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Dear Member

COUNTY COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2025

Agenda Item No

6 **County Council Questions (Pages 1 - 24)**

Yours sincerely

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Benjamin Watts
Deputy Chief Executive

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Question 1

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Mark Hood to David Wimble,
Cabinet Member for Environment**

The Reform administration has announced that it will be saving £7.5m by scrapping the future purchase of electric vehicles which had not been scheduled until 2028. Can the Deputy Leader tell us how much the future transition from conventional vehicles to electric vehicles as calculated by our officers would actually cost this council in comparison to simply replacing them with more polluting petrol and diesel vehicles when considering purchase price, fuel cost and maintenance?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Mr Hood.

The actual cost of transitioning to EVs was an estimated figure to give an indication of future costs for Members consideration in making future decisions. Further work would be undertaken to further refine and update costs when business cases were developed more fully. Compared to the cost of sticking with petrol/diesel vehicles, the EV estimate was more expensive by over £100,000. And it didn't take into account the extra expenditure for provision of infrastructure charging costs for EVs.

The actual saving, factoring in long-term costs is not known without additional modelling work. This is recognised in KCC's new Energy Efficiency Plan which includes an action to explore and develop business needs to maintain a future ready fleet whilst optimising costs, which will likely involve a mix of technologies, capital cost and revenue benefits.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

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

At a briefing between Conservative Members ad KCC Officers on Tuesday 28 October, I asked for clarification on the legal status and composition of the 'local committees or assemblies' that have been promised should ReformUKs plan for a Kent-wide unitary council be successful. I was told that these Assembly could not easily be abolished or marginalised as their formation would be written into the constitution. Could the Leader kindly explain how this administration will do this, given KCC does not have the legal authority to write the constitution of the council which will replace it, and the leadership of that new council might not want to have anything to do with this policy.

Answer

The assumption in the question, that KCC would not have the legal authority to write the Constitution of the Council which replaces it under Option 1A, is incorrect. Page 162 of "Kent County Council" (KCC) strategic business case - submitted to Government on 28 November - states that KCC would seek 'continuing authority status' should Option 1A be chosen for implementation by Ministers.

This would mean that the Structural Change Order approved by Parliament would provide for the creation of the new unitary authority. This would be legally based on the district council functions and the functions of Medway Council, transferring to the legal entity of the County Council, which would then be reorganised to create the new unitary authority.

This is known as the continuity authority model, and was most recently used in the creation of North Yorkshire Council as part of LGR implementation. It was North Yorkshire County Council that had the responsibility to approve the Constitution of the new unitary North Yorkshire Council on 22 February 2023, at its last meeting before Vesting Day - also known as the Go Live date - on 1 April 2023.

In circumstances where continuing authority status was applied to KCC, it would be the responsibility of KCC, as the continuing legal entity, to review and adopt a revised Constitution for the new unitary Kent Council before Vesting Day on 1 April 2028, and therefore it would be possible to include the necessary provisions for the creation of the 'area assemblies'.

Mr Chairman, I hope that fully answers the question.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Jeremy Eustace to Diane Morton,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Please can my friend the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care give an update on the CQC Improvement Plan, how many Inspectors there are currently in Kent, and when the next full inspection is likely to take place?

Answer

Chair, Members, and colleagues, Kent County Council underwent its first full Care Quality Commission assurance assessment in October 2024, with the report published in May 2025. The overall outcome was “Requires Improvement.”

The inspection highlighted three key areas for improvement:

- The timeliness of assessments and reviews,
- Safeguarding processes, and
- Consistency in practice.

In response, the Council has developed a CQC Improvement Plan, aligned with our Adult Social Care Strategy – “Making a Difference Every Day” and our financial recovery programme.

Progress is:

- Monitored by the Directorate Management Team,
- Risks are escalated where necessary, and
- Quarterly reports are submitted to the Department of Health and Social Care.

The first return was submitted on 17 November 2025, and following Scrutiny recommendations, a full update will come to the Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee. The Care Quality Commission does not keep permanent inspectors in local authorities. For Kent’s inspection, a temporary team of around 8 to 10 inspectors and specialists was deployed.

The inspection framework runs on a two-year cycle, meaning the next full inspection is expected in late 2026, and at present we do not know if interim or thematic visits will take place before then.

Chair, I fully support regulation. It should protect people and safeguard standards. However, in my view, the CQC still remains—as Wes Streeting said last year—“unfit for purpose.”

Care is not always matched by quality. Inspections are not always timely. Commissioning is not always effective. And the system still owes providers and taxpayers confidence, clarity, and consistency.

The CQC has seen repeated leadership changes at the very top, ongoing problems with the provider portal, and persistent instability in its regulatory regime.

At a recent Registered Managers' Conference, I was told that:

- Kent should be resourced with 25 inspectors,
- But currently has only 12.

That gap alone explains:

- Why inspections are delayed for years,
- Why good providers lose business, and
- Why confidence in the system has been so badly damaged.

Recruitment alone has taken 18 months.

Despite all this, providers in Kent continue to deliver care every day.

They keep going despite inspection delays, workforce gaps, and national uncertainty.

So today, all we can reasonably ask for is that the inspection system becomes fit, agile, properly resourced, and responsive, so that:

- Good services are recognised,
- Poor services are challenged, and
- The public can once again have confidence in the system designed to protect them.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Harry Rayner to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader of the Council**

Can the Deputy Leader (Cabinet Member for Finance) confirm that in the event the Council sets a council tax increase of less than 4.99% for the financial year 2026-27, that HM Government can reduce the amount of central funding paid to KCC, in the amount foregone by the Administration's not increasing council tax, by the maximum figure allowed?

Answer

The level for the County Council share of council tax (including any increase) is a decision to be taken by full County Council at the annual budget meeting on 12 February. In the policy statement on the local government finance settlement published on 20 November the government said "any protection through funding floors assumes local authorities use the full council tax flexibility". We take this to mean that the only potential penalty is lower protection for those authorities losing out under the funding reforms. As with other aspects of funding arrangements we will not know the full detail until we have evaluated the provisional settlement which was only announced this week.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Wayne Chapman to Diane Morton,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

The Think Ahead programme has provided a key pipeline of qualified mental health social workers for over a decade to Kent County Council. With the funding now been withdrawn by the Labour government earlier this year, please can you tell us if there was a consultation with the sector, what is the potential impact on local services, and what alternative development plans are in place to ensure continuity of specialist support?

Answer

The decision by the Department of Health and Social Care to withdraw funding for the Think Ahead programme from 2026 onwards is deeply disappointing and, frankly, short-sighted. This programme has been a vital pipeline for recruiting skilled mental health social workers in Kent, and its loss will have a significant impact on our ability to meet growing demand.

What makes this even more frustrating is that the decision was made without consultation with Think Ahead or local authorities who rely on this scheme. It feels like yet another example of central government failing to understand the realities on the ground.

Mental health social work is not something you can just replace overnight—AMHPs don't grow on trees. We will do everything we can to mitigate this loss through apprenticeships, partnerships with local universities, and strategic workforce planning, but this decision undermines years of progress.

We need to keep pushing for sustainable solutions but 1.6 million people deserve way better than what we have in Westminster right now it's a disgrace.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Luke Evans to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

As the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport is aware, the A299 Thanet Way is an essential artery road for East Kent that supports all surrounding critical infrastructure. The Cabinet Member will also be aware that the road is in a terrible state of repair, requiring constant and increasingly expensive maintenance due to significant sub-surface issues and heavy traffic flow. These complex, multi million-pound reconstruction projects place an unsustainable financial burden on Kent County Council and routinely cause disruption to the lives of people using the road daily which includes thousands of my residents and me personally. Given the road's strategic importance and the scale of the necessary long term repairs that KCC cannot afford, I would like to ask if KCC have been in any discussions or are planning to have discussion with National Highways or the Department for Transport to reclassify the A299 Thanet Way as a trunk road, thereby transferring the funding and maintenance responsibility to the central Government?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Mr Evans.

In 2021, National Highways began reviewing the Strategic Road Network for possible trunking as part of the work for their 3rd Road Investment Strategy, covering the period 2025 – 2030.

Three Kent roads were assessed. The A229 Blue Bell Hill and the A249 Detling Hill were recommended for further detailed development. The A299 was also assessed but not shortlisted due to limited commercial activity at nearby ports and airports, and lower than average traffic and HGV flows. They were also aware of the risks around the geology underlying the road, which has led to the current maintenance issues. It is important to note that National Highways made clear that a change in ownership would not guarantee more investment, and any transfer would likely require a contribution from KCC for permanent repairs.

The government is aware of the ongoing challenges with the A299, and KCC has previously secured funding for improvements. KCC remains prepared to advocate for further funding should new opportunities arise, however, these may be limited as the government priorities shift towards more devolved transport authorities.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Alister Brady to Diane Morton,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Quarter 2 figures show an increase in the Adult Social Care overspend of £50.9 million. In July, the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health approved the commissioning of a new Open Framework procurement model for the Older Persons Residential and Nursing Care Service. This decision indicated that it sought to deliver future cost avoidance to address the overspend.

Whilst last year's funding settlement ensured there was additional funding for Adult social Care, Is the Cabinet Member confident the procurement tweak will address any future Adults Social Care overspend without negative impact on how the Council can support the most vulnerable residents in Kent? In answering, can they confirm when we might see the impact on the budget from the change and who is responsible for the failure if overspending in this area continues?

Answer

Mr Brady, let me be absolutely clear – because your questions deserve a straight answer – we are not tweaking this system.

We are demanding what is right for council taxpayers and for residents who rely on care services.

Tweaking is what happens when a council lacks the courage to challenge vested interests, when a broken system is managed rather than fixed. That may have been the approach of the past, but it is not the approach of this Reform-led Council.

This Reform-led Council was elected to fix what others ignored – and that is exactly what we are doing.

You asked about the budget impact. You will see the results when the time is right – and not before.

We will not undermine live procurement, weaken our negotiating position, or engage in political theatre with taxpayers' money. Responsibility for the budget does not sit with one individual. It is held collectively – by the Cabinet, by our officers, and by every single Member of this Council. That is why we are all here: to take responsibility and to secure the best possible outcome for our residents and council taxpayers.

Now that your questions have been answered, I will turn to the system you are referring to.

Adult Social Care faces severe national pressures, but unlike the past, we are not pretending the problem will solve itself, nor are we waiting for a bag of gold coins to appear under the Christmas tree. We are asking for a system that is properly structured – fair, realistic, and workable.

What we inherited was a system that looked acceptable on the surface but had not been properly maintained underneath. The previous administration polished the car, but they never opened the bonnet.

What my engineers and I did find was a poorly managed market, outdated contracts, and extraordinary variation in prices across the county. I was genuinely shocked by the level of inconsistency and uplifts that had been allowed to continue without challenge. This was **not** a market under control.

And I am genuinely surprised by the so-called financial expertise of the previous administration — how this was allowed to happen again, and again, and again.

It does not take genius to understand that adult social care overspends are driven by two things: around two-thirds cost pressures and one-third demand. Yet year after year, costs were allowed to drift without grip or proper challenge.

Nor did it take hindsight to recognise that national insurance increases and inflation **were** always going to hit this sector hard. In some parts of the social care market, providers have seen their reserves almost wiped out — not because of inefficiency, but because costs were rising while the system carried on thinking it was ok! Not much Christmas joy last year and certainly hasn't been so far this year either from Westminster.

Now for too long, the market has demanded, and this Council gave in, again, and again, **and again**. That stops now. We will **always** ensure vulnerable people are supported — that will **not** change. What **will** change is the market discipline we apply: how we shape the market, how we set expectations, and how we ensure fairness for providers and council taxpayers within the funding we receive from central government.

Every single contract is now being scrutinised. Every conversation with providers is being had — and they are robust. That is exactly what should have happened years ago. It is not right that companies were allowed to extract hundreds of thousands of pounds and in some circumstances millions in dividends from taxpayers and self-funders while Kent's residents carried the burden. All available on company's house did the previous administration not bother to check!

Independent research by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, in its report *Ending Extraction in the UK Care System*, shows that hundreds of millions of pounds of public money have been extracted from social care through profits and dividends instead of being reinvested in frontline care. That is precisely the behaviour we are now challenging across our commissioning.

That is why I approved a new **Open Framework for Older Persons' Residential and Nursing Care**. This is not a tweak. It is a **reset**.

Providers must meet clear quality thresholds. Once they do, selection is on price. Pricing is transparent, aligned to the Fair Cost of Care, and benchmarked with neighbouring authorities. For the first time in years, this Council is clear: if you want to do business with us, it must be at the **right price**.

The procurement opens in December 2025 and mobilises in summer 2026. From mobilisation, we expect increasing cost avoidance and much stronger financial discipline. Over time, this will stabilise the market and ensure we pay a fair and sustainable price for care.

But let me be blunt. I have heard vulnerable people described as so-called “loss leaders”. Are we really saying that someone’s mum or dad is a loss leader in a care home? That is morally wrong on all accounts. These are people – not commercial strategies.

Care is not a loss to be managed, and our residents are not commodities to be traded so profits can be extracted elsewhere.

In Kent, if your business model only works by treating vulnerable people as a problem on a spreadsheet, then your business model does **not** belong in our care system.

We will **always** ensure that vulnerable people are supported. That will **not** change. What **will** change is how we shape the market, how we set expectations, and how we ensure fairness – both for providers and for council taxpayers – within the funding we receive from central government.

We are clear about what good looks like: **the right person, receiving the right package, at the right price.**

Thank you Mr Chairman

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Oliver Bradshaw to David Wimble,
Cabinet Member for Environment**

Residents in my division frequently use the Allington Household Waste Recycling Centre but struggle to transport heavy or bulky items due to not owning larger vehicles and our current policy does not allow rented vans at the centres. While the local borough council provides a bulky waste collection service, this is limited in the number of items that can be collected per day and can be costly for residents. Does the Cabinet Member for Environment plan to review current site access policies to allow residents to use rented vehicles for transporting household waste to recycling centres so they can dispose of waste safely and responsibly?

Answer

Thank you for the question. KCC's Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) policy does not permit rental vans, tipper trucks, drop-sided lorries, horseboxes or agricultural trailers at any of our sites. This restriction is in place to prevent the misuse of HWRCs for commercial or trade waste disposal which is illegal under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Hire vehicles are frequently used for business purposes making enforcement action extremely challenging. By maintaining this restriction, we ensure HWRCs remain dedicated to household waste, uphold site safety and manage our disposal costs effectively.

At present, there are no plans to review the HWRC site access policy to allow rented vehicles as doing so would significantly increase the risk of trade waste entering the sites and compromise the integrity of the service. Instead, we continue to work with district councils to provide practical alternatives, including bulky waste collections and reuse schemes, so residents can dispose of items safely and responsibly.

As identified, for residents who find it difficult to transport large or heavy items, Maidstone Borough Council offers a bulky waste collection service. This service allows up to eight items per booking, with charges starting at £32 for 1–4 items and £42 for 5–8 items. Whilst this is not a free service, the cost is broadly comparable to hiring a vehicle for transporting waste to a HWRC and it offers the convenience of collection from home.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

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

In recent weeks, a number of residents have raised concerns about the condition of our local highways, particularly repeated incidents of localised flooding caused by blocked drains and gullies, as well as reduced visibility at junctions where shrubs and vegetation have been left to grow unchecked. The lack of delivery on these issues is a concern as at the same time, the Council has been wasting money repainting road signs outside a closed down school.

Can the Cabinet Member please explain how they assure themselves that the Council is getting best value, avoiding similar mistakes and properly implementing the Council's priorities of safety and value for money?

Answer

Thank you for your question regarding how the Council assures best value, avoids mistakes, and implements its priorities of safety and value for money in managing local highways.

To address concerns around blocked drains and gullies, we maintain a proactive cyclical programme, introduced in April 2023. This programme ensures all highway drains across Kent are attended on a three-year cycle, with strategic routes receiving annual cleansing and other routes maintained annually, biennially, or triennially based on assessed safety risks. Should any issues arise outside these programmes, we encourage customers to report them via our online fault reporting tool for us to investigate. During storms/flood event, we prioritise our work in areas where there has been internal property flooding.

In addition to drainage, we have a comprehensive programme in place to ensure highway vegetation does not obstruct visibility for road users. Where private vegetation causes an obstruction, our operational teams will follow this up if the encroachment is considered a safety concern. Although this year's weather has led to a lot of vegetation growth, our teams have not identified any major visibility issues or a significant increase in related complaints. However, they are happy to investigate any specific concerns if location details can be provided."

It was an unintentional error painting the lines outside the school but for context the cost of the painting these lines was £350 from a £1 million budget for road markings and signs. We take our financial responsibilities seriously to ensure public money is spent carefully and mistakes like these are exceedingly rare.

Our highway safety inspectors raise several thousand jobs each month and each carries out safety checks on up to 80 miles of road per day working across an area they will be locally unfamiliar with. This involves driven and walked inspections, to keep Kent's roads and footways safe for everyone."

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

WITHDRAWN

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Stuart Jeffery to Matthew Fraser Moat,
Cabinet Member for Department of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE)**

The Council is forecast to be £46.5m overspent this year, with Adult Social Care forecasting an overspend of £51m including £21m of savings for 2025/26 that have not been achieved. The Leader has also previously announced £40m savings across various other service areas while the real the spending pressure on the Council is Adult Social Care. KCC is, after all, a Social Care Authority.

As Cabinet Member responsible for saving the Council money, can the Cabinet Member for Department of Local Government Efficiency confirm whether his team is doing any work to come up with options to deliver the outstanding £21m savings expected in the current agreed KCC budget for Adult Social Care and to identify necessary savings for this portfolio in future years?

Answer

The DOLGE team is working closely with the Adult Social Care service, and the rest of the organisation, to come up with options to minimise any level of overspending in this financial year. The details of those actions were highlighted in the Quarter 2 monitoring report to Cabinet in October. In addition, we are working with all services, including adult social care, to identify the savings necessary to deliver a balanced budget for 2026/27. We expect to publish a draft of next year's budget in very early January.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Richard Streatfeild to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

The number of pupils identified as requiring a specialist school place to meet their educational needs is greater than the number of places available, and children from Sevenoaks with SEND already travel the furthest in the County to get to an appropriate specialist school. Can the Cabinet Member explain whether the county is meeting its own equality policy, in terms of the outcomes for children with SEND and the potential impact on their parents.

Answer

Kent County Council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places are available. The County Council's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2026-30 (KCP) is a five[1]year rolling plan which is updated annually. It sets out our future plans as Strategic Commissioner of Education Provision across all types and phases of education in Kent. This plan was most recently discussed at November's CYPE Cabinet Committee and can be found at this following link, including a dedicated SEND Sufficiency Plan. ([Agenda for Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on Tuesday, 18th November, 2025, 10.00 am](#)).

While it is often advantageous for a child to attend a school closer to their home, KCC has a duty to give consideration to the SEND Code of Practice and underlying legislation when deciding what school place should be offered to a child with an EHCP. Where a child with SEND does not have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), decisions are made in line with the School Admissions Code 2021 and underlying legislation. Neither of these legislative pathways guarantee a child a place at a school close to their home. Pupils with EHCPs should be placed at schools that can appropriately meet their need. Pupils without EHCPs secure places through co-ordinated and in year admissions process, which make use of each school's oversubscription criteria, combined with availability of places and parental preference. KCC is confident that it makes placement decisions in line with these duties, providing a fair and equitable provision, which also meets any related equalities duties. Where parents, carers or students remain unhappy with school options made available to them, both legal frameworks provide opportunity for independent appeal bodies to consider alternative solutions.

The combination of these factors ensures that Kent continues to adapt its education landscape to meet changing need and that places are offered in a legally compliant, and therefore fair way.

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WITHDRAWN

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Tim Prater to David Wimble,
Cabinet Member for Environment**

In July 25 at the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee meeting, I asked you if Kent's Household Waste Recycling Centres were safe from cuts. You replied: "To the best of my ability to answer that, subject to an act of God, I'm of the opinion that, yes, we are keeping them all open." In November, when asked to "categorically rule out" the closure of Kent's household waste recycling centres your Deputy Leader, Mr Collins, said: "Tips are being looked at." Are you still committed to keeping all our HWRC's open?

Answer

There are currently no plans to close any of Kent's Household Waste Recycling Centres. The service continues to review and make improvements to the reuse and recycling facilities available in order to maintain operational and cost efficiency.

Closing any Household Waste Recycling Centre is not on my agenda, but in the case of Ross Way. In Cheriton, this facility was scheduled to come to the end of its contract next year. This will now hopefully be extended by a further 12 months, whilst we build the new state of the art facility at Junction 11 of the M20.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Sarah Hudson to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council have an Objectively Assessed Housing Need of just under 20,000 homes in their Draft Local Plan, which has just been out for consultation. Many residents have commented on the ability of our road network to cope with an additional 20,000 homes across Tonbridge and Malling. However, Kent Highways continues not to object to sites where there is a severe highways impact. Even on planning applications on roads which are 20% over capacity at peak times and with the highest levels of nitrogen emissions in Tonbridge and Malling, such as one in Wateringbury in my division, Kent Highways lodge no objection. Please can I ask the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport what is needed for Kent Highways to object to a planning application, or individual site allocations in a Draft Local Plan?

Answer

Thank you for your question. While I fully understand the need for the provision of affordable housing, the increased housing targets set by Government for several Kent districts are concerning. KCC works closely with councils who are developing new Local Plans to ensure that transport issues are considered when selecting development sites. Most Kent councils are now using the Kent Transport Model as part of their evidence base with KCC officers highlighting congestion and safety issues and identifying where developers should deliver infrastructure improvements.

I have to say that the whole development planning context is hugely challenging for us as a Local Highway Authority. The National Planning Policy Framework sets an extremely high bar for highway authorities to object to development. We, not the developer must prove that the impact of development would be "severe but severe is not defined in the legislation. Even when roads are over capacity or have high emissions, objections are rarely sustained. In a recent appeal case, where KCC objected on grounds of severity of impact, the Inspector commented: "KCC set out two thresholds of severity, (one) being a 60 second increase in delay" (when the junction is already over capacity), this is a very long way from my own interpretation of a 'very great' or 'severe' impact."

While KCC Highways is no longer able to sustain objection to development proposals on congestion grounds except in the most extreme cases, officers will always seek suitable conditions and infrastructure and service improvements wherever possible. I understand this is the case with the development proposal you are referring to in Wateringbury.

I cannot comment on your question on Emissions and Air Quality as these issues are a responsibility of the planning authority to assess and consider.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

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

The Cabinet Member answered at last County Council that in this year so far, 209 refugee children have been looked after at Acacia Court in my division and 1,891 children across all KCC reception centres. In our view, this is humane work, which we should be proud to do and we are refunded the costs of it by government. Will the Cabinet Member confirm whether claims made that adults are, or have been, accommodated at Acacia Court and other centres are false and untrue and does she agree with me that people knowingly spreading such false claims about UASC reception centres are acting disgracefully?

Answer

I can confirm that KCC would never knowingly house adults with children at a UASC reception centre.

The Home Office and staff within the UASC reception centres have a system for age assessment. However, until we have a change in legislation that allows us to carry out medical age assessments, I cannot confirm that there have never been or ever will be adults housed in UASC reception centres.

I cannot agree with Mr Hook that people spread false claims about UASC and are acting disgracefully, as many of these people have genuine fears and concerns.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Mike Sole to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways explain how maintenance payments for National Cycle Routes are being prioritised for rural lanes around Canterbury, particularly sections of National Cycle Routes 16 & 17 in my Canterbury South division, that rely on narrow country roads. When answering, can the Member set out what actions the Council is taking to ensure that repairs to surfaces, signage and verge safety on lanes through villages such as Bekesbourne, Adisham, Bridge and Pett Bottom are not being deprioritised compared to urban schemes, including what metrics are used to assess risk to cyclists on high-use but low-visibility rural corridors?

Answer

Thank you for your question Mr. Sole.

Kent County Council supports active travel, encompassing walking, wheeling and cycling, in Kent. However, there is no funding specifically allocated for the maintenance of the National Cycle Network. We have a small maintenance budget for road cycle routes which is predominately used for reactive surface repairs.

Our approach to the management and maintenance of KCC highway assets overall is set out in our current Highways Asset Management Plan for 2021/22 to 2025/26. Our planned maintenance programmes reflect the usage of individual highways, both in terms of traffic volumes and the different types of road users, whether that be vehicle users, cyclists, pedestrians or people with disabilities. Reactive maintenance is based on a risk-based approach which takes the same factors into account.

I can say, however, that officers have recently completed an exercise to fully map cycle routes in Kent, including understanding their ownership, and it is intended to create an asset management plan for these assets, as part of the next highways asset management plan for the coming years.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Colin Sefton to Diane Morton,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Could the Cabinet Member please advise what the "urgent catch-up vaccination drives" are that are being taken to address the fact there is a significant decline in uptake for the 2025/26 flu campaign compared to last year (34.7% vs 44.0%) and even further below the ICB ambition target (51%), with lower uptake especially among frontline workers and younger groups. In addition, what impact has this low uptake had on the Adult Social Care Operational Pressures Escalation Plan 2025/2026?

Answer

Kent and Medway ICB are leading on the annual flu vaccination programme. They are taking a multifaceted approach to improve uptake among frontline staff and eligible residents. Due to the earlier onset of this year's flu season all elements of the approach have been intensified. These include:

- Publicising the vaccination programme and how to access it, including invitations and reminders to residents.
- Making access easier through hundreds of vaccination sites including GP practices, pharmacies and community clinics.
- Outreach to communities - mobile outreach services such as a roving vaccine bus.

KCC are supporting the NHS to circulate flu awareness messages. In multi-agency meetings, KCC contribute to maximising the reach and impact of the annual flu vaccination programme to high-risk individuals and groups.

The KCC Adult Social Care Operational Escalation Plan includes flu vaccinations as an essential factor to protect vulnerable people and supporting the resilience of the health and care system. 'This should be provided by their employer, to meet their responsibility to protect their staff and service users and ensure the overall safe running of services. Employers should commission a service which makes access easy to the vaccine for all frontline staff, encourage staff to get vaccinated, and monitor the delivery of their programmes. It is the ambition of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) that 100% of frontline health and social care staff are offered the vaccine. The Authority has arrangements in place to encourage all frontline social care staff regardless of their risk status to be vaccinated against seasonal flu. Seasonal flu vaccination arrangements are publicised to staff through the Authority's intranet and staff communication channels. Risk reduction awareness, information and education are key elements of the Authority's communication strategy through print media, online and directly with contracted providers, the community and voluntary sector.'

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Geoffrey Samme to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

The delivery of schemes in the Maidstone Integrated Transport Package (ITP), funded by £8.9m from the Local Growth Fund and additional Section 106 developer contributions, has been a disaster, with most of the money spent and a fraction of the schemes delivered.

Will the Cabinet Member provide an update on the delivery of the scheme, including how much money has been spent and how much remains outstanding?

Answer

I thank Mr Samme for his question. It is somewhat ironic that he chooses to use the word "disaster" for something his party has played a significant part in, and of course pre-dates my party being elected. The Maidstone Integrated Transport Package (MITP) consisted of an £8.9m package of schemes that were originally agreed by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). Over the years there has been some confusion as to what the schemes actually were. The original bid document that was submitted to Government defined the scope as projects to assist the delivery of new and expanded Park and Ride sites in Maidstone. Subsequent to the bid submission and in light of developments with the Maidstone Local Plan at the time, the construction and operation of Park and Ride sites were not supported by Maidstone BC, and an alternative package of transport schemes had to be identified by KCC and Maidstone BC. The spend of the Local Growth Fund (£8.9m) was completed in 2023/24 in line with SELEP requirements and has been allocated to improvements at the A20 Coldharbour, Hermitage Lane (North), A229 Loose Road junction with Armstrong Road and the closure of Cranbourne Avenue at the Wheatsheaf junction. An allocation has also been put towards the ongoing A20 Ashford Road/Willington Street scheme.

It should be noted that several schemes were removed from the MITP as there was opposition from County and Borough Councillors and the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board. Money was spent developing these proposals, but the improvements to the A274 Sutton Road junction with Willington Street, Cripple Street, Sheals Crescent and the A20 London Road junction with Hall Road were subsequently dropped.

Several schemes are assumed to be included in the MITP but are being progressed with other funding streams that have been made available to KCC. For example, the A249 Bearsted Road and M20 Junction 7 improvements, A229 Linton Crossroads and A26 Tonbridge Road (Fountain Junction).

In total, there are £4.343m of S106 monies provisionally secured from developer sites in Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling with £2.746m spent to date. The remaining S106 monies are yet to be banked by KCC. An MITP update report with further detail has been prepared and will be presented to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Maidstone JTB in the new year.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Trudy Dean to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

On 24 July 2025, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council issued the decision notice for an access route from A20 to Pippins Place, East Malling - a development of 200 houses. The decision was the result of a negotiated settlement between KCC Highways, TMBC and developer Vistry, the effect of which was to retain and protect roadside trees, and create an internal footpath saving KCC the expense of road widening works.

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport please explain why nearly five months later KCC Highways has still failed to issue the necessary S278 notice for the works to go ahead, residents are still required to use a temporary access and temporary fencing remains in place on the A20?

Answer

After the planning permission was changed to protect the trees and create an internal footpath, Vistry had to submit an amended S278 stage 2 design for us to review. The updated plans were received on the 16th September. Various modifications were requested to ensure compliance with both national and KCC standards.

The technical audit concluded on the 7th November with KCC confirming approval of the revised design and giving permission for the works to proceed on site.

Vistry has chosen to start works on the internal footway prior to the highway elements and I believe this is due to negotiations on pricing with their contractor, which we are not party to.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 December 2025

**Question by Alex Ricketts to Diane Morton,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Healthwatch Kent is an independent health and social care body set up to champion the views of patients by gathering feedback and providing advice. It is commissioned by Kent County Council with money provided by the Department of Health and Social Care. Their top three priorities for the next year are learning disabilities, the mental health crisis and veterans. Following the Government's Dash Review, Healthwatch is to be disbanded, Local Healthwatch functions are to be merged with Integrated Care Boards, and some transferred to local authorities. What are the implications of this restructuring for KCC? Specifically, how will it affect the independence of patient voice, the ability to tackle health inequalities, and the resources currently allocated to Healthwatch Kent?

Answer

Thank you for your question.

We are aware of the Dash Review recommendations, and we are reviewing the impact of the recommendations. However, as this change requires primary legislation to go through Parliament, we are awaiting that legislation before firm plans are agreed.

We recognise the need to ensure independent voices are heard through all our Social Care and Health work, including our work on tackling health inequalities, representing patient and public voice remains an important part of our local system and we are committed to continuing to work with our NHS partners in the future, once the legislation is clear.