

ADEPT Engineering Board meeting notes – July 2023

At its meeting on 14th July, the Engineering Board received a presentation from the Crown Commercial Service (CCS). Whilst the focus was on the support that the CCS can provide local authorities through its various frameworks, it was also clear that there could be stronger links between the CCS and the Direct Services Management Group (DMSG). The DMSG used to play a more prominent role in the past at Engineering Board as it brought together local authorities that ran their own direct service organisations for whom information could, at times, be critical. The DMSG has new leadership from East Riding Council and will be attending future Engineering Board meetings, bringing updates on its work but also seeking wider input from other Board members on key issues – particularly through being able to call upon previous expertise of managing DSOs.

Hannah Bartram gave the Board an update on the progress of Live Labs 2, the progress on which the Board will be following closely in the years ahead. However, Board members also heard that National Highways is updating the Manual of Contract Documents for Highway Works (MCHW) which, for most local highway authorities, forms the backbone of how their respective highway maintenance and improvement documents operate. Whilst updating of documents to reflect modern working practices is always to be lauded, there was great concern that this was proceeding almost under the radar and at considerable pace – with the review planned to be completed within a 4-month window. However, the MCHW is being reviewed on a sectional basis with each section only open for a few weeks for expressions of opinion on the changes being made. This approach came to light through the Bridges Working Group and concerns were raised with Department for Transport representatives at the meeting who did not appear to be aware of this activity.

In terms of updating documents, the Board also received an initial first stab of a replacement Commuted Sums Guidance document. The intention is to replace the County Surveyors' Society's Commuted Sums Guidance, a piece of work led by Shropshire Council. The Board wished to ensure that, as much as possible, the new document covered all aspects of highways infrastructure – particularly as Transport for London had, over a decade ago, led on adding to the original CSS document in relation to traffic signals equipment. The Commuted Sums Working Group will continue to provide further updates on progress at future Engineering Board meetings.