



BUILDING ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUCCESS

Kier Sheffield LLP's acclaimed model for the private sector maintenance of municipal buildings is expanding across northern England. At its core are progressive 'green' principles driven by an environmental management system (EMS) built to ISO 14001 standards. More important still is the ability to understand and interpret underpinning sustainable issues revealed by Fast-Track-14, says Simon Michie, as he helps lay advanced foundations for Kier Building Maintenance North.

Kier Sheffield LLP has successfully broken the mould. Thought to be the largest UK partnership contract of its type between a prime local authority and the private sector, since 2003 the company has added new momentum to the repair and maintenance of social housing, public buildings and refurbishment work.

Its success is spreading across the north of England. Initially projected as a £640 million initiative over 10 years, the unique partnership has catapulted Kier Building Maintenance beyond Sheffield to involve 'Decent Homes programmes in Hull, Sefton, Lincoln, Derby and Doncaster', repair and maintenance works in Hull, Leeds and North Tyneside, Liverpool, Hull, Lincoln and Derby, plus major projects including the construction of new schools.

Behind the partnership's achievements is the Kier Group's commitment to positive environmental management and performance. Working with the company's management team, Kier Sheffield's performance and environmental manager, Simon Michie, has begun to extend continuously improving performance intelligently as his role continues to develop across northern England, drawing on insights gained from participation in the six-month Fast-Track-14 (FT-14) programme.

Learning to think differently

As a professional whose career began with Sheffield City Council's Works Department, he is familiar with both sides of the highly successful public/private partnership and sensitive to the impact of a modern, pro-active environment management system (EMS).

"Substantial cultural changes were involved in moving on from a committee-based local authority department before 2003, which missed many windows of opportunity," he explains.

"The first 18 months were a timetable for us to prove ourselves. We faced new opportunities but to understand them people had to embrace a very different way of thinking. An environmental strategy was clearly key to the business but we needed a sharp focus. Kier Group has a comprehensive environmental policy and was very willing to support us in achieving ISO 14001 and putting a local policy in place within a common structure.

"ISO 14001 was the obvious choice to build our environmental management system around, while always remembering not only to

chase the standard and certification, but also to build a holistic model that improved business performance across the piste."

As Kier Sheffield, a venture between Sheffield City Council and the Kier Group, moves towards a wider regional role, the ability to demonstrate its continuously improving environmental performance is high on the business agenda. The partnership has already won a three-star-rating for services and brought the Council Beacon status for partnering, plus the Local Government Chronicle Award in the Public/Private Partnership category.

"Kier Sheffield has worked with Business in the Community to improve its environmental performance and enters their annual Yorkshire and Humberside Environmental Regional Index. A key part of the index is to have a functioning EMS. Kier Sheffield can now say "yes" after completing the Fast-Track programme. We were in silver position this year in the region and on the way received the 'Significant Improvers & Climate Change Champion Awards'."

Far more than 'framed' credentials

However, Michie has been around long enough to know that rushing for credentials is not an end in itself. "Experience with ISO 9001 taught me that implementation is not as straightforward as many people think when they start, certainly if you want more than a frame on the wall. Any chosen route to ISO 14001 needed to advance our business processes. We had to understand clearly what it could achieve generally and do for us specifically.

"I was sold on the FT-14 system when I first saw the ISO 14001 Toolkit in action at a University of Sheffield management systems seminar. With the peer-group workshops and expert support, including environmental training for staff, it looked even better."

FT-14 was developed by ISYS International, which implements the half-year programme throughout the construction industry in partnership with regional construction bodies and major clients.

Participants work together closely in peer-groups, using a powerful, web-based interactive information and communication resource - the ISO 14001 Toolkit - to access detailed step-by-step guidance, document templates and discussion forums.

Crucially, the online system also means that ISYS - plus senior company executives - can monitor progress constantly, identifying where individual support is needed. Equally importantly, those on the programme share problems and ideas to reach better solutions.

Once a month, participants are supported in local, structured peer-group workshops - known to be enjoyable but demanding - with expert support from ISYS.

By focusing on identifying and controlling environmental risks, FT-14 helps companies to achieve legal and regulatory compliance, while demonstrating environmental commitment to their key stakeholders. Other business benefits include improved resource efficiency, reduced pollution and lower waste treatment and disposal costs. Companies can also enhance their corporate image, creating a real competitive edge as sustainable demands rise.

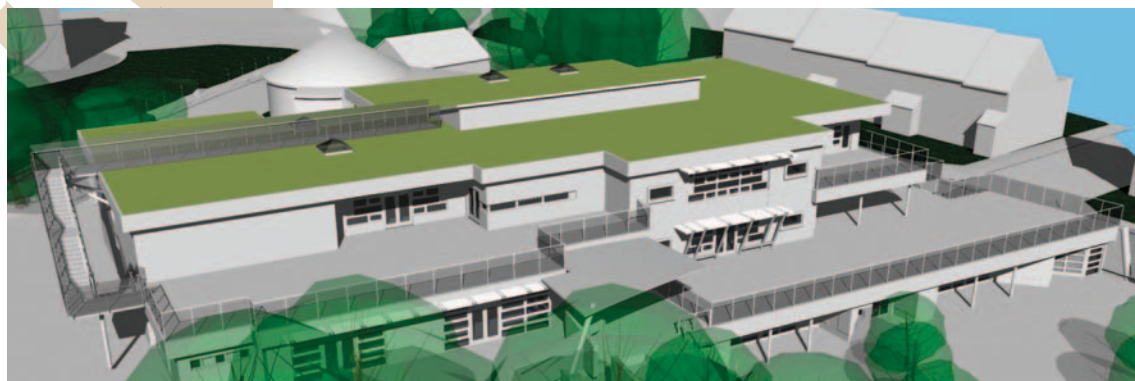


Sharrow School - creative sustainability in action.





Sharrow School initially modelled in 3D. An example of the vision Kier Building Maintenance in the North is keen to realise more widely in the UK with the help of pragmatic sustainable management principles.



FT-14 also creates the framework to support other contemporary management systems, such as Quality (ISO 9001), Occupational Health & Safety (OHSAS 18001) and Investors in People (IiP).

This integrated structure worked for Michie. "FT-14 provides model answers. They may not take quite my approach but the aim was very clear. The FT-14 methodology also means that you don't need to absorb ISO 14001's entire structure in one go. Rather, you create one piece, then another and put the two jig-saw parts together to reach part three.

"However, the key was peer-group workshops. We all met regularly and said what we thought of a particular solution. Effectively, we were all members of an 'implementation club' that widened our horizons and acted as a reality check."

Insights into underlying aims proved particularly useful. "Going step-by-step through the ISO 14001 process meant that everyone could understand clearly what was intended and how it would work. Learning directly from the experiences of previous FT-14 programme members was an additional bonus.

"The ISO 14001 Toolkit was complemented by the workshops where it was good to be under friendly pressure to bring in your assignment 'homework'. Competition may be sub-conscious but it works. Close rapport between group members also generated a lot of email traffic back and forth. The group can tell you if you are going too far in a favourite direction. Don't go global!

"The fact that everyone has a different job creates insights as to how others tackle a common problem and shows issues in totality. I made my input and, in return, regularly collected useful pieces of knowledge from the others. Being able to invite additional colleagues, such as members of the purchasing team and the facilities manager, to relevant workshops, was a further advantage," says Michie.

Executive commitment says it all

Crucial to FT-14 success is a high degree of personal and corporate commitment. "Opting into the programme included an investment in a laptop to operate the Toolkit online, my time and my expenses. I took the detailed proposal to my director who took it to the Board, who supported me fully. The fact that FT-14 requires a signed statement of corporate commitment by the MD also reassured me that I had my company's support from the top."

Importantly, Michie and Kier Sheffield recognise that responsible involvement in the environmental agenda is good for business. Parallel to the programme, the company is acting on climate change priorities to reduce carbon output. As an example, through good route planning, more working from home and a modern maintained fleet of efficient vehicles, the number of company vans on the road has been cut from 600 to 500. Electricity consumption is falling too.

"Succeeding on the programme successfully in six months to put all elements of an active EMS in place has altered daily realities," he adds.

"My life is now clearer, having completed the FT-14 programme successfully. I am focused for changes in the near future. Next, we will be studying our resources and procedures, perhaps tracking how our environmental policy links into strategies for a series of sites. In which ever way we move forward, as the company expands and we start on other sites, we will not be beginning from scratch. The aim will be to continuously refine our system."

Kier Sheffield maintains the 50,000-plus housing stock managed by Sheffield Homes Ltd as well as municipal buildings with 1,100 staff formerly employed by the Council's construction and building services direct labour organisation. Today, it manages more than 200,000 repairs annually, with heavy schedules for painting, heating equipment fits, electrical tests and gas service and repairs. Each year its call centre takes more than 250,000 calls.

www.kiersheffield.co.uk



ISYS

ISYS International Ltd, The Heath, Runcorn,
Cheshire WA7 4QX

t:- **0870 777 1130**

f:- **0870 706 1731**

e:- **enquiries@isys-int.com**

w:- **www.isys-int.com**