

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 October 2018

Question by Nigel Collor to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste

With the date for Brexit rapidly approaching we have the following measures to, deal with vehicular freight traffic: Dover TAP, Operation Stack and now Project Brock plus thoughts of using the M26; but little on tourist traffic. Tourist traffic is extremely important as there is more potential for the Dover town area to be well and truly gridlocked as has happened in the past with emergency vehicles unable to get through, bus services disrupted or even cancelled, lifeboat crews being unable to reach their Station and, above all, carers not being able to get to their clients to render assistance plus a greater likelihood of needing to provide humanitarian needs for people in queuing cars and coaches. Will the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste please advise what measures are being discussed to deal with tourist traffic as part of Brexit preparations?

Answer

Thank you, Mr Collor. A number of Operation Fennel multi-agency groups are now meeting regularly; the Strategic and Tactical groups are meeting every month and a Task & Finish Group consisting key members from DfT, Kent Police, Highway England and KCC Highways are meeting every week. One of the key priorities currently being discussed is the issue of tourist traffic and the impacts on Dover.

Following the long delays at the Port in July 2016, the multi-agency group developed a process called Operation Perch to ensure management of tourist traffic into Dover during incidents. The Fennel Task and Finish group is currently looking at updating the Perch document to take into account possible scenarios post-Brexit. The intention is that the plan will need to be updated due to the possible mix of freight and tourist traffic heading to the Port. Once the plan has been amended it will be shared with relevant parties, including Dover District Council.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 October 2018

Question by Antony Hook to Paul Carter,
Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Health Reform

In 2015 Faversham was promised by Kent County Council that if the community raised £125,000, which was quickly done, the Swing Bridge would be rebuilt so that boats could once again pass, creating jobs and enriching our maritime culture. Would the Leader agree that almost four years on it is time for the promise to be fulfilled and a start date for work set?

Answer

The ambition to restore the Faversham Swing Bridge, lockgates and dredge the basin, goes back many years and to the best of my knowledge is as follows:

The ambition for restoration gained momentum some five years ago, through the activity of several community groups who had the vision and saw the potential of restoring the basin to its former glory. This would allow boat owners to moor in the basin, enjoy the town and in addition, be a valuable tourist attraction. The community formed a steering group incorporating the already established Faversham Creek Trust.

Kent County Council very much wanted to support The Faversham Creek Trust and the Town Council in their vision.

David Brazier, the then Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste agreed to Mark Dance's request (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) for Capital funding. KCC set a Capital budget allocation of £450,000 which was subsequently increased to £510,000.

The Faversham Creek Trust raised £125,000.

Swale Borough Council pledged £200,000.

Faversham Town Council pledged £170,000.

In 2015, we were advised that the estimate for the work was circa £1.2million and all looked very promising as the budget broadly matched the estimate.

In 2016/17, design and procurement took place, culminating in final tenders being in the order of £2.6 million for the bridge restoration plus an additional £200,000 to repair the lockgates.

This was an exceedingly disappointing outcome and we needed to reflect on how we could solve the gap funding.

It was at my instigation, working alongside officers in Economic Development, that we researched the obligations placed upon the harbour authority, Peel Ports. We sought a QC's opinion, which indicated that Peel Ports have obligations to restore the bridge to enable it to open and function as a Swing Bridge, including the lockgates.

Peel Ports have been advised of the legal opinion, and we are awaiting their full response. Various reminders have been sent, which culminated in the 14 October 2018 with a response and I quote from the letter from Peel Ports Group: "I can assure you that we are actively working on the matter, but that Peel Ports will not be forced into a formal response until a thorough and robust legal review has been undertaken".

I believe that Kent County Council has done everything in its power to try and see this restoration undertaken and completed, and we will continue to work tirelessly with the community, alongside the MP for Faversham and Mid Kent Helen Whatley who is also doing all she can to further the cause. I am planning to attend a Public Meeting on this matter on 29 November. We are happy to keep the relevant Cabinet Committee's informed as to progress.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 October 2018

**Question by Dan Daley to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste**

In February's County Council meeting, the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste informed the council that he would, as soon as possible, look to introduce an option of payment via monthly instalments for the Young Person's Travel Pass. However, to date this is still not being offered, meaning households only have the option to pay a single sum of £290, or two sums of £145, which not everyone can easily afford. In the event that there are two young persons to be paid for then, of course, the problem is doubled. Would the Cabinet Member please clarify when the option of payment via monthly instalments will finally start being offered to Young Person's Travel Pass applicants?

Answer

The potential to introduce direct debit monthly instalments for both the Young Person's Travel card and the 16+ Travelcard is being reviewed including how such a system could work, its costs, timescales and risks to parents, students and to KCC. Current work indicates that moving to a monthly direct debit system could incur additional administration costs and therefore work is continuing with a view to conclude by the end of the year.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 October 2018

Question by Rob Bird to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste

The current roadworks between junctions 3 and 9 on the M20 and the lane closures and narrow lanes frequently result in the motorway being closed for several hours at a time when there is a collision, or a large vehicle breaks down. These closures are having a devastating impact on traffic congestion in Maidstone and much of Mid-Kent, causing huge problems for residents and businesses in the area. Does the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste agree that this congestion is totally unacceptable for Kent and will he please set out the steps being taken to prevent gridlock becoming the new normal whenever Operation Brock is invoked post Brexit. In his reply, will the Cabinet Member please state whether he is satisfied that the Government, Highways England and Kent Police have the necessary and appropriate arrangements in place to keep traffic moving throughout the County?

Answer

Thank you, Mr Bird. The current roadworks between junctions 3 and 9 on the M20 are having to be completed to very tight deadlines set by the DfT. Road closures as a result of collisions are now a regular feature on all roads in the county due to ever increasing level of traffic. KCC works with partners to ensure suitable diversion routes are signed during longer closures. However, on most occasions there is no time to sign a diversion and drivers use local knowledge and sat-navs to find alternative routes, which in turn adds to local congestion.

KCC are actively involved in the Kent Corridor Coordination Group, working with Highways England and their contractors to find the least-worst times for coordinated closures, and where possible minimise the impact of the closures on the residents, businesses and visitors of Kent. The KCC Street Works teams are constantly liaising with Highways England's contractors to try and agree dates for works which would have the least impact on local traffic.

As for when Operation Brock is invoked, as you know Mr Bird, officers are working closely with all partners to agree how traffic management will work post March 2019.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 October 2018

Question by George Koowaree to Roger Gough,
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

Would the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education please inform the council what the process is from the point of accepting unaccompanied 16 and 17-year olds from overseas to placing them into accommodation within the community? Please include within your answer details of what kind of support will be available to them?

Answer

Children's Social Work Services have a dedicated team of experienced social work staff who work closely with UK Immigration and Visas, Kent Intake Unit and partner agencies to manage the arrival in Kent of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who are new to the country. Once accepted, the Service Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (SUASC) Team will undertake a screening interview to ensure the young person's immediate welfare and ascertain any immediate issues to address. The SUASC Team will then notify the Home Office and undertake a best interest rationale to confirm placement suitability in Kent and allocate a qualified experienced social work Senior Practitioner to each young person. Unless young people are aged under 16, are female or there are safeguarding issues, all 16 and 17 year old males are then placed in Millbank Reception Centre. Our care package consists of a daily education programme, independent skills classes and daily leisure activities to help them integrate in to the community for when they leave the reception centre. The allocated senior practitioner will complete the Children and Family Assessment to identify any needs and support, then prepare an individual Care Plan, which is reviewed by an independent Reviewing Officer as part of the statutory Looked After Children procedures. All young people are also supported with undergoing an independent health assessment.

Refugee Council and other partner organisations visit young people and provide intervention and support, whilst we will also ensure a young person is supported with their immigration status application and is offered a solicitor to support them.

When placed at Millbank Reception Centre, all young people are supported with a key worker, who is responsible for overseeing individual day to day needs and being a point of contact for the young person and professionals. We also undertake community trips and activities to help with integration for when they leave. We want to ensure all young people have this good quality support whilst in the reception centre and are able to develop independent living skills and basic English to support their transition in to the community. We expect young people will remain in the reception centre for an average duration of 8 weeks, before moving into shared accommodation.

In 2016 the Home Office established a voluntary National Transfer Scheme with the support of Kent due to the significant disproportionate numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) arriving in Kent and not being transferred nationally. This

scheme seeks to achieve the safe transfer of UASC away from local authorities that are looking after more than 0.07% of UASC to their total child population as quickly as possible. Kent has recently dropped below that 0.07% and have retained the care of young people within the county; however, where we rise above this figure, we will again join the NTS and transfer young people nationally.

A contract has been commissioned to source shared accommodation across the whole of Kent for the young people who are supported to move into it. Once this property is secured and made available, subject to our standards and expectations in providing good quality community accommodation, the SUASC team will allocate young people to that accommodation, ensuring where possible the continuity of friendship and ethnic relationships to enable young people to live with people they know.

The SUASC team prepare the transition arrangement for the young people to move from Millbank to the community shared accommodation and a social work assistant will take the young people to the accommodation and meet a representative of the accommodation provider to agree and sign Tenancy Agreement. Young people are supported with the provision of an essential living allowance and Looked After Children statutory arrangements to support and manage their care.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 October 2018

Question by Peter Lake to Roger Gough,
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

Why has the Council withdrawn the dedicated school bus from Edenbridge to Sevenoaks resulting in as many as 20 children now having to stand for over an hour on a scheduled commercial service?

Answer

The Council has a policy in making use of existing public transport (bus and rail) services to transport children entitled to free home to school transport. Where this is not available or appropriate we will hire in dedicated transport services in the form of coaches, minibuses or taxis. Although there has always been a bus service from Edenbridge to Sevenoaks, previously the number of children entitled to free transport to school meant that, when added to those paying a fare or travelling on a Young Person's Travel Pass, they exceeded the available capacity. Thus historically a coach service has operated.

However, the numbers of children entitled to free transport to school traveling from Edenbridge to schools in Sevenoaks has fallen significantly in recent years and from September stood at 12. In the past this stood closer to 50. The previous contract expired in July and the reduced numbers have allowed us to instead make use of the KCC subsidised bus service 404 at a total cost of approximately £9k per annum. The previous contract for the hired vehicle was £47,500. I regret that some children do need to stand on the service, but the DfT consider this to be safe practice on bus services.

If there is any evidence that the numbers standing exceed the safe limit then this is of course another matter that I would be happy to discuss with Mr Lake. I know that this issue is a cause of concern to him and his constituents, and I am due to meet him tomorrow with officers to discuss it.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 October 2018

**Question by Ian Chittenden to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste**

Would the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste please advise whether Kent County Council had been made aware through the recently formed KCC / Highways England liaison group or by other means regarding the closure of the M26 in preparation for a 'no-deal Brexit?' This is of serious concern bearing in mind the extent of confusion over the last nine months around Maidstone and other areas close to the M25 because of Motorway closures, both planned and unplanned. Would the Cabinet Member please include within his answer whether KCC consider the risk of traffic chaos will increase substantially as a result of three major projects being taken in parallel, namely Operation Brock, Smart Motorways (junctions 3 to 5) and now the M26 preparations for Brexit?

Answer

Highways England notified KCC Streetworks of the intention to close the M26 on 14 September due to part of the Kent network being used as diversion routes for these works. There was no reference to reasons for closure, such as Brexit. As part of Strategic and Tactical multi-agency groups, working on traffic management plans for March 30th 2019, KCC has been made aware of the M26 being considered by DfT and HE as a possible option.

As stated in my previous response to Mr Bird, the current programme of works on the M26 and M20 have tight deadlines imposed by DfT. KCC, as part of the Kent Corridor Coordination Group is working with Highways England to ensure where possible work on the Kent motorways and trunk roads is coordinated and publicised to minimise the disruption for the residents, businesses and visitors of Kent

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 October 2018

Question by Trudy Dean to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste

I would like to thank the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste for including the work carried out on footways in his latest breakdown of highway repairs. Could he please now provide a breakdown of the extent of outstanding footway repairs, and at the current rate of expenditure, what the expected timeframe is for the elimination of the backlog of footway repairs for each Kent district?

Answer

Thank you, Ms Dean. The data for the value and extent of footway repairs is not recorded on a District basis. During the last few years, an average of £1.4m a year has been reactively spent repairing footway defects.

Data from the 2017/18 footway condition survey is still being assessed. However, from the 2016/17 footway condition survey, the percentage of the footway network considered to be in a poor condition is 33.1%, an increase from 32.7% calculated in 2015/16.

It is estimated that the current maintenance backlog for footways is in the region of £84m. Our current modelling for the next 10-year period shows that to maintain the current level of backlog would require investment of £5.5m per annum.

A paper on highways asset management is being prepared for discussion at the January 2019, Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee.