

PEER REVIEW

1. The Peer Review team's membership was:

Lead Peer - Jason Russell (Surrey County Council)
Member Peer Cllr. - Nick Chard (Kent County Council)
Senior Officer Peer - Owen Jenkins (Oxfordshire County Council)
Senior Officer Peer - Andrew Martin (Dorset County Council)
Senior Officer Peer - Martin Pollard (Local Partnerships)
Senior Officer Peer - Scott Tompkins (Gloucestershire County Council)
Review Manager - Ernest Opuni (Local Government Support Team, (LGA))

2. The findings of the review and areas highlighted for consideration were as follows:

Context and Priority Setting

3. The Council has a clear strategic vision and has been on a consistent journey for several years. There is strong political and officer leadership and there is an effective approach to achieving vision, with transition before transformation. The transition to a unitary authority has been managed effectively, and achieves a balance between county wide and local priorities.
4. Members are supportive of the service. There is a strong Cabinet Member, with cross party support and recognition of where the authority is with contract change and issues.
5. Area Boards and Community Area Transport Groups (CATGs) are effective at enabling local ownership, decision making and influence. An area where delivery has improved significantly in recent months is with regard to the smaller sites where there is localised damage and potholes. These can be particularly difficult because they often need road closures and diversions to enable the works to be carried out safely. Programming these works, and integrating them with works by others on the network, is a challenge, but good progress is now being made.
6. Clarity is needed about how the wider Council vision and transformation cascades to the highways and transport service. It was recommended to consider the development of a clear vision and strategic outcomes for the service, linked to the Council's priorities, and supported and understood by all stakeholders. There are opportunities to align/link wider service activities (maintenance, congestion, resilience, procurement) with economic growth and social value agenda (apprenticeships, local suppliers etc.).

Planning and Performance

7. The case has been successfully made for investment in the infrastructure using an asset management approach and methodology. The development of long-term depreciation modelling for key assets has started. Opportunity to create benefits for communities from being a unitary authority has been realised through asset transfer and service delegation and communities are involved in decision making through Area Boards.

8. Consideration should be given to the development of a performance management framework to underpin delivery of strategic outcomes. This can assist in expectation management and effective benchmarking. Depreciation modelling is still to be rolled out to all assets to enable long-term prioritised lists to lead to longer term programmes. And consideration should be given to development of service improvement plans to achieve key service objectives (e.g. DfT's Band 3 self-assessment rating, winter service transformation).

Enablers

9. Harnessing the knowledge and energy in local communities has led to improved outcomes and additional funding.
10. There are many skilled and knowledgeable people in the service with a clear positive intent amongst staff and partners to ensure the service is successful. There is a positive and effective relationship between Members and Officers, with strong and capable senior political leadership which gives clear and consistent vision.
11. The service should recognise and plan for the risks associated with the significant challenges faced over the coming months, including contract mobilisation, service reviews and restructuring, and delivering a major infrastructure pipeline.
12. Highways Service has a lean organisation, reliant on key individuals in business critical roles. Consideration should be given to capacity, succession planning and development needs.
13. The service has to ensure IT systems support integration and workflow and feedback.
14. Effectiveness of the supply chain management is effective and Client role in managing new model should be examined and ensure there is a shared understanding between Members and Officers of contract and performance management.

Delivery

15. The service has managed the termination of the highways contract and the very challenging procurement of the new contract effectively. Service Delivery Teams are an effective vehicle for collaboration between the partners.
16. The Highways Service has successfully delivered LEP schemes on time and to budget.
17. Local delivery and decision making is effective, with Area Boards which have devolved decision-making and increased community involvement.
18. The reinstatement of the Parish Steward scheme, which further empowers parish councils and communities, is welcomed. The CATGs help to manage local expectations, allowing local communities to resource, influence and deliver services.
19. The service needs to ensure it fully understands the benefits and cost of each stage in the delivery process, and fully realise the potential in the supply chain and further utilisation of early contractor involvement. Contract performance management needs to be aligned with the service performance management framework and stakeholder expectations. Option for further innovation should be considered.