

COUNTY COUNCIL

Friday 23 July 2021

Question by Paul Stepto to Susan Carey,
Cabinet Member for Environment

What progress has KCC made in fulfilling its 2030 Climate Emergency Declaration?

Answer

Kent County Council has not declared a Climate Emergency. KCC recognised the UK Environment and Climate Emergency at a County Council meeting on 23 May 2019.

We are working on two targets, an accelerated target for net-zero emissions for our own estate and activities by 2030 and the 2050 target for Kent and Medway as a whole.

We agreed the accelerated target in September 2020 after work from Laser, our energy subsidiary, which identified that it could be achieved with investment of around £27m.

Since then, we have secured over three quarters of the funding we need in Government grant and by March 2022 we expect our present level of carbon emissions to reduce by 40% compared with 2019.

We have been reducing our carbon emissions and measuring progress for some time. Since 2010 we have reduced our carbon emissions by 57% and more detailed information on what we have done and what we are doing can be found on the Council's website.

Work is also under way on natural solutions to Climate Change, adaptation to the change that will happen and improving resilience. Information on this and more is also on the website and in reports to the Environment and Transport Committee, County Council and Cabinet.

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**Question by Mel Dawkins to Roger Gough,
Leader of the Council**

At the last full council on 27 May 2021, Roger Gough, in his leader's speech said that we need to support infrastructure, roads and services alongside new housing developments.

This is relevant to Canterbury where there is significant planned development. I am concerned about the number of homes being required by government, which will require more public services and infrastructure support.

With the above challenges in mind, how does KCC intend to support the infrastructure, including roads and highways around the huge number of houses required to be built by the Central Government in the next 20-25 years, which will be part of the subsequent Canterbury City Council local plan to be finalised next year?

Answer

Thank you for your question Ms Dawkins.

Regarding the potential impact of new development and the need to mitigate pressure on existing services and local communities KCC secures funding for essential infrastructure through the planning process, including S106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Development contributions in law, have to be directly related to the impact of a particular development on KCC services and agreed with District Councils as the Local Planning Authorities. The District Councils have the statutory remit to balance all competing considerations when determining individual planning applications, in accordance with their adopted local planning policies and determine which contributions are necessary for development to proceed. KCC publishes an annual 'Infrastructure Funding Statement' which identifies the funding sought and secured in each District, which may be of interest. Details can be found on the KCC website. I will ask my Staff Officer to send you the link.

However, the current system remains imperfect and the provision of funding for the *total* cost of the infrastructure required to support housing growth remains a long-standing issue across the whole of the country.

Consequently, KCC strongly advocate an "infrastructure first" approach in terms of representations to central government and we are working closely with local authority partners, building upon the 'Kent & Medway Growth and Infrastructure Framework' and individual council plans. In the meantime, whilst central government currently recognise the overall issue through a number of initiatives and funding

streams including the 'Housing Infrastructure Fund' we will continue to work with District colleagues to build the case for successfully targeting these sources.

The proposals put forward by the City Council to address the governments housing requirements within their proposed draft Local Plan are certainly ambitious and the County Council will be making formal comments through the current public consultation. A vision which seeks to free up space within the inner-city area to enable active transport, improve air quality and protect its outstanding world heritage sites is to be welcomed. We will seek to support the City Council with further external funding bids as opportunities arise, so that whatever their final chosen strategy, additional funding is available to reduce the burden on the CIL and Section 106 receipts so that they may be used for all those vital services that you mention.

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Friday 23 July 2021

**Question by Antony Hook to David Brazier,
Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport**

Could the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport please state what assessment KCC has made regarding the road safety in Kent of the Department for Transport's proposal to disapply rules governing how long hauliers may drive for without rest?

Answer

I thank Mr Hook for his question. The County Council has not been consulted on this temporary relaxation. For clarity, it applies from 12 July 2021 and will run until 8 August 2021.

The relaxation includes:

- an increase to the daily driving limit from 9 hours to 10 hours with one of 11 hours (allowed up to twice in 1 week)
- the requirement to take a regular weekly rest period of 45 hours in a 2-week period with an increase to the fortnightly driving limit from 90 hours to 99 hours.

This does not impact the 'Working Time Directive' which applies all the time employees are at work, including loading, unloading etc. These have not been relaxed.

In terms of likely impact on collisions, we have requested that the DfT provide us with monitoring data of previous implementation of such emergency measures. We will also monitor data locally, but over this short period, we are unlikely to see definitive trends.

National evidence suggests that 'driver fatigue' is a bigger issue in the goods vehicle sector than for all vehicles, and a lack of qualified HGV drivers has been a problem for the sector since long before Covid. It is possible that the relaxation of driver's hours could have an adverse impact on safety, but this is unlikely in the short term to be significant. Evidence from Kent shows some 12 collisions and 1 fatality a year where driver fatigue was a contributory factor, therefore in one month the impact may not be noticeable. It should not be recommended as a long-term measure.

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Friday 23 July 2021

**Question by Richard Streatfield to David Brazier,
Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport**

The Department for Transport (DfT) has just announced that KCC is one of 6 local transport authorities shortlisted for the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme, which has a total funding pot of £120m available. KCC has until 30th July to submit a business case. There is strong support in Sevenoaks Town for such a scheme to reduce emissions especially around Bat and Ball and Greatness Park. Could I ask the Cabinet Member whether Sevenoaks is included in the prospective business case and if not, why?

Answer

I thank Mr Streatfield for his question.

Kent has been shortlisted for the Fastrack element of the ZEBRA program. The Kent bid is for electric buses for the Kent Thameside Fastrack BRT scheme and for the Dover Fastrack BRT scheme in development.

The nature of the ZEBRA bidding process requires the local authority involved to be able to submit proposal/business case in a tight timescale and to have signed up partners. The final business case has to be submitted to DfT by mid-August.

As an electric bus scheme for Kent Thameside was already developed and was signed up to by potential Fastrack tenderers, this made it the most appropriate scheme. The Dover Fastrack was included only after Stagecoach confirmed that they would partner on such a bid. The bid is for funding towards the cost of electric buses and the associated charging equipment.

As further funding for zero emission buses is made available from DfT through either ZEBRA or the National Bus Strategy, KCC will be working with Districts and Operators to identify more opportunities to introduce schemes including within Sevenoaks subject to a successful business case.

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Friday 23 July 2021

**Question by Ros Binks to Peter Oakford,
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for
Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**

KCC has been making effective use of remote working throughout the Pandemic and there is now an opportunity to make best use of the Council's office estate to support a positive office environment where it is needed. P&R Cabinet Committee recently considered an update outlining an interim path in advance of KCC's longer term Property Accommodation Strategy, which referenced options regarding how staff might be able to work at County Hall and across the organisation's office estate. Can the Cabinet Member please clarify the expected staff numbers returning to the various buildings at County Hall, how Members will be able to access those staff and also reassure the Council that there will be effective processes in place to ensure that staff maintain the facility to work together as a team, as this is generally acknowledged to have a positive impact on wellbeing and productivity?

Answer

Thank you for your question. I have discussed and agreed this response with the Cabinet Member for Communications, Engagement, People and Partnerships because, as your question highlights, the continuation of a more flexible way of working is primarily concerned with our staff, but can only be truly effective if the right environment and technology is available to them. That is why we are taking steps to ensure the office estate can be made more efficient to deliver the environment and spaces that a more flexible way of working requires and to support the future needs of the organisation.

As you have said, remote working has been highly successful over the last 16 months and KCC staff responded very positively and effectively to having to work differently. Of course, not all our staff are office based - many deliver services directly to and in our communities. The ability for them to do that in an agile and different way is also a key part of the work being done now as part of the Strategic Reset. This programme was agreed by the County Council in July last year and recognises the importance of developing an operating framework, suitable for a modern employer, to deliver the Authority's political objectives. The move to enable our staff to deliver services in a more agile way from the location that is most productive for them and the organisation is key to the delivery of these objectives.

Part of the flexible working approach is for staff to be able to work from any location, including home; alongside partner organisations in their buildings; or from any KCC office or public facing building. Those staff who were previously office based will be able to work in any of these locations – it is not a linear choice between home or their previous office base - and is very different from 'home' working.

In terms of the number of spaces available at County Hall, there will be around 850 in Sessions and Invicta House on any one day after September. The current system of booking spaces will remain in place across the estate to ensure that everyone who wants and needs to work at SHQ has space to do so.

Your question also asks about how Members can access staff. There will be no change to Members' ability to contact staff via e-mail, phone or Teams and, of course, meetings in person as required.

The last part of your questions seeks assurance that staff will be able to come together as a team and I am able to give that assurance. Spaces for teams to come together is an integral part of the planning for the future of our estate. Whether it is for regular team meetings, more formal planning and innovation sessions or social interaction between team members, appropriate spaces will be available.

We have worked consistently throughout the last 16 months to ensure we have listened to feedback from staff about what they need to enable them to continue to provide excellent service and do their jobs productively. As you recognise in your question, being able to meet with their team colleagues and their managers is something that many have missed and we will absolutely ensure they are able to do that going forward in the most appropriate location. Many staff have also fed back that the ability to work more flexibly is something they have really valued and want to sustain. Of course for some it is not appropriate and where an individual's wellbeing or ability to do their job means they need to work the majority of their time in an office/service building, it is a core part of our flexible working approach that they will be enabled to do so. The health and wellbeing of our staff has been and remains our highest priority along with effective delivery of our services to Kent residents.