



COUNTY COUNCIL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

8 DECEMBER 2016

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COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 8 December 2016

**Question by Mike Harrison to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport enlighten members and our residents with a clear and concise answer to the complex question as to just who is responsible for brown road signs?

Can he include within his answer information on where the responsibility for granting permission to erect/install the signs lies and who is responsible for the 'on cost's, maintenance, up-dating and when necessary replacement of them.

I am fully aware that Motorways and some Trunk roads are the responsibility of Highways UK. Which leaves as far as I can ascertain KCC as the responsible body for the many hundreds of these Brown Signs across the county. However, this does not appear to be the case which is why I am asking for a clarification as to just who is the responsible body i.e. 'Visit Kent'? These Brown Signs are very important to many of the small business's struggling to make a go of it and to enhance the good things to be found all over the county. Perhaps if we knew for sure where the fees end up we might have the answer?

Answer

Brown tourism signs are applied for and fully funded by the requesting business including any maintenance, replacement or changes to the signs after installation. Signs can only go on A and B roads.

Visit Kent is the first point of contact for these sign requests. They check the applications against tourism guidelines and, if the application meets the criteria, they forward the application to KCC Highways and Transportation team who send a full list of the design costs to the applicant explaining what they need to pay and when.

Once the design is finalised the customer is advised of these costs. They can then make the decision whether to proceed or not. We do not carry out any work until payment has been received.

If a sign is knocked down or damaged KCC would remove it and not provide a replacement until the business applies again.

KCC do not subsidise these signs. The only exception would be if a business has closed permanently and the signs are now redundant.

All this information can be found on the Visit Kent Website.

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Thursday 8 December 2016

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

It is understood that the Government has a Sustainability and Transformation Plan in dividing the NHS in England into 44 areas or footprints. Already a number of local authorities have released details for public consultation.

Can I ask the Cabinet Member whether KCC has received details of the NHS Sustainability and Transformation plan?

Answer

NHS England has required all local health economies to produce plans that demonstrate how the NHS and its partners, including local authorities, will implement the provisions of the Five Year Forward View that was published in October 2014 and incorporated into the Conservative Party's election manifesto in 2015. 44 areas, based on the interdependencies of local health and social care services, were identified and they have been working together to produce the Sustainability and Transformation Plans referred to in Mr Latchford's question.

Drafts of the plans have been submitted to NHS England in April, June and October 2016 for their endorsement. The Kent and Medway plan was formally published by the NHS on 23rd November.

The STPs must demonstrate how health and social care services will be delivered to meet the challenges of both quality and affordability faced by each area. Central to the plans for Kent and Medway is the development of "new models of care" that provide a much greater range of treatment in the community, primarily through GP and related services, and which will improve the care people receive whilst reducing the need for hospital admissions. The most conspicuous example of a new model of care in Kent is that being developed by Dr John Ribchester at Estuary View Medical Centre in Whitstable, which is one of the national Vanguard initiatives.

KCC has been deeply involved in the STP process and has had strong representation on all the relevant boards and working groups involved, including the STP Steering Group which provides overall direction for the plan. Progress on the STP has also been reported regularly to the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board.

Through this involvement we have forcefully argued the case for increased integration between health and social care as well as the need for greatly expanded and improved care "out of hospital". This will be essential both to improve patient care and to the ongoing financial stability of our hospitals. The sustainability of social care will be critical to the success of any STP and our representation has allowed us to raise the profile of social care and emphasise its importance to the whole system.

The STP for Kent and Medway is still “work in progress” and while it describes the direction of travel and general approach, much of the detail is still evolving. The next stage will be a far more detailed explanation of the need for our system to evolve to meet the new challenges it faces. This is planned for January next year.

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Thursday 8 December 2016

**Question by Brian Clark to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

*Will the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport outline steps which the County Council will take to ensure that vehicles are not displaced into Kent for use in public transport or commercial services from London as a result of extended **low** emission zones in the capital and that the areas of greatest pollution in Kent also benefit from a statutory roll out of ultra-low polluting vehicles?"*

Answer

Within the rules and regulations governing the operation of bus services Kent County Council has no formal control of the type, and size of the buses bought by operators. We can influence through the services we directly contract and also through our partnership working, but as 97% of all service mileage is commercial, that influence is limited. In respect of ex London buses being used on Kent supported bus services, please note such vehicles could be of a better emission rating than the vehicles they replace.

The authority fully supports the steps being taken to improve the air quality of the UK, by targeting vehicle emissions. Within Kent over the past 12 months, Stagecoach has introduced the first Euro 6 service buses to Kent, in the Thanet/Canterbury areas. 55 of these double deck buses have been ordered. A further 30 Euro 6 minibuses will be introduced by Stagecoach to Ashford by the end of 2016). The introduction of new vehicles to the Kent bus fleet by other Kent bus operators is expected in 2017 and this will help improve air quality.

Finally, in respect of statutory ultra-low emission zones for pollution hotspots, we will work with our district colleagues where such schemes are proposed, to ensure that they not only deliver the air quality improvements desired but can be done so sustainably.

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**Question by Michael Horwood to Graham Gibbens,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Can I ask the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health what the County Council is doing to support community pharmacies in Kent and especially in my Swanley division?

Answer

KCC recognises and indeed supports community pharmacies in Kent and in Mr Horwood's division of Swanley.

Early this year I became aware of proposals made by the Department of Health to reduce funding to community pharmacies in England and together with the support of Mr Gough, Chair of the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board (KHWB) and indeed the KHWB wrote jointly to the Minister of State for Community and Social Care outlining our concerns of the potential impact particularly on pharmacies that serve rural villages and those who live on the fringes of urban communities, I am especially concerned about the impact on the vulnerable and elderly.

More recently, following a pause by central government, it became apparent that proposals to reduce funding were indeed to be implemented, we again wrote to the Secretary of State for Health outlining KCC's concern of the impact on access to pharmaceutical services as I've outlined previously, seeking a re-consideration of proposals.

Disappointingly the proposals were implemented at the beginning of December and we continue working with the Kent Local Pharmaceutical Committee to monitor the impacts.

KCC through the Public Health Grant also supports Kent community pharmacies through commissioning of specific health improvement services such as sexual health, NHS Health checks, stop smoking and healthy weight services. Public Health have also championed across Kent the Healthy Living Pharmacy initiative with over 100 accredited pharmacies which will help access to the proposed Pharmacy Quality Payments thereby supporting income.

I am happy to provide more detail to all Members as part of the regular Members Briefings should Members wish.

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Thursday 8 December 2016

**Question by Brian MacDowell to Roger Gough,
Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform**

Recent press coverage indicates that a school playing field is sold off every two weeks.

How many school playing fields in Kent have been lost over the last 10 years?

Answer

Any sale of a school playing field requires consent from the Department for Education. In order to gain this consent, the playing field must be surplus to requirement; and all funds must be reinvested in school or community sports, or in some cases education.

KCC has sold 7 school playing fields across Kent in the last 7 years. KCC's Property Department were not able to confirm with any certainty how many sites were sold for the 3 years prior to this as this data had been archived prior to data being migrated onto its new Asset Management system.

In each instance of sale the playing field was sold as part of a school closure along with the buildings themselves.

The capital raised from the 7 sales I referred to has contributed to the construction of 19 new schools on new sites with supporting playing fields, as well as a wide range of existing sports facility upgrades and community sports facilities.

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Question by Martin Whybrow to John Simmonds, Cabinet Member for Finance and Procurement

Does the Cabinet Member for Finance and Procurement accept that KCC's messages to Kent's residents to stop smoking are hypocritical all the while we continue to hold shares in tobacco companies as part of the council's direct treasury investments?

As part of his reply could the Cabinet Member confirm whether it is time to review our investment fund, which makes up only a small part of our overall treasury policy, and to move away from investments that are in direct conflict with KCC's public health remit and other strategic policies?

Answer

I am interested in this change of attack from Mr Whybrow who after making no progress at all on the Pension Fund now seems to have turned to the Council's treasury funds.

To get the facts right on 25 November the Council had £305m on deposit and of this £5m, or 1.67% was invested in the Pyrford Absolute Return Fund which is also used by the Pension Fund.

The use of the Pyrford fund was an early part of our diversification away from bank deposits to achieve a higher yield. The fund has returned 5.5% per annum since we invested in 2012.

One of the reasons we use the Pyrford fund is that it has a very cautious investment approach and we need to be prudent with treasury cash and it only invests in cash, bonds and equities. Equities account for 30% of the fund and BAT is the third largest equity holding in the fund but accounts for only 1.7% of the total fund and the KCC proportion invested in BAT is £85,000.

I have to say that I see no reason for disinvesting completely from a fund which we would have to do which is an important part of KCC getting income from its cash investments to help our overall budget position.

At various stages mainly in connection with the pension fund, we have received protest letters about investments in tobacco, oil and gas, minerals, alcohol, private health care and companies involved in armaments. There would alas be very little left to invest in and these companies do provide a significant return. Our first responsibility must always be to the pensioners, and our council tax payers.

**Question by Lee Burgess to Gary Cooke,
Cabinet Member for Corporate and Democratic Services**

With the recent news that a large number of schools contain asbestos in Kent and that 12 KCC employees have brought cases against the council, 8 of which have led to pay-outs totalling £842,958. What steps are being taken to ensure the safety of the pupils and parents in these schools and our workers across the whole of our estates?

Answer

Could I firstly thank Mr Burgess for the question as it provides a further opportunity to reassure parents that the safety and security of their children while attending Kent maintained schools is our number one priority and I am confident that our schools provide both a safe environment for our children to learn and for our staff to work.

The payments you refer to relate to historic cases of people who worked at KCC establishments in the 1960s and 1970s with their resulting claims being brought some 30 years later.

Today we are more knowledgeable about the risks that asbestos can pose and we have comprehensive policies and plans that ensure that those risks are properly and appropriately managed across the whole of our estates.

We conduct and have in place a rolling programme of asbestos management surveys in accordance with HSE Health and Safety Guidance Document HSG264 "Asbestos" The Survey Guide, on all KCC buildings.

These surveys identify where asbestos exists or may exist not only within the schools but also our other buildings. All our schools are provided with copies of the reports and we also provided guidance to the schools.

We are not however responsible for independent schools or for academies although we will always support these organisations should they request our assistance

Finally – members should be reassured that should we become aware of a situation where asbestos is posing a threat to the health and wellbeing of pupils or staff or visitors by virtue of disturbance or deterioration, then we will act and will ensure that the material in those circumstances would be removed under strict control conditions.

I trust this provides you and the County Council with assurance that KCC has adequate policies in place to ensure the effective management of asbestos in all its buildings.

**Question by Rob Bird to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

Heavy rainfall in Maidstone quite often results in the roadway at the foot of the Broadway being flooded, compounding congestion in the area. Furthermore, in extreme conditions the subway also floods making it very difficult for pedestrians to cross this busy road.

Despite these matters being raised repeatedly with officers for many months and years, there appears to be no permanent solution in sight.

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport please give his assurance that these issues will be properly addressed once and for all, and provide a time-frame for completion of the necessary works?

Answer

The most recent flooding at the foot of the Broadway in Maidstone was caused by a blockage in the drainage system as it enters Southern Water's Surface Water Sewer. Arrangements were made to attend to the problem overnight and the blockage was successfully cleared.

We are continuing to work closely with Southern Water to resolve this issue but this has been delayed due to the Maidstone Gyratory Works as the surface water is flowing down Rocky Hill and overwhelming the drainage system at the bottom of the Broadway. The highway drainage system is now clear but until the main carrier pipe has been fully cleaned there may be some further problems in periods of heavy rainfall. We are liaising with Southern Water about a suitable slot for them to undertake their inspection and cleaning but this may now not be until after the Christmas period.

Regarding the subway our Drainage and Structures Asset Team advise that the existing pumps have all been repaired but we are looking to upgrade the drainage system within the subway to make it more robust and resilient. As this may require additional reinforcement within the subway structure, we want to ensure we fully investigate and plan these works carefully. However, we are confident that all works can be completed within this financial year, subject to the results of the investigatory work. I will ask that they keep you informed of progress.

**Question by Pam Brivio to Roger Gough,
Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform**

I understand there are delays of up to three months for an appointment with an Education Psychologist for diagnosis of conditions such as Dyslexia, is the Cabinet member for Education and Health Reform able to explain why and what steps are being taken to remedy the situation.

Answer

We do not recognise a delay of three months in accessing the Educational Psychology Service. However, if Mrs Brivio has a particular case in mind, where there has been a delay of three months, then I would be happy to look into this.

The work of the Educational Psychology service has two distinct parts.

It provides psychological advice, as part of the statutory Education Health and Care Plan assessment process which is commissioned by KCC's special educational needs department.

It also offers a traded service to schools through a service level agreement, which they are able to purchase should they choose to. Arrangements for visits by an educational psychologist would be made with the school in a timely way, which is normally within six weeks.

Where a school does not have a service level agreement, there is the availability of a "pay as you go" service. The availability of this is dependent on the capacity of the service at the time.

**Question by Ian Chittenden to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport please say how much money has been allocated by the Chancellor to each of Kent's Districts under his £1.3bn road improvement plan, and say more specifically what he plans to do in the light of those allocations to ensure to ease congestion in Maidstone where there is gridlock on all road approaches and a clear need in the south for a southern link road?"

Answer

In the Autumn statement, new funding of £1.3 billion was announced to help support infrastructure projects on the UK network. I can confirm the following investment in Kent: a 'Local Highways Maintenance – Pothole Fund' of £2.196m. £175m is being made available for 'Road Safety' nationwide and two roads in Kent were highlighted as being of concern, A252 and A290. Bids to this road safety fund will be invited in due course.

An additional £1.1bn will be allocated for local highway improvements under the banner 'Congestion Busting and Repairing Roads'. Further details will be announced in due course. We will submit bids accordingly.

With specific regard to Maidstone, I can confirm that we will continue to progress work to establish the justification for a Leeds-Langley Relief Road between the A20 and A274. This work will be completed ahead of the scheduled first review of the emerging Maidstone Borough Local Plan by 2022 in order to assist decision making on whether such a scheme should form part of the mitigation necessary to support housing and employment growth over the period beyond 2022 to 2031. Until the outcomes of the review are known the County Council has maintained that major development in the south eastern sector of Maidstone should not come forward due to the severe impact it will have on congestion on this part of the highway network.

I will of course let you know about any announcements that affect Kent's' roads.

**Question by Mike Eddy to Roger Gough,
Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform**

Can the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform inform the Council of what discussions he or officers have had or plan to have regarding the future of the former Walmer Science College site once it ceases to host the Goodwins Academy's upper school in September next year?

Answer

On the closure of Walmer Science College, the decision was made to retain the site for future educational use. This remains the position.

Goodwin College (the former Castle Community College) is due to move into its newly built premises during the summer break in 2017. The Academy Trust will then return the Walmer buildings to KCC.

Officers have commenced discussions with the Enterprise Learning Alliance (the PRU provision in Thanet and Dover) about using some of the buildings on site. Enterprise Learning Alliance provides education and support to KS3 and KS4 pupils who require an alternative curriculum approach to that received in mainstream secondary schools. Enterprise Learning Alliance supports Dover pupils in a small number of premises in the Dover District and it is felt that the facilities on the Walmer site might better meet their needs.

Currently "Your Leisure" operates the School's sports hall as a public facility outside of school hours. Discussions will take place with Your Leisure about future arrangements. KCC will continue to consider other options to ensure the site is used effectively to deliver a range of educational and community functions in the local area.