

Partnership approach pays off in Blackburn

An integrated approach to highways asset management has revolutionised the Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's highways operations. Since its inception in 2009, the Highways Asset Management Integrated Service (HAMIS) project has already saved the council £0.8m and is expected to save over £2.9m by 2016. Shoaib Mohammad, Director, Capita Symonds looks at how the scheme has developed.



Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Capita Symonds have been working together in a strategic partnership since July 2001. The partnership provides the full range of highways and property services with the traditional consultancy services sitting within Capita Symonds; and operational elements of the service being retained by the council and delivered through their Direct Services Organisation (DSO).

In the summer of 2008 Capita Symonds undertook a thorough review of the entire service to understand how the structures, processes and relationships affected outcomes. This review identified issues in the end to end delivery process that meant that the ultimate goal of improving the condition of the local road network would not be achieved unless the historic, albeit relatively minor, problems and barriers

associated with the consultancy and operational teams were resolved.

STRATEGY

Capita Symonds subsequently developed the concept of an integrated service that would, for the first time, bring the consultancy and operational teams together under the sole banner of HAMIS (Highways Asset Management Integrated Service).

The HAMIS team was governed by a joint partnership board with Capita Symonds formally seconded its director into the council as the Head of Highways to lead the new team. The strategic objective of this service was to deliver private sector outcomes within a public sector environment through focusing on the following areas:

- Risk Management: There were certain health and safety

concerns which highlighted a need for comprehensive training to be delivered to all operatives. This training was focused around safer working practices, materials and delivery methods.

- Greater Efficiency: The outputs delivered by the operational teams in the years leading up to the review were found to be below that of their private sector equivalents. This inefficiency resulted from a number of areas but was primarily focused around utilisation of labour, plant and materials, together with a lack of performance management.
- Quality: The outputs on site sometimes fell below the required standards. The contributory factors fell between both the consultancy and operational teams with the major pitfalls being the need for tighter, more relevant and appropriate specifications from designers and higher quality workmanship from deliverers.
- Growth: The HAMIS approach enabled the operational teams to deliver a broader scope of works. The subsequent rise in projects would in turn enable the team to grow while generating more opportunities for current employees.

OBJECTIVES

The HAMIS initiative was targeted with achieving £2.9m of efficiency savings over a six year period which

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equates approximately to 20% saving of the overall highways budget. These efficiency savings were to be generated by:

- Plant – rationalisation of the fleet and optimisation of the delivery programme;
- Materials – more effective procurement;
- Staff – increasing staff productivity to generate capacity through:
 - Effective programming to reduce staff 'down-time';
 - Enhanced job scheduling to ensure plant selection is optimised;
 - Up skilling of staff to increase capability;
 - Integrated management of resource;
 - Shared data platform;
 - Putting in place effective performance metrics;
- Growth – Delivering work previously contracted out from the additional capacity;
- Sub-contractors – rationalisation of suppliers.

CHALLENGES

There were of cultural barriers which had to be addressed, often through simple methods such as co-location and team development. There were also more complex issues such as the

varying employment terms which had to be addressed through strong leadership and an integrated management team.

RESULTS

Since 2009 HAMIS has saved the council approximately £330,000 in efficiency savings in its first year of operation (2009/10) and is on target to achieve over £400,000 in financial year 2011/12.

It has also reduced fleet costs by 25%, resulting in a 61 tonne carbon reduction; increased workforce productivity by 26% (against a target of 15%); and increased planned maintenance from 27% to 57% (against a target of 36%), demonstrating a huge improvement in planning and asset management and a reduction in reactive maintenance.

The technical keys to its success have been establishing a long term delivery programme of works; the introduction of the latest technology including GPS handhelds that enable highways inspectors to register defects and instantly order repairs; better co-ordination with other council services that affect the highways such as drainage works; new systems such as live works

databases; and allocating maintenance 'gangs' to specific neighbourhoods.

In terms of facilitating the necessary behavioural change then establishing good communication within the new team has been vital, along with allocating roles to staff based on their strengths while ensuring that all team members know exactly how they are contributing towards achieving our joint objectives.

Overall, the HAMIS project demonstrates that achieving private sector efficiencies in a public sector setup is possible through an 'insourcing' model which has enabled all stakeholders to retain full commercial and budgetary transparency – while avoiding TUPE transfers and any redundancies – as well ensuring maximum cashable savings for the local authority.

Shoaib Mohammad
(shoaib.mohammad@capita.co.uk) is
Highways Director at Capita
Symonds.

