

Why HMEP matters

Ralph Stobart, principal consultant at Habanero Consulting, discusses the work of the Highways Maintenance and Efficiency Programme (HMEP)



I want to start with a couple of well-worn phrases: 'Many hands make light work' and 'A problem shared is a problem halved'. The reason that we have all heard these phrases is that there is an element of truth in them. Why is it then that as all local authorities come under increasing budget pressure an area that is often reduced or even cut quite early is that of working collaboratively with other authorities?

I believe that this is short sighted and want to take this opportunity to publicise the work of the Highways Maintenance and Efficiency Programme (HMEP) in the field of collaboration, and to exhort local authorities to resist any temptation to not get involved.

The HMEP strap line is 'By the sector for the sector'. Its purpose is in essence to promote the sharing of knowledge and good practice across the sector. This is primarily achieved by the development of products that are built on the experience of some authorities and then made available to all authorities to use - sounds to me like a good definition of public service - the sharing of good practice rather than all authorities having to develop it for themselves at an increased cost to the public purse. That is not to say that people don't have to learn their own lessons for the learning to be most complete, but rather that they can get a 'leg-up' to accelerate that learning. This kick-start can reduce the learning cycle by months if not years, with the result that the public purse is saved millions of pounds at the earliest possible



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opportunity. This is an outcome that I am sure we would all applaud.

How do we achieve this kick-start to learning, or more pointedly how do you? The answer is just by getting involved. HMEP has a wide network of advocates across the country and for all parts of the industry, both in the public and private sectors.

HMEP has already developed a number of products for the sector and is in the process of developing others. These cover subjects such as standard contracts, advice on procurement, asset management and sharing services across organisations. You can read about them at the HMEP website www.dft.gov.uk/hmep.

Getting lean

One of the more recent HMEP initiatives is the development of a lean toolkit for the sector. I have written about lean many times in this magazine so will say no more than remind people that lean is a change method that supports authorities to develop services that deliver improved customer service at a reduced cost, and that this is done by focusing on those activities that create

value for customers and removing those that don't. A very simple example is that if we fix defects right first time we don't have to keep re-visiting and re-fixing the same defect many times and don't have to pay for it over and over again.

I should confess that we are supporting HMEP to develop the lean toolkit, and the reason is that we believe that it will provide the kick-start to learning that I have already mentioned.

The lean toolkit is a combination of practical 'how to' guidance based on what has worked in the sector and case studies that illustrate the cost savings, customer service improvements and team morale and ownership improvements that have been achieved by your peers. The lean toolkit has been drafted and is currently being piloted by a number of local authorities - *The HMEP lean toolkit* is expected to be published and available for all authorities at the end of 2013.

If this was an end of term report for highways authorities I suggest it would say something like 'shows promise but could learn more quickly'. So please do take the opportunity to contact your HMEP advocate. ●