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**To:** Personnel Committee – 12 September 2007

**Subject:** Gender Equality, Kent Highways Services

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**SUMMARY:** This report briefs Members on the activity to support gender equality in Kent Highways Services.

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**1. Purpose**

1.1 This briefing paper responds to a cabinet request for information on activity to support gender equality in Kent Highways Services (KHS).

**2. Kent County Council – the strategic position**

2.1 Kent County Council's Equality Strategy 2007 - 2010, published earlier this year, identifies five priority outcomes for the Council. One of these outcomes is to "maintain our reputation as an excellent employer, promoting a culture where the Council recruits on merit and diversity is valued". This outcome recognises the importance of a diverse workforce, including one where the roles of both men and women are valued equally.

2.2 In addition to this strategy, there is a clear legal framework which underpins our activities to promote equality for men and women. The framework includes the recent Equality Act 2006 which creates the Gender Equality Duty for the public sector. KCC's Gender Equality Scheme, contained within the Equality Strategy, sets out a three year action plan for meeting this duty.

**3. Corporate Monitoring**

3.1 To ensure KCC enhances gender equality within the organisation, the Council monitors the workforce by gender, reporting quarterly to Equality Lead Officer Group (ELOG).

At June 2007:

	KCC (including Schools)	Environment & Regeneration
Number of staff	45,477	908
% male	20	51
% female	80	49
% full time female	65	39
% part time female	88.4	69.6
% of all staff earning less than £15k p.a.	33	20.2
% staff earning less than £15k who are women	33	27
% of all staff earning £30-50k p.a.	17.7	24
% of all staff earning £30-50k p.a. who are women	16	15
% of all staff earning over £50k p.a.	1.6	5
% of all staff earning over £50k p.a. who are women	1	2.9

Recruitment & selection processes including training applications are monitored by gender to ensure no detriment in the recruitment process. This information is reported to ELOG quarterly.

#### 4. **Other Council Activities**

4.1 There are a range of employment initiatives to enhance gender equality in the Council's working practices:

- Employee benefits including child care vouchers, flexible working arrangements
- Terms & Conditions of Service including a generous contractual Maternity Scheme, which is also now accessible in the case of adoption as part of a one year pilot. Paternity pay is now enhanced and there is enhanced personal leave to enable carers to have paid time off
- Equal Pay Audit which includes guidance to managers on equal & consistent starting salaries for men and women
- Equality & Diversity training available to all staff for example two Day Recruitment & Selection, half-day Positive Action Recruitment, one day Diversity in Action (separate events for staff and managers)

- 'Towards 2010' targets to employ 250 apprenticeships for 16-24 year olds and increase opportunities for graduates to work and live in Kent through Kent Success (Apprenticeships) and Kent Graduate Programme
- Kent Works programmes which provide work experience

## **5. Introduction to Kent Highways Services**

- 5.1 KHS is the largest division within KCC's E&R Directorate It works in partnership with three private sector organisations, Ringway, Jacobs and TSUK, through the KHS Alliance. Together it manages and maintains roads and pavements, streetlights, signs and bridges across the Kent network as well as promoting sustainable car use, supporting public transport, improving road safety and maintaining high levels of public satisfaction by responding to around 16,000 phone calls per month.
- 5.2 KHS is undergoing rapid and extensive transformation to ensure that it maintains high levels of service standards against a backdrop of challenging budgets and increasing demand and expectation. This transformation is an excellent opportunity to promote KHS as an employment option for greater numbers of women.
- 5.3 In light of the fact that:
- approximately 33% (299 out of 912 staff) of people who currently work for KHS are women.
  - KHS workforce has traditionally been predominantly male
  - the recognised benefits of a more diverse workforce, not least that research<sup>1</sup> shows that an outward-looking, customer focused service culture is closely associated with women-friendly environments
- there are a number of activities planned to promote KHS as an employer of choice for women and to retain those women currently employed. This paper outlines these activities together with some of the associated challenges.

## **6. Activities within Kent Highways Services**

- 6.1 Given the current transformation process, it is timely to take stock of the activities currently underway within KHS to promote gender equality.
- 6.2 **New roles**  
Every role within the new structure has a new job description. These descriptions only include requirements which are necessary to perform the role, for example graduate degrees are only included where essential. This includes part time roles. This removes a significant barrier which often excludes many women from applying for roles. Furthermore, the grading of each and every role has been evaluated by the Reward team to ensure it is fair and appropriate to the role. This work serves to ensure equal pay amongst relevant roles.
- 6.3 **Career paths**  
The new KHS structure has fewer layers of management. This less hierarchical format encourages a more flexible approach to meeting work demands and allows staff to move within their grade to increase experience & knowledge. This clearly supports women moving into technical career paths.

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<sup>1</sup> Identified from "Gender isn't an issue", a report into the role of women in local government, June 2005

#### 6.4 **Flexible working**

The ways of working within KHS will change dramatically as a result of the transformation. Flexible working will underpin this way of working enabling greater numbers of people to work from home, to work more flexible hours and to access technology which will enable them to maintain a work life balance. All of these changes will help to promote KHS as an attractive employment option for women.

It will be important to ensure flexible working patterns are available for senior roles to encourage more opportunities for women to work in senior positions and provide crucial role models. Role models have an important part to play in promoting flexible working. Managers who work flexibly give a positive message that they accept the need for a work life balance. Encouraging more men to work more flexibly may lead to greater acceptance of flexible working practices and have a positive impact on the gender pay gap.

#### 6.5 **Apprenticeships**

KHS is planning to recruit young apprentices, starting shortly with a pilot in North Kent. This is in partnership with Kent Works, working together with a cluster of mixed secondary schools in the Gravesham area. There are further plans to recruit apprentices to a range of roles, including as trainee inspectors. This will help to dispel myths among young women about working in highways industry.

#### 6.6 **Graduate Trainees**

KHS is committed to recruiting graduate trainees to work within the new Alliance. These graduates will undertake placements in each of the four Alliance partners, experiencing a variety of roles. Whilst a robust recruitment process will ultimately determine the best graduates for these roles, it is intended to promote these opportunities beyond the traditional, male dominated institutions.

#### 6.7 **“Take our young people to work”**,

This October, the Council will be promoting "Take our young people to work", an opportunity for staff in E&R to bring young people they know to work for a day. The idea is to promote the Council as an employment option for young people and to give them a taste of what it might be like to work here. This activity has the potential to promote KHS as an employment option for women by providing them with a taste of what it might be like to work for KHS. It is hoped it will encourage girls who might otherwise not consider highways as a career option.

### 7. **The challenges**

- 7.1 The activities outlined above will all contribute to promoting gender equality and encouraging women, at various stages in their career, to work for KHS. KHS recognises however, that gender equality is a long term goal; therefore our activities look towards achieving both short, medium and long term changes to the composition of the workforce to work for KHS.

- 7.2 There are challenges to achieving gender equality with KHS, not least the socio-economic and demographic setting<sup>2</sup> of women in Kent and the impact this has on KHS' activities to promote equality:
- The 2001 Census statistics show that there are similar numbers of men and women in the Kent County Council Area - 49 per cent and 51 per cent respectively out of a population of 1,369,900.
  - Women in Kent are significantly more likely to be 'economically inactive' as a result of looking after the home/ family, than men (13 per cent compared to 1 per cent) In Kent, more men (32 per cent) than women (23 per cent) occupy professional positions, including higher and lower managerial and professional occupations.
  - Women in Kent (18 per cent) are significantly more likely than men (11 per cent) not to have access to a car.
  - The majority of Kent's part time workers are women, who make up 87 per cent of employees. 27 per cent of women in Kent work within 2km from their home, compared to 16 per cent of men.
  - 30 per cent of women in Kent have no qualifications as compared to males (27 per cent).
- 7.3 Furthermore, men and women have different access to private transport, different patterns of commuting and employment, and different child-care and other family responsibilities.
- 7.4 The growing skills shortage in the highways industry and increased competition amongst both private and public sector employers for these limited skills only serves to heighten the challenges. Given the attraction of careers within the growing service and retail industry, this competition will only become more acute.

## **8. Leadership**

- 8.1 Finally, it is critical to emphasise the important of leadership in achieving gender equality. Research<sup>3</sup> has identified:
- The symbolic importance of the sex of the organisation's leaders. The fact that there is a woman leader and/or chief executive can hold high significance for the organisation and the community.
  - Good gender relations are reinforced by the modelling behaviour of managerial and political leaders, both men and women.
  - A clear consensus between senior managers and elected members about the importance of gender diversity and equality holds high significance for good practice.
  - An aggressive promulgation of gender equality is generally thought to be counter-productive.
- 8.2 Both E&R and KHS have women on their senior management teams though, like most organisations, there is more work needed to ensure women are truly represented. In addition, a leadership development programme is planned for the new leadership team within KHS. This programme will include

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<sup>2</sup> Kent County Council's Equality Strategy 2007 - 2010

<sup>3</sup> Identified from "Gender isn't an issue", a report into the role of women in local government, June 2005

a focus on their role setting the tone for KHS and modelling the desired behaviour which will promote gender equality.

9. **Recommendations**

- 9.1 The Personnel Committee is asked to note the activity outlined above, to reflect on the challenges and to highlight this work across the Council and its partners.

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