

Kent Highway Services – The Director’s Update

A report by Geoff Harrison-Mee, Director, Kent Highway Services, to the Highways Advisory Board on 8th May 2008.

Introduction

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

Key issues and points of interest

2. **A229 Blue Bell Hill** – Our crews worked 24 hours a day over the 28th - 31st March weekend laying 5,500 tonnes of material using 3 paving machines over the 3km scheme length. We successfully delivered on time and budget and a wash-up meeting has been held to learn lessons for the future and how this type of project delivery can be translated into our smaller schemes. This was a great Alliance team effort and demonstrates the value of the long term relationship with Ringway and Jacobs. Behdad Haratbar, Acting Head of Countywide Improvements led on this project. Presentation in Item 5 of this Board.
3. **Accommodation - Wrotham** – following discussions with KCC Planning Team and after seeking Counsel advice we have decided to withdraw from the Wrotham site and look for alternative location for the second major office/depot. As the planning and construction process is likely to take 18 months we plan to move to consolidate staff in the Doubleday House complex once the new site at Ashford is completed. This will mean that KHS staff will primarily operate from Ashford, Doubleday and Invicta House. I am taking responsibility for this key project.
4. **Potholes** – The effects of last year's wet summer, followed by the wet winter has caused damage to many roads resulting in potholes. To combat this, Kent Highway Services launched a blitz on potholes during April. We have redirected over 24 crews to focus on repairing only potholes and raised a high profile campaign of reporting with the public. At its peak we were repairing over 3000 potholes a week. The media and radio campaign has been successful in raising the awareness of who to report a pothole to and we plan a similar campaign in the Autumn. Kim Hills, Head of Community Operations is leading on this.
5. **New high profile vans** – the first order of liveried vans has arrived to raise the profile of our inspectors and help drive the ‘keeping kent moving’ target. We will shortly have over 60 vans around the county advertising the 08458 247 800 telephone number and the new red KHS logo.
6. **Re-organising KHS** – the new KHS structure is now around 90% populated with on-going recruitment processes both internal and external to fill the remaining posts. We are finding some posts difficult to fill due to the market chasing a small number of people with specialist skills. We continue to use recruitment fairs to attract new talent to the Alliance. Staff are bedding down in their new roles and teams and staff development/training has started to ensure everyone is clear on their roles and how to use the new technology that has started to be rolled out. 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.

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7. **Highways Agency Area 4 Contract** – as previously reported to the Board, KCC, Ringway and Jacobs are creating a joint venture company to bid for the Highways Agency (HA) Area 4 contract. If successful we will be maintaining the motorways and trunk roads in Kent (and parts of West and East Sussex) and take over from the current provider InterRoute. We have a long way to go yet but we have recently been told we have made the tender list and completed the Highways Agency assessment process they call CAT - Capability Assessment Tool. This is a bit like a school 'Ofsted' inspection and is an assessment just of the KCC part of the KHS Alliance. Ringway and Jacobs have already been assessed and have a very good score of their own.

We achieved a score of 167.8, the highest score from the 40 contractors and consultants who have gone through the assessment process up to three times is 187. So for our first assessment we are pretty pleased with our score.

The assessment is made up of 24 separate parts and the good news is that all our scores are above the 'Operationally Effective' rating with 10 being rated as 'Strategically Valuable' and 3 rated as 'External Differentiator' (and we think two of these are the highest CAT scores recorded). The lead CAT assessor said '*KCC has created a unique alliance structure and this is bringing benefits across the service and access to greater expertise and resources that would be available in a traditionally structured arrangement. Coupled with the inherent focus on social responsibility that comes with being a County Council, this gives a highly distinctive character to KCC compared with other suppliers in the CAT program*'.

The assessment report is a very useful check in the progress of KHS and has some very useful improvement actions that we will be taking forward.

Conclusions

8. 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 as the organisational changes bed in.

Contact Officers: Geoff Harrison-Mee 01622 694776