

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

22 February 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 further phase of reorganisation. The report considers the potential implications for the Borough Council

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The County Council is currently going through a reorganisation of its structure. This will inevitably have an effect on Kent Highway Services (KHS) and, as a consequence, it has potential implications for the Borough Council, be it directly in carrying out our own services or indirectly as a result of its impact on our local community.
- 1.1.2 We do not yet have any direct information from the County Council on the emerging changes. Nor have we had an opportunity through consultation to express views on the relative importance and priority of what is being proposed to our own services such as Development Control and in achieving transport arrangements in the Borough. However, officers at KHS will be briefing us shortly on the reorganisation and I hope to be able to share an oral update with the Board on the night of the meeting.

1.2 Implications for the Borough

- 1.2.1 In the meantime, 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).
- 1.2.2 Driving the strategies and budgeting exercise are, of course, the Comprehensive Spending Review and the provisional Local Government Financial Settlement that included significant reductions in local authority grants.
- 1.2.3 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.

- 1.2.4 From the figures already published in the POSC report, it would seem that work areas close to the interests of the Borough Council might be disproportionately adversely affected in the service reorganisation. The areas I have in mind range from servicing the Joint Transportation Board where Members are keenly interested in traffic and highway improvements to Development Control responses where the quality of advice on highway issues is critical. I am also concerned that resources in design work will be lost which could reduce the ability of KHS to best bring forward future small improvement projects that could themselves be funded in a variety of ways.
- 1.2.5 Related matters are the continuing liaison work on the Medway Valley Public Transport Strategy, improvement of West Malling Station forecourt, dealing with the needs of Tonbridge when so much of the current focus of KHS is on Parish Council liaison activity. 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.
- 1.2.6 The County Council does appear to have a strong focus 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 surely wish to see continued in the reorganised KHS especially as the specification for the next franchise is expected in draft form some time later this year. There does appear to be a tangible eagerness from the County Council, Borough and District Councils in Kent and rail user groups across Kent to work together to ensure that the Department for Transport is under far more scrutiny this next time around than it was for the current franchise. The County Council's commitment and capacity to take a lead role in this process will be vital.
- 1.2.7 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, judging by the report that went to the POSC on 18 February. In these new circumstances, I am sure the Board will want Borough officers to work closely with colleagues in the County Council to assist in identifying and progressing suitable MHF schemes.

- 1.2.8 With all of these elements in mind, we will be seeking information from Senior County Council officers on what is being proposed and the likely timescale for implementation. The new maintenance contract that replaces the one with Ringways is likely to be a critical factor in the programme and the new contract is planned to be up and running by 1 September this year.
- 1.2.9 It is perhaps too late for any significant opportunity to influence the direction of the current KHS reorganisation but I consider there is merit in making our views known on what we consider important for the quality of the work we jointly carry out and get involved in.

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 the action proposed in the report is aimed at ensuring we make the County Council aware of these concerns.

1.6 Policy Considerations

- 1.6.1 Community

Background papers:

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Nil

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