

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

07 March 2011

Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure

Part 1- Public

Matters For Information

1 KENT HIGHWAY SERVICES REORGANISATION

Summary

Kent Highway Services (KHS) is currently going through a considerable phase of reorganisation. The report considers the potential implications for joint working on highway, traffic and transportation matters by the County and Borough Councils.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The County Council is currently going through a reorganisation of its overall structure. This will inevitably have an effect on Kent Highway Services (KHS) and, as a consequence, it has potential implications for the County and the Borough Council, in our joint working arrangements.

1.1.2 I have already reported on this matter to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board and what follows is a refresh of the advice I offered to the Board at its recent meeting. This followed a useful discussion with a senior County Council officer in which aspects of the changes critical to this Borough were highlighted.

1.2 Broad Implications for Joint Working

1.2.1 We do have some insight on the scope of the review and the context in which it is taking place. The broad strategy is set out in the County Council's 'Bold Steps for Kent' and KHS priorities are contained within the 'Medium Term Financial Plan 2011-13' (MTFP). The major factor driving the strategies and budgeting exercise is, of course, the Comprehensive Spending Review and the provisional Local Government Financial Settlement that included significant reductions in local authority grants.

1.2.2 More detail on what this implies for KHS in future years is contained in the budget report considered at the Environment, Highways and Waste Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (POSC) meeting held on 18 January. At a practical and common sense level, it is clearly prudent at a time of severe financial constraint that maintenance of the assets that already exist must have some priority over expenditure on new infrastructure. This is one of the stated aims of the County

Council's strategy in its MTFP and it implies ring-fencing of this and some other parts of KHS's current operations. This is likely to have a significant impact on the shape of KHS that emerges from this current review because ring-fencing at a time of financial reduction in budgets inevitably amplifies the effects on the other unring-fenced parts of the business.

- 1.2.3 Consequently there is a risk that work areas where we work closely with KHS might be disproportionately adversely affected in the service reorganisation. The areas I have in mind range from servicing this Board, where Members have consistently been keenly interested in traffic and highway improvements, to other areas such as Development Control analysis where the quality and timing of advice on highway issues is critical.
- 1.2.4 With the scale of the financial reductions envisaged in the budget papers, it would be unreasonable to expect anything other than some reduction in the resources for design work on small improvements. Therefore it will be important that we do not lose momentum in the continuing liaison work for the Medway Valley Public Transport Strategy or for the improvement of West Malling Station forecourt and dealing with traffic and transportation improvements in Tonbridge. We are also interested in what impact there might be on joint action to deal with fly-posting and on transportation modelling for the Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells 'hub', if indeed this concept continues to have any status with the demise of the South East Plan.
- 1.2.5 The County Council is focusing strongly on current and future service arrangements in the Kent Integrated Rail Franchise, as demonstrated in the lead it is taking in the Kent Rail Forum discussed elsewhere in these papers. This is a focus that the Borough Council will wish to support through the current reorganisation of KHS especially as the specification for the next franchise is expected in draft form some time later this year. The County Council's commitment and capacity to take a lead role in this process will be vital.
- 1.2.6 From the advice I have received, it does seem that the Member Highway Fund (MHF) is going to become the more significant means of funding local highway improvement schemes over the next few years. I believe this will be a catalyst for closer working between County and Borough Members through the JTB to ensure that the reduced amount for highway investment is targeted as best it can be.
- 1.2.7 I have been assured that work areas critical to the Borough Council are equally so to the County Council and that this will become clearer as the new structure emerges. This will happen over the next few months and I understand that new arrangements need to be introduced and established as soon as this summer when a new major maintenance contract will replace the current one with Ringways.
- 1.2.8 Thus, the items of critical importance to the Borough Council have been explained and emphasised to those carrying out the reshaping of KHS. We can but wait to see what happens in practice and seek to steer matters through this Board.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 Nil for the Borough Council.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 None for the Borough Council direct.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 There is a risk that Borough Council work and services might be less well supported in the new KHS structure and these concerns have been aired appropriately with KCC officers.

Background papers:

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Nil

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