Editorial

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1. INTRODUCTION

The theme for the Association of Municipal Engineers Conference (AME) in June this year was 'Advancing Best Value in the Built Environment'. It has been possible in this edition of *Municipal Engineer* to carry forward this theme under the banner of managing for excellence in municipal services. The edition has quite deliberately taken some of the papers presented at the conference and with assistance from the authors has developed some of the themes raised. In other papers new ideas are introduced and it is hoped that the theme will be continued in discussion papers, which develop and offer examples on the theme of managing for excellence.

2. APPLYING MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES TO ACHIEVE BEST VALUE

One of the major contributions that municipal engineers have brought to the civil engineering profession is the understanding and application of management techniques into complex social and community projects. Within their environment municipal engineers, although not necessarily driven by profit, have to establish best value through a diverse range of behavioural drivers. The need to balance the expectations of the community, the political ambitions of the elected members and still deliver projects and services which are demonstrably good value and of technical and professional excellence demands a complexity of management skills perhaps not equalled in other aspects of our profession.

3. THEMES

Given a broad hand in selecting subjects for papers, the theme of partnering has come through from many authors. Indeed the editorial team is appreciative of all the papers received although in order to achieve a balanced edition some of the contributions around the partnering theme have had to be withheld. This again accords with the interest and debate being received by the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) where, during Autumn 2001, a series of events is being held based around partnering and particularly addressing its shortfalls after some years of experience of initiatives throughout the construction and infrastructure service sector. The repercussions of Egan through *Rethinking Construction* still generate considerable debate. Is the new world promoted through Egan really the sea change it sought to bring or merely rhetoric adopted by an industry unwilling to challenge the government and public sector and so risk rejection in their profit and loss accounts?

The partnering theme is indeed in the title of the very first paper presented. In this keynote paper Alan Crane, Chair of M4I and of the ICE's Engineering Management Board brings us up-to-date with the implementation of the new order. He cites recent examples from the series of demonstration projects put forward by local authorities and championed by the Local Government Task Force (LGTF). Crane offers a useful summary of the route we have followed but goes on to demonstrate through the analysis of key performance indicators (KPIs) the excellent results achieved to date, concluding with four useful case studies to demonstrate his point. In the second paper of this initial couplet, Roy McGregor explains further the work of the LGTF in seeking to deliver the *Rethinking Construction* agenda to local authorities. In particular he introduces us to the toolkit specifically prepared for local authorities to assist deliverance of best value within the agenda.

Having introduced the partnering (or is it 'partnership'—a regular discussion topic in seminars) developed case studies in Dorset, Kent and Devon follow, each highlighting different aspects of the partnering programme and which readers can use to prompt ideas which may suit their own circumstances. It is interesting to note a theme that efficiencies in the early days were driven by the decline in workload brought about by reduced capital spend but that this enforced regime has successfully translated to positive change for good.

The management of the supply chain and obtaining the best value out of supply chain members in a non-adversarial way has become one of the key themes of the new programme. It is particularly appropriate therefore to welcome the paper from Gareth Thomas of the Construction Productivity Network (CPN), which introduces us to the importance that all links in the supply chain are sufficiently robust to guarantee delivery. As a key player in the supply chain learning network the CPN is performing an essential role assisting us to manage change through workshops and positive leadership. The challenge is to extend the learning network culture throughout the supply chain so that maximum benefit is derived. Recent ICE seminars have perhaps demonstrated that we have a way to go before being ready to involve the product manufacturer's end of the chain in the benefits of learning and until we do there will be sub optimal performance.

Gareth Davies brings us back to experiences in securing best value and his paper on excellent management and best value in Luton's approach to managing its parking stock and taking advantage of decriminalised parking enforcement. The management of the administration within the special parking area status within Luton and working towards very ambitious targets offers a sound example to follow. At the same time Luton was not ashamed to take demonstrable best value practices from elsewhere and apply them as appropriate. To recognise that the relative proximity of 33 London boroughs with considerable experience perhaps demonstrates, particularly with local government that there is much to be gained through sharing of knowledge and that some of the joint consultative officer or member panels should be encouraged more. Indeed the theme of the preceding paper on learning networks can equally be applied in the benchmarking process as it can in the supply chain.

Douglas Pigg's paper is another development from conference, and another statement of our possible underperformance. He

asks from the Highway Authority viewpoint whether we are prepared for a performance-based best value future. He challenges us to admit that we are not and that some of the tools we use to measure the performance are not able to meet the future stringent requirements if investment in highways is to be demonstrated as necessary. Government exasperation with inertial in public services and half hearted attempts at partnering are seen as barriers to successful formula funding and through highway investment improving the quality of life for society's poorest members. Another challenging paper inviting your reactions please.

The edition concludes with briefing papers and briefing sheets, which can be used as a reference point for managing for excellence. The editorial committee's thanks to all authors for a stimulating and worthwhile edition, can readers now rise to the challenge of response?