

# From potholes to place

Steve Godwin, director at Habanero Consulting, discusses moving away from a locality based approach to highways



**I want to challenge you to move from salami slicing to fundamentally rethinking how you can deliver services in a joined up way. This will save you money and help to deliver better local services.**

Lord Heseltine has set out the case for localism in *'No stone unturned in pursuit of growth'*. He makes a case for a rebalancing of priorities from central to local government to allow leaders to create growth for their own communities. So how do highways need to respond to this new thinking? Many authorities have already done much work to make their highways operations more efficient but budgets continue to be cut deeper and deeper so how can highways now meet this new challenge – not by continuing to salami slice. The challenge for highways now is to cross silos and make more radical change to transform **“from potholes to place.”**

Authorities are now moving to whole street focus (hedge to hedge) and whole town focus. This allows them to do the right thing for the street, to only do it once and to make significant savings while delivering better local outcomes. So why isn't everyone doing this already – the benefits are huge but you need to break down traditional silos and fundamentally challenge ways of working. This means creating cross-functional teams for a local area – they should have all the skills and equipment to fix whatever they find 'right first time'. They need to be able to

fix potholes, repair slabs, repair signs, clean graffiti, kill weeds and much more – essentially to tackle anything that the street needs. These teams have strong links into the local community and their priorities are based on local needs. The teams communicate directly with communities and local members so cutting out all the back office handoffs and much waste in the process. They engage local people in caring for their local environment and creating a safe and attractive place to live which teams and residents can take pride in.

## Authorities in action

Some authorities have already been getting their teeth into this.

In Sandwell the leadership team mapped all the visits to streets over time. They saw teams revisiting the street many times but not fixing the root cause. They also saw many specialist teams coming to the street to perform work in silos. Despite all these visits the street didn't look good! So they changed their approach to create a multi-skilled team who own the whole street hedge to hedge and do whatever it takes to get it right. The director of highways said: **“The team were empowered to take ownership and autonomy and encouraged to work as ‘one team’. If they identified something they couldn't fix there and then, they coordinated works to be dealt with appropriately, rather than left, and this allowed them to complete all works in a street ‘right first time’. I'm looking**

**“They need to be able to fix potholes, repair slabs, repair signs, clean graffiti, kill weeds and much more”**

**forward to continuing to build on the momentum and enthusiasm this work has bred.”**

In Shropshire they started in reactive maintenance – reducing the cost per defect from £80 to £18 at the same time as reducing the end to end time for repairs from 38 to eight days. They have increased the scope of their work and have implemented a hedge to hedge approach with gangs looking to do whatever they can while they are in an area. They have moved on to a radical and exciting whole town focus – joining up services across all of the public sector.

The public sector is recognising that working in silos is expensive and isn't delivering for the public. As the public sector transforms the way it works to deliver localism and to meet budget challenges we will all need to think about how we can respond to make this happen. We look forward to exciting times ahead. ☺

## Shropshire reactive maintenance results

### Cost per defect (£)

Before

After

£80

£18

### Repair time (days)

Before

After

38

8

