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To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview &
Scrutiny Committee - 12 January 2012

Subject: Expectation Management (Service clarity)

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This brief report outlines an approach to increasing the transparency of the agreed service levels of the Highway & Transportation service. Its purpose is to make clear what we can deliver in these challenging times and to ensure that resources are best targeted and utilised. Accountability, honesty and deliverability are key to the future success of this high profile service area.

1. Introduction

In these challenging times it is essential that Kent County Council (KCC) is clear on the service levels that it can reasonably provide. The Highways and Transportation service (H&T) provides an enormous range of diverse services, many of which are used daily by every resident of Kent. Explaining these services is often difficult and it is important that this is addressed so that our customers are aware and take advantage of our full service offering.

H&T has recently seen a significant reduction in its budget and extensive work has been undertaken to deliver real savings and efficiencies. Two of the largest and most successful initiatives have been the works contract re-procurement (from Ringway to Enterprise) and the KCC staff restructuring and down sizing (down circa 70 posts, i.e. 25%). The success of the savings/efficiency initiatives has meant that the impact on the front line services has been minimal, with service levels being mostly maintained and in some areas improved.

It has become clear from various discussions over the last 12 months, that our customers understand many of the challenges that we currently face, but they do not understand the range and level of services that we provide. There is a clear desire to remove this uncertainty and it would be to the benefit of KCC and its customers for this to be achieved. This paper seeks to explain how H&T propose to address this issue.

2. Managing Expectation

We have embarked on an open and transparent 'expectation management' programme to set out clearly what service level 'our customers' can expect from Highways & Transportation. Priorities must now be clarified more than ever

before, with safety critical matters and programmed asset management remaining of critical importance. The support of Members in this context is essential.

The attached appendices (in draft) are intended to highlight what we do, what we 'have' to do and why. It clearly details the levels of service and resource that are to be provided and form the basis for future communication with our customers. As they currently stand they are not intended to be used in isolation but are provided within this paper to allow detailed discussion and feedback.

Following engagement with Members, we will ensure that information published on the KCC website will be clear on the levels of service that residents can expect and how localism/self-help may be able to assist them. This will also help the Contact Centre in answering more calls directly.

A key benefit of this exercise has been in revisiting why we do things and the benefits/outcomes that our actions have on the highway asset and the users of our service. This will enable us to explain clearly to our customers how and why our decisions are made. Initial feedback on this initiative has already been extremely positive. Informal discussions with KALC, Parish council workshops and County Members have all supported the lead that H&T is taking and agree that transparency and openness are the only way to improve the levels of trust and understanding of our customers.

It is important to ensure that the staff in Highways and Transportation embrace localism and that processes are sufficiently flexible to permit local communities to engage where they wish to do so. This openness and transparency will support the concept of local communities adding value to the services that we are able to deliver and will help to mitigate any negativity surrounding budget limitations.

3. Recommendations

Members are asked to comment on the issues and principles identified in this report.

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