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Dear Member

COUNTY COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2025

Agenda Item No

6 Questions (Pages 1 - 18)

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Watts', is written over a faint, circular official stamp.

Benjamin Watts
Deputy Chief Executive (Monitoring Officer)

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Question 1**COUNTY COUNCIL****Thursday 6 November 2025****Question by Alister Brady to Diane Morton,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

On 14 July, you wrote to the Home Office expressing concerns about proposed changes to the Social Care Worker Visa scheme, which would close the route to new applicants. Will you join me in formally recognising and thanking migrant workers in Kent's social care sector for their vital contribution to the delivery of care services? Additionally, what safeguards and support does KCC offer to migrant care workers who encounter malpractice in their workplace, particularly those who may feel compelled to report such issues?

Answer

Thank you for your question. The letter that I wrote to the Home Secretary and the Minister of State for Care on 11th July was expressly about the abruptness of closing the Social Care Worker Visa route to overseas recruitment for new applicants from the 22 July 2025 and that there was no formal consultation with Social Care sector, and KCC were not notified.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all those working in Kent's social care sector — including the many migrant workers who have come to this country to provide vital care and support. Their contribution is deeply valued. Every day, they make an enormous difference to the lives of the people they support, as well as to their families and carers. The kindness, dedication, and compassion they bring to their roles are integral to the strength and stability of Kent's care system.

However, it is now widely recognised that as a country we need to encourage indigenous British people to fill these roles instead of relying upon labour from abroad to prop up our care system. This needs to be balanced with getting people off welfare and into work and ensuring that work pays a decent amount of money so that everyone can afford to live.

For any care worker who has come to the UK through a sponsored visa and experiences malpractice or poor treatment, there is support available locally. Kent's local Care Association — the Kent Integrated Care Alliance (KICA) — provides advice, guidance, and practical help to care workers and employers. Through its International Recruitment Hub, KICA offers access to information, signposting to specialist support organisations, and a confidential route for reporting concerns.

In the most serious cases, where a provider's licence is revoked or sponsorship withdrawn, KICA and its partners can assist displaced care workers in finding alternative employment with ethical providers. We encourage any care worker who encounters malpractice, exploitation, or unfair treatment to report it, and we are committed to working with partners to ensure they receive the support and protection they need.

Kent County Council remains clear that migrant care workers are a vital part of our health and care system, and we will continue to champion fair employment, ethical recruitment, and a culture of respect and inclusion across the social care workforce.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Paul Thomas to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

KCC are often blamed for matters outside of their control. The Loose Road and Tovil footbridge emergency closures caused major issues for the local and wider communities. Loose Road started as an emergency closure for gas leaks and resulted in planned works without the normal lead in period. Residents were disproportionately negatively impacted and as a local resident in Maidstone South I shared their frustration. No local bus service for 6 weeks, loss of passing trade for local business, lack of alternative suitable routes to name but a few.

In terms of KCC as the Highways Authority, can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport confirm whether they have or will be looking to organise a round table review, involving the Kent Resilience Team and key partners, to enable all of the issues to be identified and confirm what lessons can be learned which might support lobbying of Government to change relevant regulations?

Answer

The emergency works by SGN have caused additional disruption in the area and we recognise this, however our powers do not extend to prevent such works taking place. Following the initial mains replacement a further 28 gas leaks emerged on older mains in the area, and these had to be addressed under emergency powers. These works commenced on 20th October.

Lessons were learnt during the first set of works, and this has enabled us to ensure SGN have better signs to advise motorists of diversionary and unsuitable routes and placing marshals at specific locations. SGN also have a dedicated web site for the works.

I can confirm that we would welcome around the table discussions with all interested parties and stakeholders to discuss all aspects of these works. I will request Highways officers make the necessary arrangements with SGN.

I can however advise that Government has already reviewed emergency powers for utility companies through a recent Transport Select Committee. The outcome is that clarification will be provided when immediate permits (emergency works) should be used but it has not committed to reviewing what types of work immediate permits can be used for.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Harry Rayner to
Brian Collins, Deputy Leader

Could the Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services confirm whether the outturn for the over budget costs for Adult Services exceeded £30m in the first quarter of the 2025/26 budget?

Answer

I confirm that a £31m overspend for the Adult Social Care and Public Health directorate was reported to Cabinet on 25 September 2025.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Andrew Kennedy to
Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council

Does the Leader of KCC support the Nolan Principles setting out the minimum recognised standards of behaviour in public life and Kent County Council's own Code of Conduct for Elected Members?

Answer

Yes.

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Question withdrawn

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Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Nick Wibberley to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

An Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) provides a child with the necessary provisions to help them learn, develop and function during their school life and into further education. In my constituency of Ashford South, a young family contacted me within the first few weeks after the election asking for assistance in progressing their children's EHCP. I duly obliged and contacted the required department at KCC in June, July, August and September. I understand the family is still awaiting progress.

Could the member for Education & Skills confirm what the reasonable timescales for these types of processes should be and can she clarify what role Members may usefully play in supporting families seeking to progress their children's EHCPs?

Answer

I am very sorry to hear about the family in your constituency.

Kent invests in a range of non-statutory services and training for schools to ensure pupils can access support for learning without an EHCP. If this is shown to be insufficient, then a Request to Assess can be made. From the point of submitting the Request, if there is a decision to issue an EHCP, it should be issued within 20 weeks.

If a request to assess was made by the family in May then to be within the 20 weeks, the plan would have been issued in October. The national average for completion of plans within the 20 weeks is 50% and KCC's rolling average is 65%. Recently we have experienced some difficulties with obtaining all the assessments in time which has regrettably impacted on completion rates but this has now been addressed.

For those being assessed, the assessment should be completed by week 16 and at that point the Local Authority will decide whether or not to issue a plan.

Between week 16-20 the draft plan is sent to parents and a setting is requested, and by week 20 the plan should be finalised.

Delays can occur at any point in that time - from late assessments to refusal to admit to a school.

If Members have families contacting them with any queries regarding this process it would be helpful if they encouraged them to contact their Assistant Officer which they were allocated at the start of the process.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Paul Stepto to Brian Collins, Deputy Leader

At the Cabinet meeting of 25th September, the Deputy Leader displayed a large mock cheque and announced that he had 'saved' KCC a considerable sum of money by paying off a long-term loan early. The Leader described this as a 'brave move'.

Would the Deputy Leader confirm precisely how much was paid to settle this loan, the finance pot it came from, and the interest rate of the loan?

Answer

The loan was for £50 million. It was a 50 year loan, with over 41 years left until maturity. We received a discount of £5,567,463 for early payment. This was slightly offset by advisory and bank costs of £220,600. This meant there was an overall immediate saving of over £5.3 million. The funding came from cash balances. Even after taking account of the loss of interest on balances, there is still a saving of £670,000 every year until 2067. The interest rate on the loan was 4.84%.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Jeremy Eustace to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Considering the recent announcements from the Labour Government in Westminster by the Chancellor and the Education Secretary, amongst others, around the opening of Primary School Breakfast Clubs across England I am sure that many parents will be keen to know how this will be delivered and administered, specifically here in Kent.

Please could I ask my friend the Cabinet Member for Education to confirm how many primary schools there are in Kent, how many now have a breakfast club, how many are due to open and when, and what additional monies have been made available by the Government in Westminster to date to deliver this opportunity in Kent?

Answer

The Labour Government continues to promote its breakfast club initiative as a flagship policy, promising free breakfast clubs in every state-funded primary school. But the reality is far less impressive.

The pilot, launched in April 2025, includes just 750 schools nationally — only **4.4%** of England's 17,000 primary schools (Full Fact). In Kent, 11 schools have joined — just **2.4%** of our 462 maintained primaries (Schools Week).

Funding is split: maintained schools receive it via Kent County Council, while academies and free schools are funded directly by the Department for Education (DfE Guidance). We do not know how much funding these schools have received from DfE to deliver their breakfast clubs, but the national budget for 2025/26 was £30m.

The offer includes:

- 60p per pupil per day
- 78p for FSM pupils
- A £500 setup grant
- A £1,099 staffing lump sum (DfE Methodology)

But the **actual cost** of running a breakfast club is closer to **£1.98 per pupil per day** (Public Sector Catering). Schools are reporting shortfalls of up to £9,000, with some withdrawing from the pilot altogether (Schools Week).

Beyond funding, schools are facing:

- Staffing shortages, especially for early morning supervision.
- Lack of kitchen space or facilities to prepare food on-site.
- Unclear guidance on what constitutes a compliant breakfast club.

- Concerns about SEND provision, with no additional support for children with complex needs.
- And 64% of school leaders say the scheme will not improve attendance (MadeForMums).

This is yet another Labour policy that sounds good in headlines but lacks the funding, planning, and operational clarity to make it work.

However, Kent County Council will continue to support our schools, and advocate for clarity and realistic funding to ensure such initiatives are deliverable and sustainable for our schools.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Mike Sole to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

In 2022 KCC consulted on plans to build a new 420 pupil primary school in Thanington. There has been a significant amount of new housing in the area with work continuing on 750 homes at Saxon Fields and a further 420 at Cockering Farm, as well as other nearby developments. Pupils in the area are unable to get a place at nearby Wincheap Primary school resulting in long journeys across the Canterbury or to village schools, often at the expense of KCC. The school was due to open this year, but not a brick has been laid, and now I understand from KCC estates that "if the project is resurrected it will be in 2028 earliest for a possible 2030 opening".

Please can the Cabinet Member explain why the project has not proceeded as anticipated, give a commitment as to when it will open, and confirm how much KCC has saved and will save, both in terms of construction costs and investment income earned on monies held, by delaying the spend of S106 contributions on the school?

Answer

Thank you, Cllr Sole, for your question.

The Thanington school project has been paused due to slower-than-expected housing occupancy and pupil demand. National factors such as economic uncertainty, affordability issues, and planning barriers like nutrient neutrality have contributed to delays in development and reduced pupil yield.

As of 2024, only 85 pupils have come from Saxon Fields (26% of expected), and Cockering Road has 270 occupied units out of 745. The adjacent site with 400 planned homes has yet to be occupied.

Opening a new school now would undermine existing schools in Canterbury. Therefore, the project will proceed only when there is clear demand for Year R places.

KCC has received £2.4 million in Section 106 contributions, with £5.73 million still to be collected. The total estimated cost is £15.1 million. Funds have been used for land acquisition, and no investment income has been earned. The remaining costs will be met through capital funding, including the Basic Need Grant.

While the delay is disappointing, it ensures the school will be viable and sustainable when built.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Richard Streatfeild to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

In Sevenoaks Town and across Sevenoaks District residents believe that KCC policy on cross pavement charging of electric cars is too cautious, inflicts prohibitive costs on many residents and is only in the interests of commercial providers.

Can the Cabinet Member explain why Kent has such an out of date policy and what he is going to do about it to work in the best interests of Kent residents to fill up their car battery at the best price?

Answer

I appreciate the Member's concern that the Council's approach to cross-pavement charging of electric vehicles may appear cautious. However, our position is guided first and foremost by our statutory duty to ensure public safety on the highway. This does not mean that our approach is out of date – rather, it is aligned with national safety requirements.

At present, there is no fully designated UK standard that guarantees protection against a type of electrical fault known as an 'open PEN' fault, which can cause dangerous voltages on charging equipment or nearby metalwork in the event of a supply failure. This risk is particularly prevalent if domestic charge points are charging vehicles on the public highway.

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) has recently published guidance — referred to as IET 01 — outlining how future devices should address this issue, but manufacturers of domestic charge points are still developing non-compliant products. Until such products are independently certified and incorporated into the national BS 7671 wiring regulations, it would be unsafe for the Council to permit domestic charge point use on the public highway, as public safety cannot be guaranteed.

We will, however, continue to monitor developments in this area closely and will review our position once there is greater certainty around national standards and product compliance.

In the meantime, a controlled trial is underway, of a solution which demonstrates safety compliance and ensures all necessary ongoing electrical safety checks are conducted, whilst meeting strict indemnity requirements.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question from Stuart Heaver to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader of the Council

Will the Deputy Leader tell us how big a reduction in Council Tax, Kent residents should look forward to, following the months of work undertaken by his DOLGE team?

Answer

As anyone with any council experience will know, it is far too early to discuss Council Tax. We're also waiting to hear how central Government intends to fund the Authority next year. When we get all that information, we'll make a decision about spending priorities and tax levels. That's part of the budget setting process. We look forward to hearing the savings proposals from all political groups in the Chamber and will respond to them in due.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Mark Hood to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader of the Council

The Reform administration has claimed it is "saving £32m over four years by ending the climate emergency declaration".

Which lines of the budget this will effect and how this will deliver long-term savings considering almost all mitigation and adaption to climate change is cost effective?

Answer

The previous Administration had identified £32 million of spend over four years, starting from 2025/26, as part of their potential capital project list. These formed part of Appendix C of the budget papers considered by County Council in February 2025, prior to the recent election. The project was described as "Renewable energy source options to work towards Net Zero target". There were no savings associated with this project. By ending the climate emergency declaration and ceasing this project the Local Authority will avoid having to borrow £32million to fund the scheme.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Antony Hook to Chris Palmer,
Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

KCC is operating a number of centres to house unaccompanied asylum seeking children, one of which is Acacia Court in my division which looks after 16-17 year old for up to two weeks before they move into the national transfer scheme.

Can the Cabinet Member report how many children have been being looked after in Acacia Court so far in 2025 and how many have been looked after across all our similar centres in 2025? In answering, could they also clarify what steps are taken to confirm that those being looked after are under 18s and how misinformation about these arrangements are challenged?

Answer

Between 1 January and 31 October 2025, 209 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) were accommodated at Acacia Court, and 1,891 across all KCC reception centres.

These centres are Ofsted-registered children's homes, not immigration or detention facilities. KCC does not process asylum claims; children are referred by the Home Office, which conducts age checks and security screening before referral.

If concerns arise about a child's age, KCC social workers carry out age assessments. If a child is found to be over 18, they are transferred to adult Home Office accommodation.

KCC actively counters misinformation through a dedicated webpage, stakeholder engagement, and partnerships with police and local leaders to manage risks and community tensions.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Tim Prater to
Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council

Does the Leader expect her Cabinet Members to always make themselves available for and to attend all Scrutiny and Governance and Audit Committee meetings whenever an item or issue within their portfolios is due to be discussed?

Answer

As I'm sure you're aware, the Scrutiny legislation says that where members of the Executive are summoned to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings to give evidence, it is a formal and constitutional requirement that they or a deputy attend. We will continue to comply with these requirements and engage with Scrutiny to help showcase the good work the Executive and the Council as a whole is doing for the people of Kent.

Also, I do of course expect my Cabinet to attend Governance and Audit Committee when they are told formally that they will be required to answer questions or provide information.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 6 November 2025

Question by Martin Brice to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

Kent has repeatedly experienced waves of disruption caused by simultaneously planned roadworks hit residents and businesses across Kent. We cannot allow next summer to be a repeat of recent chaos. In Tunbridge Wells, I have, as part of my Roadworks Tsar role with the Borough Council, established a local roadworks forum to improve collaboration and cooperation between utilities companies and tackle disruption. Parliament's Transport Committee recently recommended the implementation of a Street Works Commissioner to provide a stronger accountability mechanism and promote good practice. KCC's own Traffic Manager gave evidence to the Committee in support of the need for better collaboration between utility companies.

As KCC is the responsible Highways Authority, will the Cabinet Member consider establishing a forum in which utilities companies can plan their roadworks across out county together and strategically, and does he agree that Kent should have its own Street Works Commissioner?

Answer

In terms of setting up a further committee, Mr Brice, will also be no doubt aware that significant engagement already exists. This is not just on a scheme or project basis working with residents, parishes, Districts and the like, but in Kent a Highway Authority and Utility Committee (HAUC) remains in place and has been long standing for some time. This committee addresses local, parish, district and county wide concerns with the various work promoters, reviewing breaches in permit conditions and penalties and also developing improvement plans, and understanding best practice.

While this is county wide, there is also a Southeast HAUC where regional issues are discussed, shared and addressed. This also provides a bridge to the national policy making forum. In that regard, UK HAUC is the national body that advises the Secretary of State on street works and traffic management legislation, regulation and rule setting while also promoting best practice.

It was because of KCC's historic and proactive role within all of these organisations that saw the authority invited to provide expert evidence to the Transport Select Committee to which you refer.

Therefore, rather than create a new forum with more administration burden I would suggest Mr Brice that we maximise the structure that already exists and which has already proved effective and has provide a direct route to national policy makers. It is in this way that we can make long lasting and effective improvement into how street works, and traffic management are delivered in Kent.

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