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Ask for:
Date:

Dear Member

COUNTY COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2022

Agenda Item No

6 **Questions (Pages 1 - 12)**

Questions put and answers given.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Watts', is written over a faint, illegible printed name.

Benjamin Watts
General Counsel

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Question 1

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 20 October 2022

**Question by Karen Constantine to Susan Carey,
Cabinet Member for Environment**

On 18th August 2022, the Government granted permission for Manston Airport to be turned into an air freight hub, overturning a ruling made by the High Court last year which ordered the Department for Transport to reconsider its decision to grant permission for the works. As a result of this decision, an extra 2.2 million tonnes of CO2 emissions will be released into the atmosphere every year, which is equivalent to the annual emissions of 420,000 UK residents. Additionally, it is anticipated that at least 12,000 air traffic movements will occur annually, which in turn will result in a phenomenal increase in road haulage traffic throughout Kent.

In light of this decision, can the Cabinet Member please explain what steps the Council is taking to ensure that we remain on track to deliver our net zero targets, taking account of the increased air traffic and the expected additional pressure on the surrounding road network?

Answer

Carbon emissions from airports are considered on a national basis by Government and in this context the Secretary of State considered that Manston airport's future emissions would be neutral both nationally and for Kent as a whole.

Similarly, the impact of motorways and trunk roads is also considered nationally and with the focus on freight at a reopened Manston, we would expect much of the resulting road traffic to remain on the motorways and trunk roads. The impact of Manston directly on Kent County Council's commitment to Net Zero is therefore the traffic and transport on our local roads. This includes the A299 Thanet Way which freight traffic would be expected to use to connect to the M2 for strategic road network connections to the rest of the country.

The carbon impact of the airport's road traffic on Kent's highway network will be included as part of the development work for Kent County Council's new Local Transport Plan 5, which requires a quantitative carbon assessment. The new Local Transport Plan will therefore contain proposals to move us towards net-zero carbon and will take account of the traffic on the local road network from the reopened Manston Airport.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 20 October 2022

**Question By Mr Mark Hood to Dan Watkins,
Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation**

The pandemic has had a significant effect on passenger numbers on Kent's bus network, which is contributing to the increasing number of services identified as being unviable by commercial operators. Many residents are still worried about the health implications of bus travel and this is slowing the recovery of passenger numbers - the phrase "use it or lose it" has never been so apt.

Every Member wants to see a sustainable public transport system (which can only be achieved by increasing the numbers of passengers) and as the Local Transport Authority, this Council has a part to play. Somerset, Norfolk and Oxfordshire County Councils have all launched campaigns to increase bus usage in an effort to increase passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels. Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport please confirm if we can expect to see a county-wide promotional campaign to encourage people who are fortunate enough to have a bus service to use it and leave their cars at home?

Answer

I also want to see vibrant, accessible, and commercially sustainable public transport network in Kent, which is why over the coming months, Public Transport Officers, through the Kent Enhanced Bus Partnership, will be working with our operator partners on developing a multi-media campaign for promoting bus use.

The length of the campaign and the target audience, will be determined by the partnership, based on patronage data for Kent services, compared to pre pandemic levels. A report will be provided to Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 20 October 2022

**Question by Mike Sole to Dan Watkins,
Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation**

Many of the young residents I represent, particularly in Thanington and Bridge, have experienced problems since the start of the school year in getting to school via the bus because there is not enough capacity. Parents have paid money for bus passes they cannot use and end up driving their child to school or an earlier bus stop.

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport explain what is being done to resolve the issues, and in light of further residential developments along the routes, ensure that the issue does not reoccur in future years

Answer

At the start of each academic year, KCC officers work closely with Stagecoach to identify any services where there are capacity issues and to develop a plan to address them. The solution sometimes may be to advise pupils of the best available service, to re-time a vehicle or in some cases, provide an additional vehicle. Most reported issues are addressed within the first two weeks of the start of the school year.

It should be noted, that when addressing capacity issues, both KCC and Stagecoach use the total capacity of the vehicle as a benchmark. This is made up of seated and standing passengers, as marked in the vehicle, and as approved by the DfT.

Therefore, it is possible for a bus to be full, but not over capacity. Lack of capacity is where children are being left at stops, either inbound to school or at school returning home. I would be grateful if Mr Sole could provide specific details of incidents when the bus has been over capacity and children have consequently not been able to access it either for their journeys to school or home so that officers and Stagecoach can review further as part of their regular meetings with Stagecoach.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 20 October 2022

**Question by Kelly Grehan to Peter Oakford,
Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**

With energy costs set to rise throughout the winter, can the Cabinet Member please tell me if an assessment has been undertaken by KCC to establish whether or not we can afford to keep all our council-owned buildings open during their current operating hours? In answering, can the Cabinet Member also comment on the work already undertaken by KCC and its partners to utilise some of these buildings, such as libraries, as 'warm hubs' for residents who are struggling to heat their homes?

Answer

The County Council has no current plans to reduce the operating hours of any council run buildings as a result of energy cost rises, they will remain open during the winter, so residents will be able to visit them.

The Government announced that public sector organisations will receive the same level of support as households with their energy costs this winter, offering an equivalent guarantee for six months, so any price increases will be similarly capped, saving the Council having to face any further increase in energy bills.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 20 October 2022

**Question by Alister Brady to Sarah Hamilton,
Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

While the introduction of the Energy Bill Relief Scheme will go some way in helping to support schools this winter, they still face the prospect of soaring energy costs. Can the Cabinet Member please therefore explain how KCC, as the Local Education Authority with a Strategic role in supporting schools in Kent to deliver accessible, high-quality education provision for all families, can help support Kent schools this winter as energy prices continue to rise?

Answer

KCC works with LASER Energy to promote efficient use of energy within the council and in schools and settings. LASER also supports energy procurement by education settings to reduce costs. In addition, KCC schools and academies can apply for to the Energy Efficiency Investment fund to make sustainable changes which support greater energy efficiency. Maintained schools also have access to well-regarded financial support from the TEP Schools Finance Service.

The government had confirmed that schools are included in the Energy Price Guarantee being implemented from the 1st of October, for six months. There have been very recent announcements about a change to government policy and we are awaiting further clarification and guidance about the implications of this change with regard to schools and other education settings. Officers are in close liaison with Kent Association of Headteachers in order to monitor the situation, but it is not our expectation that any children are sent home to reduce costs.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 20 October 2022

**Question by Mel Dawkins to Peter Oakford,
Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**

Following the rollout of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the government is now encouraging settled refugees to move into the private rented sector where possible. However, while many of the settled Ukrainians have secured jobs and would be able to pay rent, they have struggled to secure their own accommodation because they do not have a financial guarantor.

As a way around this, Lord Harrington has suggested that local councils could act as guarantors for those wanting to rent homes. Can the Cabinet Member therefore explain whether or not KCC would be willing to act as a financial guarantor for displaced Ukrainians living in Kent as part of its support package for Ukrainian Displaced People?

Answer

Thank you, Chairman, and my thanks, also to Ms Dawkins for her question.

As the County Council will know, there has been an overwhelming response from Kent resident sponsors to host Ukraine families in their homes. The most up to date data shows that there 1698 host families are offering their homes and providing support to 3990 Ukrainian people under the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme. A total of 2811 people have arrived with 1179 people still being processed. KCC, along with District Councils carry out several important functions in supporting the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme in Kent.

I am sure that Members know that Kent County Council, District Councils and other key public sector organisations have all been working hard together to deliver the 'Home for Ukraine' scheme in line with the Government guidance. That said, Kent specifically, and the South East region in general, is already experiencing ongoing challenges to do with accommodation issues. The biggest issue is the availability and affordability of private rented properties in Kent and the South East region. As at the beginning of this month, there were 36 people awaiting to be rematched or move into private rented property. Eight people were in emergency accommodation, and it is anticipated that as many as 1,560 people may require a move into private rented property over the next 6-12 months.

The reality is that District and Borough Councils have limited supply of available substantive and emergency accommodation. At the same time, the private rental market remains under significant pressure with affordability issue compounding the challenges. As a result, the accommodation issue has come into a sharp focus as some of the initial offer to host families comes to an end.

As the County Council will know, aside from the specific functions associated with assisting the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme, KCC retains, and is required to fulfil its duties and powers as set out in the relevant legislation.

On the specific point about the feasibility of KCC being willing to act as a financial guarantor, I can inform the County Council that the matter has been explored, and from the legal standpoint it has been established that KCC cannot be a named guarantor. However, it is important to confirm that Districts as the Housing Authority, can and many already do, provide additional financial incentive payments to landlords where a guarantor is not possible as well as deposit and rent in advance payments on behalf of tenants under certain prescribed conditions. Therefore, a form of financial guarantor policy is something that already exists. I can also report that KCC along with District Councils intend to engage further with third party guarantor companies that Districts Councils, may be able to pay to have 'Guarantor insurance'. This will include the consideration of any material contribution by KCC.

Thank you, Chairman.

COUNTY COUNCIL**Thursday 20 October 2022****Question by Antony Hook to Dan Watkins,
Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation**

The Brenley Corner roundabout, which is the junction of the A2, M2 and A299 is a troublesome bottleneck for local and long-distance traffic at all times and is particularly hellish when Operation Brock is imposed miles away on the M20 when this M2 junction is deliberately reduced from two lanes to one.

Can the Cabinet Member update the Council on any lobbying of National Highways, as the responsible body for any junction works, and advise when Kent residents can expect significant change to Brenley Corner to make their lives easier?

Answer

Brenley Corner – M2 Junction 7 with the A2 and A299 (Thanet Way) is listed as a Road Investment Strategy (RIS) 3 (2025-30) ‘pipeline’ project. The business case for case for improvements to the junction is currently being developed by National Highways (as the government owned company responsible for motorways and trunk roads) and a consultation on potential scheme options is expected in the next few months; the exact timeframe is still to be announced.

Kent County Council, and other organisations including Swale Borough Council, are involved in various working groups as the scheme options and business case is progressed. However, at this stage there is only funding for scheme development and no certainty of funding for scheme delivery. A decision on whether this scheme will be funded for delivery and included in the next RIS will be made by the Secretary of State for Transport in late 2024 or early 2025 before the publication of the next RIS.

Improvements to Brenley Corner are a priority in KCC’s current statutory Local Transport Plan (LTP) and in the sub-national transport body – Transport for the South East (TfSE) draft Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) which once finalised following the consultation that closed in September, will be submitted to Government for their consideration in setting priorities for national transport infrastructure. All local Members should have received an email/letter from National Highways explaining the process of developing the improvement scheme for Brenley Corner.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 20 October 2022

**Question by Richard Streatfeild to Dan Watkins,
Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation**

I am aware from contact with the residents in my division that there is significant concern about the lack of capacity on Sevenoaks town buses to get children to and from school. I am incredibly frustrated at the challenges this has caused my constituents and I know this experience is also replicated in other parts of the County. Therefore, I felt it important to raise this issue with County Council.

Can the Cabinet Member explain what actions are being taken to address the bus capacity issues, noting that many parents will have paid for a Young Persons Travel Pass that they are unable to use due to lack of space on the buses

Answer

This September, with changes to services, changes to school pupil flows and some families delaying applications for Kent Travel Saver, there were challenges on a number of services in the Sevenoaks area. Officers worked closely with Go Coach and Arriva, to identify the issues and develop solutions. These involved re-routing of some services, allocating a bigger vehicle, change to service timing or providing an additional vehicle. This approach has delivered sufficient capacity for the Sevenoaks area.

Officers continue to have regular meetings with Go Coach and Arriva where service loadings are reviewed, to ensure capacity is maintained.

I also refer Mr Streatfeild to my previous response to question 3.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 20 October 2022

**Question by Ian Chittenden to Dan Watkins,
Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation**

"The cost of road repairs and streetlights are on the rise as a result of inflation and the war in Ukraine. Analysis from the LGA and the Association for Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) has found that councils in England and Wales have faced a 22% increase in road maintenance in the last six months, along with a 38% rise in the cost of running and repairing streetlights.

Bearing in mind that our current set of Key Performance indicator for 'Potholes repaired in 28 calendar days' is already in red, and our contractor for the work is reporting issues due to the economic climate and supply chain restraints, can the **Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport** confirm that funding for highway and streetlight maintenance will be protected, and if necessary increased in line with inflation, so that Kent residents are kept safe when travelling around the county?"

Answer

Many of this year's highways maintenance activities were planned and committed prior to the inflationary events that have been seen across the sector. This means that in the short term many of Kent Highways programmes which were let under existing contracts have remained mostly unaffected by price inflation.

Where suppliers are encountering delivery issues such as market scarcity or material price volatility, the service is working closely with them to help overcome these challenges whilst maintaining performance and quality standards.

The impact of re-tendering contracts such as the Pothole Blitz and the Term Maintenance Contract remains an unknown quantity but suffice to say we are expecting substantial price increases. This will also be the case for the Road Asset Renewal contract this year where forecasted price indexation clauses for next year could be significant.

The service continues to work closely with the various suppliers and is remaining as flexible as possible to ensure critical operational activities continue to be delivered in the most efficient, economic, and innovative manner.

Regarding potholes, we continue to challenge our contractor, Amey, regarding this performance issue, which they have put down to recruitment, resourcing and supply chain difficulties. In comparison to May and June, there was a significant improvement in performance in both July and August, and this indicator is now above the floor standard. We have also utilised the Pothole Blitz contractors to ensure timely completion of works. This situation continues to be closely monitored by Highways management team.

Despite these prevailing challenges, I can confirm that the service will continue to deliver a highways operation where the priority is to keep the highway safe and accessible.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 20 October 2022

**Question by Mr Lehmann to Sarah Hamilton,
Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

The costs of transporting children eligible for Home to School transport support have increased significantly in recent months, as I have witnessed when conducting Home to School Transport appeals. I am conscious that inflation and other price increase issues in the transport industry risk further impacting KCC's budget and our capacity to support and assist children who need assistance with transport for a range of reasons.

Earlier in the year, Members were given an estimate of £150,000 for the cost of replacement travel arrangements for the entitled students travelling on routes under threat of cancellation if we proceed with the proposed bus subsidy cuts.

Can the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills provide assurance that the £150,000 cost estimate has not dramatically increased since the decision was developed and also confirm how confident they are that the suggested allocations for these pupils will adequately meet their longer term needs?

Answer

It should be noted that eligibility to free transport to school is an entirely distance based criteria and is not affected by the removal of a bus service.

As part of the consideration for reductions to the supported bus service subsidy, officers considered how entitled students, currently on services, would be provided for. They identified opportunities to slot children onto other existing contracts (i.e., at no cost) and where this was not available the alternative provision and type of vehicle required and based the cost of such vehicle on current costs. The anticipated costs were then set against current season ticket costs.

Since the costs were first calculated, the children impacted have changed. Officers have re-run the analysis and identified consistent numbers of children and overall cost impact which remains as previously estimated; inflation was built into this as the estimate is based on current prices, by vehicle type, we are getting now from operators.

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