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Dear Member

**COUNTY COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 10 MARCH 2022**

I am now able to enclose the questions put and answers given during the meeting on Thursday, 10 March 2022 .

**Agenda Item No**

6                    **Questions (Pages 1 - 10)**

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Watts', is written over a faint, larger version of the same signature.

Benjamin Watts  
General Counsel

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Question 1**COUNTY COUNCIL****Thursday 10 March 2022****Question by Rich Lehman to David Brazier,  
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Two Parish Councils in my division have reported vehicle activated signs in need of repair to KCC, only to be informed that they are not repairable and have an expected life span of just six years. These signs are proven to lower accident rates and can help us achieve our Vision Zero goals, but the cost of installing them can be in excess of £10,000, in part due to the high costs of site surveys.

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport explain why KCC is installing equipment that is not repairable or designed to last longer than six years? In answering this question, please can the Cabinet Member clarify why it is necessary for KCC to charge Parish Councils for a new site survey if a vehicle activated sign is installed at the same location as a previous sign?

**Answer**

Thank you, Mr Lehmann, for your question.

There are a considerable number of these assets across the county, often installed to remind motorists of the prescribed speed limits. These signs are not safety critical items, non-mandatory and not enforceable and they must also now only be used after all other engineering measures have been implemented to address known speed issues.

This is a change from the initial national guidance when these were first implemented 20 years ago, as the proliferation of the equipment has made them less effective as a long-term safety tool.

The current supplier provides equipment that benefits from a six-year warranty, although we try to extend this for as long as possible, most signs exceed this by a considerable duration. However, whilst these are maintained and repaired by our existing maintenance contractor, there is no budget allocation for their automatic replacement as a non-safety critical asset. If signs become faulty and cannot be repaired then they are removed from site, but the fixing post is left in situ should a replacement be pursued by the parish council or local Member.

All requests follow the process as for a new proposal, even if there has been equipment installed previously, and will require a full speed survey to demonstrate the scale of any speed issue. This ensures that the location of the equipment is appropriate to address any speed issues and allows the site to fully consider any changes in the highway and its usage since the original scheme was deployed. This will allow changes such as more development, changes in parking conditions and the like to be considered.

It is worth noting that in a 30mph area the signs activate at 35mph, in line with police enforcement thresholds, so a significant proportion of traffic would need to be exceeding this for the device to be effective. If it is deemed that no mitigation other than a sign could

be used then funding will have to be identified to progress the scheme and the proposal should appear on the Parish Highway Improvement Plan.

In terms of cost, this is dependent upon the size of the sign required and whether it is mains or solar powered; each site will be assessed on an individual basis. A typical installation of a new sign, including the post and installation works, would be in the order of £8,500 but may be cheaper if a previous pole can be reused.

**COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Thursday 10 March 2022**

**Question by Cameron Beart to Shellina Prendergast,  
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

With an excessive number of children now commuting daily off of the Isle of Sheppey seeking a better secondary school education than currently on offer, putting additional pressures on mainland school places and our transport budgets, would the cabinet member for education and skills please set out what we are proposing to improve the opportunities available for islanders

**Answer**

I acknowledge that school communities on the Isle of Sheppey do undoubtedly work within a challenging context, with significantly higher levels of deprivation than other parts of Kent. For example, the average percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals at any time during the past 6 years (Ever 6) in 2020-21 for the ten primary schools was 35.7% compared to a national average of 23%, whilst the percentage of Ever 6 for the secondary school reached 53.6% compared to a national average of 27.7%. It is therefore even more important for young people who live on the Isle of Sheppey to be provided with every opportunity for an excellent secondary education that supports them to achieve their full potential.

93% of primary pupils who live on the Island also attend school there, whilst 55% of secondary aged pupils now attend a school outside of the Isle of Sheppey, despite there being places available in the one secondary school Oasis Isle of Sheppey.

Following a meeting between representatives of the Oasis Trust, the DCS and the Director of Education where our evidence-based concerns were shared with the Trust, a letter dated 1 February 2022 was sent to Claire Burton, the Regional Schools Commissioner for South-East England and South London. The letter was signed by myself, Gordon Henderson (MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey), Roger Truelove (Leader of Swale BC), yourself and other KCC Members with a direct interest in this matter (Andy Booth, Mike Dendor and John Wright). This letter was copied to Ofsted, Dominic Herrington (National Schools Commissioner), Robin Walker (Minister of State for School Standards) and Baroness Baran (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Minister for the School System). Whilst we acknowledged that under current legislation the RSC's powers are limited while the Ofsted judgement remains that the school Requires Improvement, we have asked for a meeting to explore what change is possible.

I will be meeting with Baroness Baran in the near future and will confirm our determination to secure swift educational improvement on the Isle of Sheppey so that parents of secondary aged children are confident to apply for a place at their local secondary school.

**COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Thursday 10 March 2022**

**Question by Mr Hood to Mr Brazier,  
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

We are appalled that pupils who require stability and familiarity have been let down in so many cases by a process of retendering transport contracts which has been left to the very last minute and then left many families to make their own temporary arrangements because the Council has failed them. These children build relationships with their drivers and other carers who accompany them and any changes to their routines should be carefully planned to ensure a smooth transition to minimise disruption and distress. This has certainly not been the case here.

Please can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport confirm how many SEND pupils were left without home to school transport on Monday 21 February. In answering the question, please can the Cabinet Member confirm what measures and safeguards are being put in place to reassure families and Members that this situation cannot be repeated in the future?

**Answer**

Thank you, Mr. Hood. I can confirm that as of the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> of February the figure was 300.

We are extremely sorry for the worry and anxiety we have caused families for this failure and, as you will be aware a thorough review has been commissioned to understand what has gone wrong with the re-tendering process, to ensure we learn from it and to ensure that there is no recurrence.

**COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Thursday 10 March 2022**

**Question by Mr Stepto to Mr Brazier,  
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

“When questioned at the annual budget meeting about the logic of cutting bus subsidies while government funding from the Bus Back Better scheme is imminent, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport suggested that this source of funding should not be relied upon as it would only be a fraction of the sum KCC had originally applied for.

The figures quoted by the Cabinet Member at the extraordinary Environment and Transport meeting on 18th February indicate that KCC could reasonably expect to receive a grant of around £28m. Whilst this may not be enough to achieve our original ambitions, please could the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport explain how KCC can justify cutting 48 bus services across the county before we have had a chance to find out precisely how much money will be available to help encourage bus travel and reduce congestion on our roads?”

**Answer**

Thank you for your question, Mr Stepto.

As part of our Bus Service Improvement Plan submission to the DfT we included funding for post pandemic bus market support. This included monies for those supported services that the authority can no longer support financially. Specifically, these are those within the recently commenced consultation.

Since submitting our Plan at the end of October, aside from a response acknowledging receipt we have had no other feedback about it, nor any indication of the scale of potential funding nor how and where any funding could be allocated.

Considering this uncertainty, we cannot assume when or whether any funding will be forthcoming and if any specific requirements or conditions will be subsequently attached.

Therefore, to achieve the 22/23 budget, we cannot delay this consultation but should funding become available then we can consider its impact and its contribution during the decision-making process.

**COUNTY COUNCIL****Thursday 10 March 2022****Question by Karen Constantine to Susan Carey,  
Cabinet Member for Environment**

As I am sure you are all aware, Southern Water were fined £90m earlier this year for repeatedly polluting our beaches and our waters. Considering its geographical position, Thanet is one of the most adversely affected areas within Kent. In Thanet we also have several ecologically important areas and sites of specific scientific interest (SSSIs) at Pegwell Bay, Long Rock, Reculver Country Park and the Stour River. Other areas along the fabulous Kent coastline are no less important or valuable. The economic and social importance of our coastline must be recognised and preserved.

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment please outline what steps Kent County Council is taking to mitigate this problem, and does this include either engaging with or challenging utilities companies (such as Southern Water) as part of KCC delivering its environmental policies and strategies?

**Answer**

Kent County Council is very aware of the record fine received by Southern Water for the illegal discharges of sewage which have polluted Kent waters and significantly affected the day-to-day lives of Kent residents, communities, and businesses. In January 2022, Members of the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee received a presentation from Southern Water outlining its proposals in response to the record fine and in the backdrop of the Environment Act which places additional duties on water companies, particularly in relation to the discharge of sewerage from storm overflows. Officers from the Environment and Waste Division are proactively engaging with Southern Water through the task force established to significantly reduce overflows by 2030.

The County Council has a strong track record of planning and delivery in partnership, particularly as the Lead Local Flood Authority and Local Highway Authority. In November 2021, alongside the Vice-Chairman, I attended the launch event for an innovative scheme in Thanet (George V Park) where a local park was redesigned to provide storage for surface water from surrounding roads in order to reduce pressure on the combined sewer network in the event of heavy rain which can lead to local flooding. Working closely with Southern Water, Officers are now assessing the deliverability of similar schemes in other parts of the County to protect Kent's cherished water environments and to also deliver a series of wider environmental and amenity benefits for our residents, communities, and businesses. The progress of the taskforce is being closely monitored and a full progress update will be reported to the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee later this year.



**COUNTY COUNCIL****Thursday 10 March 2022****Question by Jackie Meade to Sue Chandler,  
Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

I have been engaging with a Folkestone resident who is experiencing issues with the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) service in Folkestone. They have highlighted a number of issues with the service, including significant delays in the processing of Education and Health Care needs assessments, missed deadlines and limited access to educational psychologists. This is, as I am sure you can imagine, causing a great deal of anxiety and stress for the family concerned and indeed for all of the other families who find themselves in a similar position.

Can the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services therefore please confirm how many EHC needs assessments are currently outstanding in the district of Folkestone & Hythe and can she also please confirm what the Council is doing to support these families in need?

**Answer**

The outstanding number of Education, Health & Care Plan applications waiting more than 20 weeks in Folkestone & Hythe is currently 14. None of these are delayed due to waiting for an assessment to be completed by an Educational Psychologist but are in the main outstanding due to the need to agree and secure an educational placement.

Throughout Kent, there is no longer a waiting list for Educational Psychology assessments. At the beginning of September 2021, there were 460 historic referrals (from the previous academic year) in the waiting list/backlog. All children who were referred to Kent EP Service for the Local Authority's Education, Health & Care needs assessment advice in 2021 have been allocated to an EP and we are now allocating children who were referred to the EP Service in February 2022 for an Educational Psychology assessment for Education, Health and Care needs assessment. In order to address the provision of EP assessments for children on the waiting list and new referrals there has been a short-term dip in timeliness of EP reports being completed within 6 weeks. In February 29% were submitted within timeframe; in March it is forecast that 40-50% will be completed within 6 weeks and by the end of June 2022 we expect to be back on track – providing 80% within the statutory 6 week timeframe.

Families are able to access additional support through Independent Advice and Support Kent (IASK) which offers free, impartial and confidential information, advice and support about special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) for children, young people up to the age of 25, parents and carers. There is also the Parent's and Careers Together (PACT) forum which has been designed with and for parents and PACT play a crucial role in how we deliver our services in Kent. PACT are part of a National Network of Parent Carer Forums and are supported by parent led charities within local areas.

**COUNTY COUNCIL****Thursday 10 March 2022****Question by Kelly Greham to Clair Bell,  
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

In January of this year the National Care Forum (NCF) published the results of a survey it conducted of its membership to understand the current pressures facing the social care sector. The survey concluded that '66% of homecare providers are now having to refuse new requests for home care and 43% of providers of care homes are closing to new admissions, while 21% of providers of home care are handing back existing care packages'.

Can the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Health please outline what steps are being taken to ensure that short, medium and long-term care placements are available within Kent?

**Answer**

We recognise the pressures and challenges facing the current home care and care home market, including the increases to National Living Wage (NLW) from next April, employer's national insurance contributions and the challenges facing the workforce more generally. We have a good record of working with the National Care Association (NCA), Kent Integrated Care Alliance (KICA) and the wider care sector and we remain fully committed to doing so. As an example of our commitment to support providers, it is worth noting that Kent County Council will have received £34m in Infection Control Grants by the end of this financial year and approximately £33m has been and will be paid straight over to the independent market (this includes £4m on Workforce Grant).

A series of round table events have been arranged with providers and these have been hugely valuable. These have been followed up by fortnightly meetings to see how we can work together to mitigate the immediate pressures and establish a medium- and long-term plan for the future and also determine a fair rate of care for Kent as required by the reforms, and we will work closely with our providers to understand costs. Just last week we held Kent's first Care Summit to help raise the profile of social care and its workforce and to look to see how social care may adapt to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Although we have seen several care home providers exit the market, we have worked with them to ensure this is managed appropriately and that importantly our residents are supported. Through the Contain Outbreak Management fund, we were able to commission a quality team to work with providers to improve and develop their homes and we have also worked to support providers with leadership and well led programmes, so they are better equipped to manage their service.

Care and Support in the Home is the biggest challenge we currently face, and we have seen several framework providers not being able to deliver care and have had to rely on off framework providers to do this. We are working to support these framework providers by looking at clusters, reviewing the current contract and increasing the capacity in the Kent Enablement at Home service.

The development of micro-providers in Kent has been identified as a key mechanism to enhance sustainability and support the development of resilient communities. We want to focus the development of these micro providers on the Care and Support in the Home market through the delivery of non-regulated care and support in people's homes. Micro-providers will not replace our existing markets but are expected to work alongside them diversifying our provider base and filling gaps in provision.

We also want to increase and develop the range of activities and services delivered in community settings that prevent and delay people entering the social care system or into higher levels of support, such as residential care.

**COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Thursday 10 March 2022**

**Question by Mike Baldock to Shellina Prendergast,  
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills**

At the CYPE Cabinet Committee meeting of 1st March, the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills confirmed that money had been allocated in the coming year's budget to provide alternative transport arrangements for 96 pupils who are currently entitled to free home to school transport on bus routes that KCC are proposing to cut.

Could the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills please confirm exactly how much has been budgeted for these purposes?

**Answer**

The impact of changes to the subsidised bus routes on the CYPE budget for the re-provision of school transport can only be accurately determined following the outcome of the consultation. The impact will be influenced by the routes ended and the number of students using these services. The current estimate of students affected has reduced since the publishing of the Cabinet Committee paper and is now expected to be around 50, demonstrating the variability in the calculation.

On this basis, the CYPE budget for mainstream Home to School Transport was not specifically increased to reflect the outcome of this change, as the budget was set on the basis this change would not have a significant financial impact outside of the normal variances you would expect from a demand-led budget such as the Home to School Transport budget.