

## CASE STUDY

Name: Mark Stevens

Job title and organisation: Assistant Director Operational Highways, Suffolk County Council

*Suffolk County Council has a population of just over 750,000, with a highway works revenue budget of £10.3m and a capital allocation of £33.2m for 2019/20.*

*Suffolk has been one of 12 authorities involved in Proving Services' Future Highways Research Club since February 2014. The Club had come up with a 'route map' for future highways services after identifying ways to transform how highway services are delivered. Suffolk and Proving Services used this map as the basis for a new Highways Transformation Programme, which was launched in January 2016.*

*Mark Stevens explains how Proving Services has transformed the way Suffolk works and the efficiency of the service provided with its partner, Kier Infrastructure Services.*

"In October 2015, our Scrutiny Committee was close to suggesting that the highway services contract be torn up and Kier was seriously looking at how much of the contract had to be seen out. A failing master-servant relationship between the two organisations meant that employees were desperate for a change. The blame culture was quite poisonous and our existing systems and processes strangled innovative thinking and practice.

"But with support from Proving Services, just two years later in November 2017, we were awarded ISO44001 the Collaborative Business Relationship Management standard that few organisations have achieved.

"The Highways and Transformation Programme consisted of six themes. The *Contract Management Workstream* dispensed with punitive operational performance measures and established a new outcomes-focused performance management framework. Joint objectives, behaviours and values were defined, merging the separate traits of both organisations and creating the foundation for a more positive culture.

"The *Finance Workstream* reduced the number of people commissioning works from 180 to just 23 and streamlined processes and controls. The *Programme Management Workstream* improved investment in the local road network and the forward planning of works. A risk-based approach was adopted that prioritised the scale of the defect against the extent to

which it would be encountered. Intervention criteria were defined for all forms of highway infrastructure defects under seven different timescale categories and the draft Well-Managed Highways Infrastructure: Code of Practice was used to overhaul the confusing and inconsistent application of timescales.

“New highway infrastructure policy, strategy and plan documents were developed and prioritisation processes for preventative maintenance works were defined through the *Asset Management Workstream*. Old area budgets were consolidated for county-wide, asset-led utilisation and longer term schedules of works were identified.

“Annual programmes of work were shared on the rebranded Suffolk Highways webpages through the *Communications Workstream*. Fleet vehicles received new livery and social media was used to provide daily updates on roadworks, delays and gritting information. Through the *Integration Workstream*, function-based, co-located teams increasingly replaced the area-based approach, improving performance, confidence and morale every time.

“Alongside these workstreams, and after RAG-rating progress against the Infrastructure Client Group’s ‘Alliancing Code of Practice’, we set about improving commercial value. Proving Services undertook a value-for-money assessment, which demonstrated that the new programme had lifted Suffolk from last to second place amongst the 12 members of the Future Highways Research Club. It also identified four further activities that had the potential to help us achieve ‘flagship status’.

“Mutuality Assurance draws Kier and Suffolk more closely together through processes and agreements. Communication and Community Engagement activity is changing the perception of the service and creating a mechanism for Suffolk’s local communities to work legally and safely on the highway network – formally launched in mid-May 2019. Systems thinking is being applied to optimise performance under the Value for Money theme and the Commercialisation and Revenue Generation theme is beginning to offset overhead costs.

“By October 2016, just 10 months after the launch of the transformation programme, our administration extended the contract with Kier to its full 10-year term. In September 2017, the old area highway offices were replaced by three ‘service delivery centres’ in which Kier and council staff are now co-located and fully integrated into one team.

“The new partnership between ADEPT and Proving Services is a great opportunity for more local authorities to benefit from the Future Highways Research Club. Working in collaboration has to be the way forward and we are definitely embracing that.”