



COUNTY COUNCIL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

26 January 2016

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COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 26 January 2017

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

My question to Mr. Balfour, as the Cabinet Member with the word Environment in his Portfolio heading, relates to the proliferation of advertising hoardings both on land adjacent to both ours and Highways UK highways. Not only are there more and more of these but a new device is being exploited which in my humble opinion is very dangerous. This is the placement of redundant farm machinery/trailers or large advertising vehicles with huge banners or signs advertising local business's which are then positioned on the flyovers crossing the motorways! Once again in my humble opinion they create a bigger distraction than a glance at a mobile device.

I would like to ask Mr Balfour is whether it is possible for KCC to approach those responsible to get this practice stopped, after all it is a form of Fly Posting and there are rules and regulations regarding this?

Answer

I do sympathise with Mr Harrison's views. The parking of a vehicle on the public highway for advertising purposes is not permitted. The Local Authorities, in this instance, the Districts and Boroughs have powers under various Acts to deal with this. If the vehicle constitutes an obstruction on the highway and a safety concern, the owner may be contacted to remove the obstruction. If the problem persists, the Authority may serve notice to have the obstruction removed.

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Thursday 26 January 2017

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

Does the Cabinet Member agree with the Department for Education that Academies are more accountable than those schools under local authority control and in the light of this has he gleaned any further information about the academy chain which pulled out of a number of schools in Kent (2 on the Island) due to financial issues?"

Answer

I would not agree that Academies are more accountable than schools under local authority control. The Local Authority maintains very clear and robust oversight of KCC maintained schools in relation to their performance, outcomes for learners, governance arrangements and financial management. The Local Authority knows its schools well and responds promptly when there are areas for concern and priorities for improvement.

There are now two separate financial regimes that operate quite differently for maintained schools through the Local Authority and through the Education Funding Agency for academies. Academy Trusts are companies with charitable status, accountable to their Boards and the Secretary of State (partly through the Regional Schools Commissioner and the EFA). Local Authority schools are accountable to the Kent County Council and its Elected Members. There are specific additional accountabilities for Diocesan schools within both frameworks. This system of multiple commissioners and funders – notably the RSC and the EFA in addition to the Local Authority – blurs responsibilities and tends towards a centralised national system at the expense of local accountability.

In spite of this, the system has generally been made to work. However, recent experience in Kent with some Academy Trust arrangements has given cause for concern. For example, the collapse of Lilac Sky Trust gives some cause for concern that the EFA did not have sufficient monitoring and measures in place to identify what was going wrong until too late. Very little information about the Lilac Sky Academy Trust has been made public by the DfE or its agencies but we are aware that all nine schools within the Trust across Kent and East Sussex had been led into serious financial deficits due to the amount of top slicing of the schools' budgets by the Trust. We regard this kind of behaviour as profoundly unacceptable for a public body which is accountable for public money and the education of children through its management of a number of schools. We understand that the EFA are conducting an investigation into Lilac Sky's historic operations including financial management and that in future there will be more effective oversight by the EFA and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

There has been, therefore, a question about whether the EFA, as the responsible agency, is adequately resourced to discharge its duties fully. At the same time it does not possess the local knowledge or intelligence that the local authority has amassed over many years in carrying out its oversight of schools. KCC uses its expertise to help schools manage,

take the necessary actions to avoid and sometimes recover from financial challenges. The EFA is not structured to respond in the same way.

In conclusion KCC would maintain that its schools are more accountable and better supported than many academy schools, while at the same time stressing that in Kent we work closely with all schools to support their needs and help respond to any difficulties that emerge. Where we are aware that academy schools are in difficulty with their finances or where there are performance issues, we raise these concerns with the Regional Schools Commissioner and the EFA. In a sense this means that the Local Authority continues to contribute to the monitoring and accountability system for academies.

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Thursday 26 January 2017

**Question by Gordon Cowan to Peter Oakford,
Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services**

Is it true that this council is only providing funding to managers for Children's Centres until September 2017?

Answer

I can advise that there are no proposed savings in the current Medium Term Financial Plan in relation to Children's Centres, and Children's Centre Managers are not facing any reductions in relation to staffing or budgets.

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Thursday 26 January 2017

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

“At last October’s County Council meeting my colleague, the member for Maidstone North-East, asked the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport when all the sawn-off streetlight columns would be removed. The Cabinet Member stated that “overdue removal jobs should be completed by the end of December”.

Nonetheless, there are still a number of sawn-off streetlight columns in my division and I am advised there are others elsewhere in the County. Would the Cabinet Member like to revise his earlier answer and give council members a firm date for the removal of all these dangerous eyesores?”

Answer

Thank you for your enquiry regarding the removal of sawn off street lighting columns in Maidstone. Our contractors had informed us that all outstanding works would be completed by the end of December. They haven’t met these timescales and I can only apologise for that.

I understand that Richard Emmett, our Street Light LED Project Manager, has contacted you and you have given him some specific locations which my officers will chase. We are continuing to investigate the outstanding works and will let you have programme dates when they are available.

In the meantime if you have any further specific locations then do not hesitate to let my Planned Works Team Leader, Wendy Boustead know, either by emailing Wendy.Boustead@kent.gov.uk or by calling her on 03000 413539.

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Thursday 26 January 2017

**Question by Trudy Dean to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

A planning application has been submitted for redevelopment of the 100 acre site of the former Aylesford Newsprint, now in the hands of the receiver.

Though the brownfield site has the potential to provide much needed jobs and housing, there has been widespread concern about potential increased traffic generation arising from intensive redevelopment, compared to the previous use of a highly automated paper mill.

Kent County Council commissioned reports have recognised that local roads including New Hythe Lane and Lunsford Lane particularly at their junctions with London Road A20 are already over capacity, and has already submitted a holding objection to the application.

The Aylesford Newsprint site lies alongside the M20. Will the County Council as Highway Authority now write to Highways England supporting new access and/or exit slip road connections direct with the motorway to unlock the employment potential of this site?"

Answer

The County Council recognises the significance of the former Aylesford Newsprint site in terms of providing much needed jobs and housing as well as the congested nature of the highway network along and in the vicinity of A20 London Road. The Council's holding objection is related to highways issues and potential mitigations which have not yet been adequately resolved particularly given the proposed trip generation which, as currently proposed, is well above that generated by the former Newsprint operation.

As part of the ongoing discussions I can confirm that an additional junction on the M20 has been considered by Highways England, including a left in and left out arrangement. They have confirmed that a new junction would be contrary to national design standards in terms of need and road safety.

Also, Highways England has pointed out that the M20 between junctions 3 and 5 will be the subject of a Smart Motorway project in 2018 creating additional running lanes and safety improvements which would be compromised by an additional junction.

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Thursday 26 January 2017

**Question by Richard Parry to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

Would the Cabinet Member for GE&T provide an update and status report on the Council's project to install LED bulbs in the County's lamp standards and the associated Central Control System.

Could the Cabinet Member's answer include information on the following:-

- *For our County how many lights have been converted and how many are awaiting conversion?*
- *What is the current completion date for the project?*
- *In Sevenoaks District and in particular in the Sevenoaks West Division how many lights have been converted and how many are awaiting conversion?*
- *Will the system of Central Control of individual and groups of street lights be introduced in stages, in those parts of the County where most of the lights have been converted, or will it not be implemented until all lamps have been converted?*

How many and what proportion of newly installed LED bulbs have failed and what is the manufacturer's and/or suppliers expected failure rate?"

Answer

I am very happy to provide Mr Parry with an update on the LED project and in particular the points raised by Mr Parry in his question.

We have 118,000 street lights to convert as part of the LED project. These are split between two phases over a three year period. As of 19th January, in Phase one for minor residential roads we have converted 48,142 lights out of a total of 68,000. This includes 3,266 lights in Sevenoaks. This phase is due to complete in mid-May this year. .

Phase two which covers main roads, town centres and ornate / heritage lights is due to start in May 2017 and convert 50,000 lights and is due to be completed by mid-May 2019.

The failure rate for the new LED bulbs is 0.23%. This is in line with our contract, Bouygues forecasts for the first year of operation, though in subsequent years we expect this to fall to 0.1%. The cost of replace bulbs, in the guarantee period, is met by the supplier.

The Central Management System is operational within a few days of each light being installed. This then give us the ability to control individual or groups of lights as required.

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