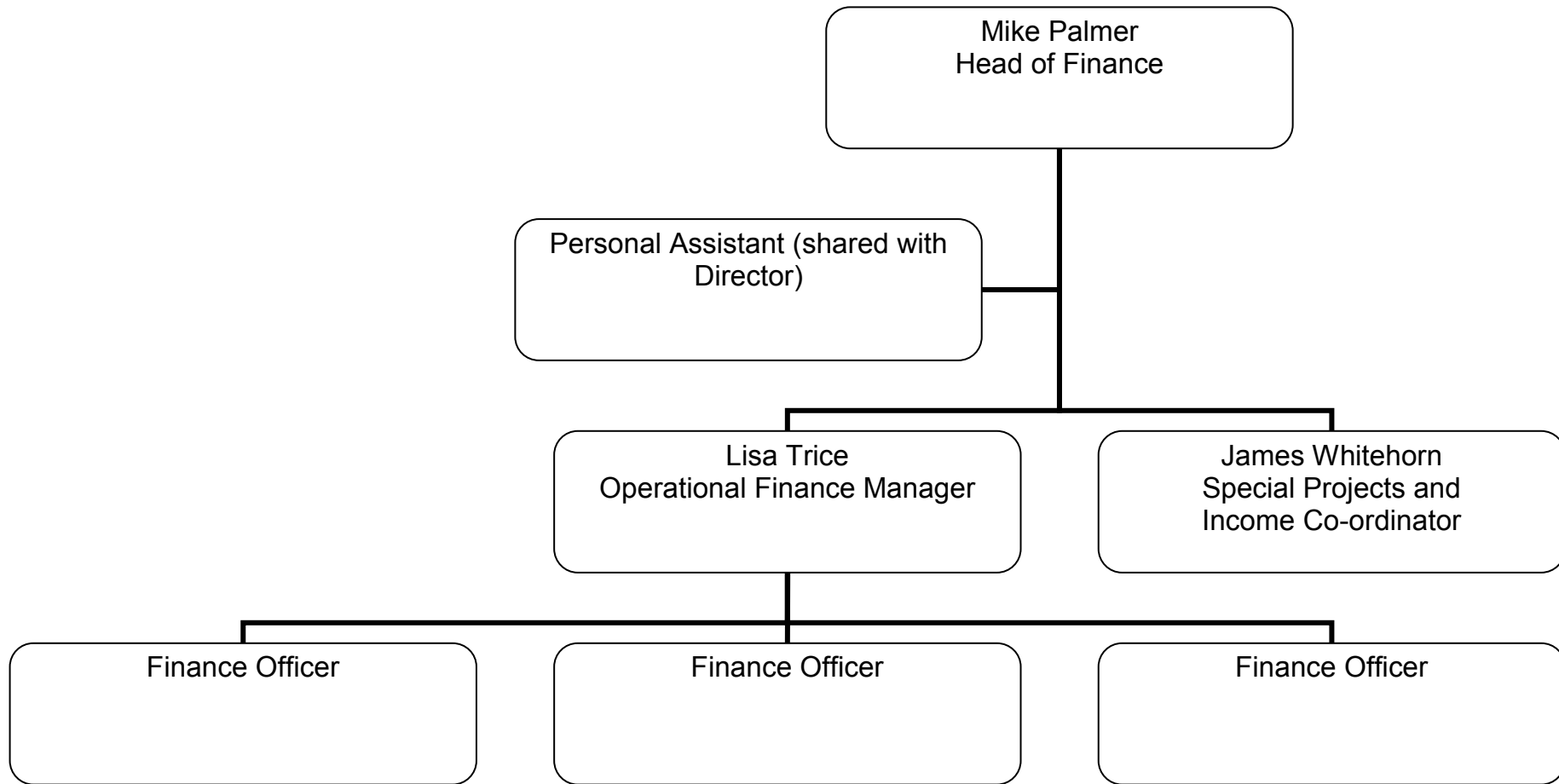
Transport and Development - This service group brings together the development planning and transport functions into multi-disciplinary teams built around district boundaries. The group will work closely with District Councils to develop Local Development Frameworks and the transport implications arising from them. The group will also lead on sustainable transport options and work closely with bus operators.

Head of Business, Performance and Communication



Business, Performance and Communication - This service group provides specialist business, performance and internal/external communications expertise and support to the whole of KHS.

Finance Services Group



Finance - This service group will provide and manage finance support to the whole of KHS.

