



COUNTY COUNCIL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

14 July 2016

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Question 1**COUNTY COUNCIL****Thursday 14 July 2016****Question by Mike Harrison to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

There are many faded road markings and damaged directional and information signs in the County. Some of the road signs in my division have been awaiting repair/replacement for many months and in some cases years. Some of these signs are clearly marked proving that we, KCC, are fully aware of the situation. I fear that there are a number of traffic accidents waiting to happen on our roads where faded road markings or damaged signs would be deemed to be a contributory factor. There must surely be some sort of repair and maintenance programme in place for these signs and road markings.

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport be kind enough to explain (in laymen's language so that I can explain it to my residents and Parish Councils) just where we as KCC members and KCC Highways stand with regard to the legal position with the complete failure of Road Markings and damaged Road Directional/Information signs which appear never to be renewed or replaced, especially if there was an accident?

Answer

KCC Highways undertake Highway Safety inspections at pre-determined timetables across the whole of the county and to every adopted part of the network. These inspections are at intervals ranging from monthly to annually depending on the category and status of the road and footway.

Highway Safety Inspections identify defects within the highway that are beyond intervention limits and signs and lines are included in these inspections.

Generally we will replace lining when more than 50% is worn however each location will be subject to its own safety considerations. Similarly we will renew / replace signs when they are so damaged or obliterated they become a highway safety issue. Unfortunately pressures on revenue budgets do mean that we can only deal with the highest of priorities. However I am pleased to say that in support of addressing the very necessary sign cleaning and lining work our latest Find and Fix campaign for highways repairs is also attending to these issues.

In addition to the highway safety inspections, our teams of Highway Stewards and Engineers work with the District Managers to identify and maintain all highway assets on a priority repair basis. These repairs are either identified through normal day to day operations or are identified via customer enquiries.

If there are any specific locations for signs and lines or indeed any other highway defect that require an inspection I would recommend these are reported directly to the highways department. This can be done via the Contact Centre or preferably directly by utilising the on line reporting tool on Kent.gov. Utilising the on-line tool will ensure there is a tracked record of the customer enquiry and that the enquiry finds its way to the correct highways officer for investigation.

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**Question by Rob Bird to Roger Gough,
Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform**

“Schools are making increasing use of the Internet and both primary and secondary school children are routinely expected to access the Internet for homework. This council has just undertaken a comprehensive review of social mobility issues in Kent's education system and the select committee has made some valuable recommendations. However, a number of children are potentially disadvantaged by the lack of Internet access or a computer at home. Can the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform please advise how many primary school age children in Kent do not have access to the Internet at home and, if this information is currently unavailable, would he arrange for this information to be collected from the county's primary schools?”

Answer

Kent County Council does not hold data detailing the home internet access for primary age children and there are no specific figures published indicating the internet access for homes that have school age children. However, national statistics suggests that around 85% of homes nationally have access to the internet (Ofcom 2015) and whilst separate figures for Kent and the South East are not published, the South East is generally 2-3% higher than the national average.

Theoretically it would be possible to collect data concerning the home internet access for primary age children; this would require all Kent primary schools to complete home internet access surveys with their parents and the completed surveys that would need to be collected and collated centrally. However, this would potentially be an extremely labour intensive process with results that would have a very short shelf life, as family circumstances change and children move through their school lives. It would also be challenging to discriminate between the types of internet access available at home and the levels of disadvantage due to the commonplace use of large smart phones and tablets that access the internet using 3/4G services.

In general, Kent schools provide very good pupil access to the internet within their support structures, with breakfast and after school homework clubs well established. Many schools have the facilities to offer pupils loaned laptops and tablets to assist their learning outside of the school. The free use of internet and computing facilities are also offered by the network of Kent Libraries.

It is also of note that Kent County Council is investing £32.6M of public funding to improve internet access. This is not intended to deliver access to more homes, as virtually every home in Kent can already access the Internet, but focusses on improving the speed of accessing the internet. The initial intention is to improve speeds to a minimum of 2Mbps for every home and business and the aim is to achieve a minimum of 24Mbps to 95% by summer 2018.

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Question by Mike Eddy to Paul Carter, Leader of the Council

“Although the current French Foreign Minister has recently refused the request of the Mayor of Calais, made in the light of the EU referendum vote in this country, to revoke the bilateral agreements between France and Britain and thereby remove British frontier checks from Calais, has the Leader and the Cabinet Members of this Council given any consideration to the possible impact of such a revocation on the social, health and police services of this county?”

Answer

I recently attended a meeting on Asylum and funding matters with the Second Permanent Secretary at the Home Office, Oliver Robbins and specifically asked this question surrounding the Le Touquet agreement. Le Touquet treaty was contracted between nations, not regions, which means that it would require the authority of the French national government (rather than the Mayor of Calais) to repeal it. It is not dependent on membership of the EU.

The French government does have the legal power to terminate the treaty but there would need to be a two year notice period before the change came into effect. The last article of the treaty of Le Touquet grants the two signatory powers the option of terminating the treaty by informing the other party in writing through diplomatic channels.

France and the UK governments have worked very well together in establishing juxtaposed controls as at Calais and there seems to be an ongoing commitment that this should continue. However, since the Referendum result it is true that calls for the ending of the treaty have increased, including by some prominent candidates for the 2017 Presidential elections. In light of this it is right that consideration should be given to the impact of revocation in Kent, accepting the two year notice period.

In Kent we will continue to work closely with the Home Office.

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Question by Roger Truelove to Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

" After June 23rd, how confident are you that Kent will achieve its target of £100 million investment from European Regional Development and other EU funding sources?"

Answer

"BREXIT' poses a threat to meeting this target, the risk is difficult to quantify at present because the implications of a departure during the mid-point of the programmes are still unclear. On the one hand, the UK's Partnership Agreement with the European Commission (setting out the planned use of European Funds between 2014-20) may be viewed as a contractual obligation to maintain current programmes for the full period, or at least until the conclusion of withdrawal negotiations. The UK government will have a period of two years to negotiate a withdrawal agreement once Article 50 of the EU Treaty has been invoked, and would be likely to end in late 2018 assuming negotiations begin this autumn. Particularly given the complexity of the process it might be necessary to extend this period, although this would need to be agreed between the UK and all other Member States.

On the other hand, the UK's financial commitment to the programmes could cease before then or a moratorium might be imposed on any new bids. In the meantime, we will continue to deliver EU-funded projects that have already been approved and contracted, and we are actively pursuing opportunities in the current round of EU funding to support further projects which deliver against Kent priorities."

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Question by Brian Clark to Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

“Given that the all-party Lords Science and Technology committee raised concern in April that the substantial EU research funds, currently available to the UK, would not likely be covered by future governments if Britain left the European Union, can the Cabinet Member for Economic Development explain the steps he will be taking to ensure that the expanding scientific sector in Kent does not suffer long term impact as a consequence of the recent referendum result?”

Answer

“I have read this report. I quote from the report’s summary:

‘While the UK science community was enthusiastic about EU membership, we have uncovered some qualifications. We heard mixed reviews on the impact of EU regulations.’ The report also said ‘many assertions to this enquiry about the UK’s success in winning EU research funding conflated performance in securing Framework Programme funds (the last being FP7) with the overall level of EU funding for R&D in the UK. The UK strong science base makes the UK one of the top performing nations in the EU where scientific excellence determines success in funding competitions. But that is only part of the picture. When the total level of R&D funding is considered, the use of Structural Funds for R&D in less prosperous parts of the EU shifts the distribution away from the UK, moving this country down the funding league table.’

But Mr Clark makes an important point and I shall be writing to the Science Minister when a new Cabinet is formed by the new Prime Minister to highlight Kent’s success in having a strong Bio-Science industry and the four Kent Universities which make an important contribution to the UK’s world leadership in research.”

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Question by Martin Vye to Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport

“Will the Cabinet Member for Environment Highways and Waste inform the Council why KCC Highways have still not produced a workable scheme for enabling traffic to enter and leave the Thanington Park development in Canterbury, despite the fact that permission for the development was granted by Canterbury City Council in January?”

Answer

Mr Vye will know that Section 106 planning agreements which often contain the detail of these things take a great deal of time to complete. The Agreement for this site was signed on Friday 1st July 2016.

The access arrangements are that the A2 London bound off slip will be relocated south west and lengthened such that the end of the slip road will be positioned approximately 100m to the south east of Cockering Road and 190m south-east of the A28 corridor. A signal controlled junction will be provided at the end of the new slip road and this will provide access to the site and a new two-way link to the A28 corridor to the north. The link to the A28 corridor to the north will, in effect, be formed through a widening of an existing section of slip road and conversion to two-way operation.

Further vehicular access will be provided onto Cockering Road at the north boundary of the site. It is proposed that two access locations will be formed, one to the south of St. Nicholas Road and one just to the east of Strangers Lane. A new route will be formed between the two access locations on Cockering Road within the site.

Pedestrian access will be available at each of the vehicular access points described above as footways will be provided alongside each of these. The existing PROW passing north/south through the site will be retained, enhanced and formalised within the built development. In addition, a pedestrian and cycle route will be provided under the A2 by using the existing farm underpass which will be enhanced with lighting, surface treatments and better quality approaches to be more suitable for regular pedestrian use. This will provide a route between the site and the Hollow Lane/Homersham corridors. Phase 1 of the works will deliver the accesses off Cockering Road by 2019 and Phase 2 will deliver the new access point off the London bound A2 slip road by 2021, subject of course to the development being built out in accordance with the submitted phasing plan.

Mr Vye can easily ascertain these details from officers.

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Thursday 14 July 2016

Question by Pam Brivio to Paul Carter, Leader of the Council

"I am sure the Leader of the Council join with me in condemning the post-referendum increase in racist and xenophobic hate crime attacks in various parts of the Country. Will he please outline the actions that this Council can take to tackle hate crime?"

Answer

Kent County Council fully and unequivocally condemns any act of racism, xenophobia or hate crime. We are proud to live in a diverse and tolerant county. Racism, xenophobia and hate crimes can lead to division in our communities and should have no place in our society.

The co-located Kent Community Safety Team, made up of staff from Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service and KCC's Community Safety Unit have already been in discussions with district and borough colleagues in relation to any potential post referendum racist and xenophobic hate crime attacks. In addition to this, community wardens have been made aware of the issues and are especially diligent to any signs of such behaviour. It is also of vital importance that schools remain vigilant in raising awareness to tackle hate crime. A joint message has been agreed with Kent Police and Headteachers at Kent schools have received a letter highlighting the importance of identifying and reporting hate crime to the right channels.

Fortunately, the early indications are that Kent has not seen the increase demonstrated in other parts of the country. However the council, through that unit will be working with the police and partners to monitor the situation closely. We will also be working to raise the awareness of hate crime and to encourage the public to report any incidents.

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