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Dear Member

COUNTY COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 21 MAY 2026

Agenda Item No

7

Questions (Pages 1 - 26)

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Watts", is positioned above the printed name.

Benjamin Watts
Deputy Chief Executive

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Question 1**COUNTY COUNCIL****Thursday 21 May 2026****Question by Wayne Chapman to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Members will be aware of the considerable frustration felt by residents across Kent — including in my own division — every time Operation Brock is deployed on the M20. I was therefore concerned to note statements made on social media by the Honourable Member for Ashford, who appeared to attribute the deployment decision solely to KCC and the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum, and who subsequently presented a petition to Parliament calling for the Transport Select Committee to launch an enquiry into Operation Brock.

Could my friend the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport clarify for the record, what KCC's actual role is in the deployment decision of Operation Brock, and where true decision making actually lies? Can he also provide the Council with an update on that petition and its current status?

Answer

Thank you for your question.

In relation to the petition, this was raised by Sojan Joseph MP and was debated on Wednesday 16 July 2025: “The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Transport Select Committee to launch an inquiry into the decisions taken by Kent County Council and the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum to regularly deploy Operation Brock, and into what work is being undertaken to find a long-term alternative.” At this moment, I have not received formal notice whether the Select Committee has agreed to undertake an inquiry.

Regarding the decision to deploy Operation Brock, Kent County Council does not make this decision unilaterally. The Council is one of several partner agencies within the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum, alongside bodies such as National Highways and Kent Police. Decisions to deploy Operation Brock are taken collectively by the Forum, based on national border pressures, traffic conditions and operational advice. KCC's role is to contribute to these joint discussions as a partner, rather than to direct or mandate deployment itself.

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

The S106 agreement associated with the Saxon Fields development in Cockering Road, Thanington states that: “The County Council covenants with the Owner to use the Bus Service Contribution to procure the operation of a bus service to serve the Development either by extension of an existing service or by the provision of a new service to achieve a 20 minute service frequency prior to Occupation of the 200th Dwelling to be Occupied.”

It has been confirmed that all relevant S106 monies have been received at that the Public Transport team is now considering how best to deliver the service specified under the S106 agreement, taking into account the current financial climate and the time that has passed since the obligation was originally negotiated. KCC would have known for many years that the money was coming, yet has failed to agree a plan with a provider for this 20 minute service. When will the procrastination end and the transportation begin?

Answer

Thank you Mr Sole,

The S106 obligation for Saxon Fields was negotiated in a very different economic and public transport context to that which now exists. Although the contribution has now been received, this did not mean that a viable service could have been planned or procured in advance. Build-out rates across developments have slowed significantly due to the economic climate, making trigger points less predictable and, in some cases, subject to renegotiation. Committing to detailed service planning before funding was secured and before development trajectories were clear would have risked abortive work and poor use of public funds.

Bus patronage patterns have also changed fundamentally since COVID, with reduced demand and a number of services withdrawn or reshaped across the network. Any new or extended service now needs to be designed on the basis of current, not historic, demand. As commercial operators, Stagecoach must determine service provision based on up-to-date usage levels, network integration and operational viability, and it is unrealistic to expect them to commit to new services without certainty that funding is in place and available.

In addition, further bus funding is expected from the adjacent Cockering Farm development, which only received Reserved Matters approval in December 2025. Designing a service prior to this approval would have risked delivering a short-term or fragmented solution rather than one aligned with the longer-term transport needs of the area.

KCC's approach has therefore been proportionate and responsible, focused on avoiding abortive expenditure and ensuring that any service delivered is viable, integrated and sustainable.

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**Question by Dean Burns to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader**

My residents and I are concerned that KCC's approach to Asset disposal prioritises financial return over community benefit. This risks local communities missing out on valuable opportunities to make better use of KCC assets for local people because the Right to Bid process is, in my view, not strong enough support community plans.

Can the Deputy Leader tell the Council whether he accepts that the Policy places financial gain over the community benefit? In answering, can the Deputy Leader comment on whether he would consider launching a Community Transfer Programme to pass some surplus assets to youth groups or charities instead of trying to sell them all through the normal disposal process?

Answer

Thank you for the question, which relates to how the Council balances financial responsibilities with community benefit when disposing of its assets. Whilst it is correct that the Council does not have a Community Asset Transfer policy, KCC does have a published disposal policy which set out how community benefit is considered. The Council disposals policy seeks to strike a balance between ensuring compliance with statutory duties such as Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 while also allowing for community benefit to be taken into account where appropriate. There are no plans to amend the policy at the current time.

To conclude , the Council's policy is not about a choice between financial return over community benefit but meeting KCC legal obligations to taxpayers while retaining the flexibility to support community use where that delivers demonstrable value the Council.

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

I have been approached by various residents raising questions and concerns in relation to the subsidised school bus passes during the academic year. Can the Cabinet Member explain whether it is possible to review the arrangements so those families joining the scheme part way through the academic year only pay a pro rata reduced rate? Can he also comment, in relation to pass affordability, whether low income pass holders can benefit from an instalment payment scheme?

Answer

I can confirm to Mr. Thomas that any pass, including those offered at a reduced cost, can be paid for by instalments.

Our Travel Saver schemes are discretionary and accessed by around 27,000 students. To keep costs manageable and simple to administer for the Council and for parents, the scheme is designed to operate on a full-year basis, which is why we do not offer part year products.

The vast majority of customers apply for their pass prior to the new academic year and those applying early in the school year will still benefit against the cost of an operator season ticket.

The Travel Saver pass is not the only way of accessing bus services and for the small number of parents wanting to apply later in the year, it may be financially advantageous to purchase an operator ticket which can be bought for daily, weekly, or other shorter periods.

Thursday 21 May 2026

Not progressed

COUNTY COUNCIL**Thursday 21 May 2026****Question by Colin Sefton to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

Could the Cabinet Member please confirm how many children have been impacted by the 2026/27 Post-16 Transport Policy changes?

In answering, could the Cabinet Member clarify how many of those impacted children and families have been offered or issued with a Personal Transport Budget, and how many have gone on to utilise the Kent County Council Transport Appeals Process?

Answer

The information requested is below.

Please note that the application window for the 2026/27 academic year remains open until 31 May, and therefore final application figures are not yet available.

Total post 16 students for the 2025/26 academic year - 922

Total post 19 students for the 2025/26 academic year – 409

Number of students who have applied, have been approved and awarded a PTB for 2026/27 to date – 516

Stage 1 Appeals

A total of 30 Stage 1 appeals have been received and responded to.

Stage 2 Appeals

- Appeals heard under the 2026/27 Home to School Transport Policy are as follows:

Category	Upheld	Not Upheld	Upcoming Appeals Logged
Post 16	4	6	15
Post 19	0	1	9

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Not progressed

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**Question by Marc Logen to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

In 2025, KCC Highways responded to 514 planning consultations in Sevenoaks—the highest in Kent—yet only 3% resulted in objections, with no policy on site visits, no data on whether they occur, and no engagement with local members or parishes, a lack of transparency highlighted by the officer-level Regulation 18 support for the 2,500-home Pedham Place Green Belt development, despite opposition from all three affected parish councils and independent advice that the proposal is unsound.

I would welcome the Cabinet Member's support in reviewing whether our current highways planning consultation process, particularly around site visits, written policy, and engagement with local members and parishes, is sufficient to protect the communities we serve, especially where developments of this scale are being considered.

Answer

The Local Planning Authority, in this case Sevenoaks, leads the consultation on Local Plans and planning applications as part of its decision-making process. KCC's role as the Highway Authority is different: we are a statutory consultee and must provide independent, technical advice within the limits set by planning law, national policy and the available evidence. That advice cannot be based on the level of local opposition, nor can it extend to matters which are for the Local Planning Authority to determine.

Our officers therefore assess proposals on the basis of professional judgement, policy, traffic evidence and their knowledge of the local highway network. Site visits are not a mandatory requirement in every case and there is no one-size-fits-all approach; they are undertaken where officers consider them necessary and proportionate to support a sound assessment. In other cases, officers may rely on submitted material, local network knowledge, previous applications and other available sources of evidence.

I do, however, recognise the concern that this process is not always well understood by local communities, parish councils and Members, particularly where KCC is unable to object because the legal and policy threshold for doing so is not met. That can create a perception that local concerns have not been heard, when in fact they may need to be pursued through other routes with the Local Planning Authority or through Member representations.

For that reason, I support clearer explanation of KCC's role, clearer signposting to the routes available to local councils and residents, and improved communication about how our highways advice is reached. Highways officers already engage through parish seminars and Member briefings, and I understand further work is being considered on how responses can better explain the process and available support.

However, I do not believe that introducing a blanket requirement for site visits or a separate consultation stage by KCC with parish councils or local Members would be lawful, proportionate or likely to improve planning outcomes. It could cut across the statutory role of the Local Planning Authority, create delay, and expose the Council to greater risk of challenge and cost. My focus therefore is on ensuring our role is explained more clearly, that communities are better signposted to the appropriate routes for representation, and that KCC continues to press nationally for a stronger and clearer planning framework.

COUNTY COUNCIL

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Question by Luke Evans to Jamie Henderson
Cabinet Member for Environment

Under Plan Bee, KCC has shown commitment to reversing Pollinator decline. However much of the new Highways Infrastructure continues to default to high maintenance grass verges. I have worked in my division to push for wildflower sections at a zebra crossing. Other Authorities such as Dorset and Rochdale have found significant savings from shifting to wildflowers and reduced mowing maintenance.

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment confirm whether he is reviewing the approach and is considering requiring a shift to wildflower verges rather than carbon-intensive, low-biodiversity grass? In answering, can the Cabinet Member comment on how this might work for changing existing grass verges?

Answer

Our maintenance programmes are always driven by the need to keep the highway safe, but alongside this we run an active and targeted programme to manage roadside verges for biodiversity.

The network is regularly reviewed to identify where changes to verge management can best support pollinators and strengthen ecological networks, with a particular focus on rural roads where biodiversity potential is greatest.

However, conservation verge management depends on local conditions, including soil fertility, as nutrient-rich soils can encourage vigorous species such as thistles and docks that outcompete wildflowers. Dorset Councils trials involved stripping topsoil and collecting grass to achieve this reduction in nutrients which represents a significant initial investment.

To support biodiversity, we do adjust cutting regimes on selected rural verges where it is safe to do so, varying the timing of cuts to encourage a succession of flowering plants throughout the year. This helps extend the availability of food for pollinators and allows verges to function as corridors linking habitats.

As you may have noticed many of our verges are looking incredible due to many wildflowers being in full bloom as we encourage no mow May in conjunction with the Highways team to gain as much from this as possible.

Our roads are indeed a corridor for pollinators, and we will always encourage through our joint portfolio approach for appropriate low nutrient topsoils be used to further promote this during works and I will work closely with Highways to ensure all that can be done without excessive cost to taxpayer is considered.

This work is delivered in partnership with a wide range of organisations across the county, including Kent Wildlife Trust, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Natural England, as well as district, town and parish councils, local community groups and our soft landscape maintenance contractors. Together, these partnerships support the management of Bee Roads, Roadside Nature Reserves (123 in Kent), Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the wider verge network, ensuring that biodiversity gains are achieved without compromising highway safety or significantly increasing costs – and result in a network of 450km of stable habitat for pollinators across the county.

If members are aware of verges that may offer biodiversity gains, then these can be logged on the Highway Reporting tool, and the soft landscape team will happily look at the proposals to assess their suitability.

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**Question by Richard Streatfield, MBE to Georgia Foster,
Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services**

In 2023 a plan was proposed to include Sevenoaks Library in the development of Land East of High St in Sevenoaks. It was withdrawn by the last administration.

Has the current administration relooked at the proposal? In answering the question, could the Cabinet Member please provide an explanation as to why it was withdrawn in the first place.

Answer

For a number of years Kent County Council worked positively with Sevenoaks District Council to explore the potential inclusion of Sevenoaks Library along with other KCC services within the proposed development of land east of the High Street. This work was undertaken on an exploratory basis to assess whether a joint scheme could be developed that met the objectives of both councils.

Following detailed discussions and viability work, the previous administration concluded in early 2025, that it was not possible to agree a scheme that was jointly viable. As a result, Kent County Council withdrew its land and services from the project, enabling Sevenoaks District Council to progress its own regeneration ambitions without further delay.

The current administration has not revisited the proposal nor have KCC been approached by Sevenoaks District Council about the project since early July 2025. The Council remains committed to maintaining a comprehensive town-centre library service in Sevenoaks and continues to be open to future partnership or collaboration opportunities with Sevenoaks District Council where these are mutually beneficial.

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**Question by Amelia Randall to Diane Morton,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

Residents in rural areas such as Birchington and Rural often face additional barriers in accessing adult social care, including transport, workforce shortages and fewer local service.

Can the Cabinet Member explain what is being done to ensure fair access to timely care and support and creating a sustainable care workforce in Kent's many rural communities?

Answer

We recognise that rural communities such as Birchington and the surrounding rural areas can face additional challenges in accessing care and support, including transport difficulties, workforce shortages and fewer local services. Our approach is focused on improving prevention, early intervention and access to support for residents who may not currently be receiving help.

For example, our new carers service will proactively identify and support unpaid carers, particularly in underserved communities, helping reduce inequalities and reach people who may not recognise themselves as carers. Our new wellbeing offer will also target residents who are isolated or not currently accessing support.

Staff and partners use tools such as Connect to Support and the Joy platform, alongside local knowledge, to connect residents with local groups, activities and community services tailored to their needs. In addition, Kent Adult Social Care has dedicated Market Development Officers who work with communities to support flexible local care solutions and micro-enterprises, which can be especially effective in rural areas.

We are also addressing workforce challenges through our new homecare model, including exploring enhanced pay rates for harder-to-reach rural locations to help improve recruitment and retention. Alongside this, KCC's workforce team supports providers through recruitment campaigns, funded training, apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, and partnerships with schools, colleges and Jobcentre Plus.

Where transport is identified as a barrier, teams can support residents through community transport schemes and partnership working with parish councils, charities and local organisations to improve access to services and activities. If the Member would like further information specific to her area, Mr Chairman, I would be very happy to provide a more detailed briefing outside of the meeting.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 21 May 2026

**Question by Geoffrey Samme to Georgia Foster,
Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services**

Could the responsible Cabinet Member please explain the rationale for selling the Antony Gormely boulders, a sculpture which until recently stood outside the Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone, and advise how much was raised from the sale?

Answer

Kent County Council made the decision to sell Antony Gormley's 'Two Stones' sculpture back to the artist as part of its ongoing work to manage the significant financial pressures facing local authorities. This private sale allows the council to raise income in a way that protects essential services and avoids impact on residents. Returning this work to the artist ensures its continued care, as well as the potential for future public exhibition.

We are unable to disclose the costs related to the sale as this information is part of confidential legal agreement that the council has entered into with the purchaser.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 21 May 2026

**Question by Paul Stepto to Linden Kemkaran,
Leader of Kent County Council**

Following the departure of the first Political Advisor, is the Leader still happy with the decision to include these roles in the KCC structure and does she intend to recruit a replacement?

Answer

Yes and Yes.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 21 May 2026

**Question by Maxine Fothergill to Chris Hespe,
Cabinet Member for Department of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE)**

Can the Cabinet Member detail the total costs incurred to date by Kent County Council in relation to Local Government Reorganisation, how these have been funded, and the statutory powers or duties relied upon in undertaking this work and expenditure, including the projected outturn for the current financial year?

Answer

A total of £194,859.50 plus VAT has been spent on commission with strategic partner and legal costs associated with the business case submission to government in November 2025. These costs were fully covered from £514,410 grant provided by MHCLG for these purposes.

A total of £123,700 plus VAT has been incurred by KCC on strategic partners in relation to initial submission to government in March 2025 and on modelling of KCC's preferred option 1a for the business case submission in November 2025. These costs have been met within existing budgets from the General Fund.

Any other costs incurred to date relate to already budgeted staff costs.

Projected costs for 2026-27 will be funded in a similar way through government grants (where eligible) or existing budgeted staff costs. Other than staff time it is not anticipated that any additional costs will fall on the general fund in 2026-27.

In terms of statutory powers the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 sets out the framework for Local Government Reorganisation. As set out here, government is the decision-maker and the council is making preparations in anticipation of an expected government decision. This is what we would do for any upcoming, anticipated and impactful, government decision. This is business as usual work for councils and is covered by the broad duties enabling councils to operate and prepare for significant changes (for example, the general power of competence, section 1 of the Localism Act 2011). Not preparing in advance for a decision by central Government on LGR happening risks a greater impact to councils' finances and resources and would potentially put us in breach of our Best Value Duty as set out in the Local Government Act 1999, and in turn, if KCC were in breach of this duty, it could potentially lead to intervention from central Government.

Relevant decision-making procedures have been taken in relation to the council's approach to LGR, see [Decision - 25/00101 - Kent County Council Local Government Reorganisation: Strategic Business Case Submission to Government](#)

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 21 May 2026

Question by Rob Yates to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council

Kent County Council has been awarded Crisis Resilience Funding (CRF) from government for 1st April 2026 to 31 March 2029.

Will the Deputy Leader consider using a small part of this CRF funding to do what Cambridgeshire County Council is doing, which is accessing a data-led system to notify families who are eligible to access free school meals who are not currently receiving this support, with the knock-on effect of securing additional pupil premium funding to our schools when such notification is successful.

Answer

The potential benefits of following a similar model in Kent to that used by Cambridgeshire will be looked into, and consideration given to whether this could be supported through CRF.

Historically, KCC has funded district and borough councils via the Helping Hands and Household Support funds (now Crisis and Resilience Fund) to access the Policy in Practice Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) system to help identify vulnerable households most likely to need support. The necessary household level data and local insight for this tool are held at district level. Following the pilot, four districts have continued to use the system. Under the proposed CRF delivery plans, funding will again be allocated to districts, who could choose to use this for access to tools like LIFT or for targeted campaigns.

From a county level perspective, exploration can also be undertaken as to whether elements of the Cambridgeshire model could add value in Kent subject to appropriate controls.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 21 May 2026

**Question by Richard Palmer to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader**

The media reported earlier in the year that works costing £600,000 were carried out on the courtyard of Sessions House where Members and senior officers park.

Can the Deputy Leader confirm what the actual cost was, and can he clarify what the spend was for please?

Answer

The original budget allowance was £600k, however, the works were completed at a significant saving to the budget at £170k.

This was for structural works carried out to the basement areas of sessions house which is used as KCC's strategic headquarters and provides accommodation for use by staff, the delivery of council services and democratic functions.

As by product of the works KCC were able to reinstate the use of the courtyard including parking, access for delivery vehicles, safe entrance to and from the stone hall, and unloading and reloading. These are uses that had been in place for many years prior to the area having to be restricted due to safety concerns.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 21 May 2026

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

I am privileged to live and serve the residents of Dover West. I live adjacent to Alkham and for the last 30 years the Alkham Valley Parish Council has been asking for improvements to the Alkham Valley Rd to the slow the traffic while it goes through the village. Over these 30 years there have been numerous accidents, including I regret to two fatal ones. I would like to praise their patience and publicly thank the Alkham Valley Parish Council, especially Cllr Trevor Johns, for their diligence and work on this matter. However, each suggestion hasn't been approved because of various regulations. Will the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport commit to ensuring that the KCC Highways team works together with myself and the Parish Council to find a workable solution?

Answer

I would like to thank the Member for Dover West for raising this matter and for his long-standing representation of Alkham Valley residents. I also wish to formally acknowledge the sustained engagement of Alkham Valley Parish Council, which is fully recognised by Kent County Council.

Kent County Council Highways has worked with the Parish Council over a prolonged period and has delivered a number of fully KCC-funded measures on Alkham Valley Road. Throughout this time, qualified highways engineers have consistently set out the technical, legal and statutory reasons underpinning our decision-making, particularly where requested measures such as non-compliant speed limits do not meet national criteria.

These decisions are not discretionary. They are governed by national legislation, Department for Transport guidance and established engineering standards that must be applied consistently across Kent. While I recognise that this professional advice has, at times, been met with frustration locally, safety and traffic management decisions must be informed by evidence and expert judgement, not by the volume with which concerns are expressed. Members should also note that there have been no recorded personal-injury collisions on Alkham Valley Road in the past three years.

Officers will continue to engage constructively with the local Member and Alkham Valley Parish Council. However, that engagement must be grounded in realistic expectations and an acceptance that any solution must be evidence-led, legally compliant and supported by the professional judgement of our engineers.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 21 May 2026

**Question by Stuart Jeffery to Linden Kemkaran,
Leader of Kent County Council**

Following reports in the Kent Messenger of racism against the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community by this council, does the Leader agree that all forms of racism and discrimination must stop and will she publish the report into this incident so that it can be properly scrutinised?

Answer

I can of course confirm that I am against any racism or discrimination in the provision of any KCC service or against any community in Kent.

I believe this question relates to media reports of an allegation by two volunteers who were working with KCC as health champions to try to help bridge health inequalities for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. As with any such allegation an investigation is underway and once concluded, appropriate management action will be undertaken as and if required.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 21 May 2026

**Question by Sarah Hudson to Georgia Foster, Cabinet Member for
Communities & Regulatory Services**

After the sale of the Anthony Gormley statues and the consequent loss of Kent history and heritage through auctions, are there any limits to the number and quality of works of art available to be sold?

Answer

KCC has 1,231 pieces of art displayed around Sessions House and held within the Art Store. There are no plans to sell any further artworks at this time.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 21 May 2026

**Question by Antony Hook to Jamie Henderson, Cabinet Member for
Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health**

Will the Cabinet Member confirm that the Council will continue with public health information campaigns this summer as in previous years, focusing on dehydration, the effects of UV exposure and other summer health issues? In relation to this, has the Council considered recent statements by doctors about the underestimated effects of UV exposure on human eyes and the importance of wearing UV protective eyewear?

Answer

I very much welcome Mr Hook's timely and wise words and his care for our resident's health with regards to summer heat and sun exposure to both skin and eyes.

Yes, we can assure the Member we will continue to promote NHS, Met Office and UK Health Security Agency hot weather health advice this summer. This includes sun safety tips and guidance around the importance of drinking plenty of fluids, like water or diluted squash, and limiting sugary drinks and alcohol, when temperatures rise. In terms of Ultraviolet (UV) rays' effect on eyesight, the Member is right to highlight that over the past decade global research has increasingly detailed how continued exposure can damage our eyes. For this reason, sun safety advice now always includes the recommendation to wear sunglasses to reduce the glare of the sun and prevent burning of the surface, cornea and lens of the eye - much like sun can burn skin.

COUNTY COUNCIL

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**Question by Mark Hood to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

The Council receives appeals from families who wish to appeal decisions made relating to home to school transport for children in their care. Can the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills confirm how many appeals have been considered and subsequently approved or declined by the Regulation Committee Appeal Panel (Transport) in each of the last three financial years.

Answer

The number of appeals considered by the Regulation Committee Appeal Panel (Transport), and the outcomes, over the last three academic years is set out below:

2023/24

- Appeals heard: 89
- Upheld (approved): 43
- Not upheld (declined): 46

2024/25

- Appeals heard: 157
- Upheld (approved): 52
- Not upheld (declined): 105

2025/26

- Appeals heard: 179
- Upheld (approved): 50
- Not upheld (declined): 128

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 21 May 2026

**Question by Trudy Dean, MBE, the Member for Malling Central to
Beverley Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

“The numbers of 16 to 19 year olds in Kent who are not in education employment or training is now well below target in our key performance indicators. Could the Cabinet Member outline what steps are being taken to get back to target?”

ANSWER

There are number of factors behind the high NEET rate, but the main cause has been the significant growth of the 16-18 year old cohort and the inability of the post 16 sector to grow at the same rate. In January 2023 there were 34,178 in the cohort by January 2026 this had increased to 39,772. The main impact is insufficient provision for the number of young people particularly at level 2 and below. KCC and its' partner, The Education People (TEP), are focusing their attention on tackling this and the other issues impacting on NEETs.

- The Pathways for All initiative has drawn together schools and colleges in eight Local Collaboration Planning Areas (LCPA) across the county. Chaired by Headteachers, they are reviewing the post 16 offer in their areas, focusing on increasing level 2 provision in sixth forms. The outcome will be a sustainable increase in the level 2 provision across Kent that will impact the number of NEETs.
- The FE colleges are looking at ways to further increase their intake in September and potentially throughout the year. This is challenging as rapid expansion means they are close to capacity. In 2023, 9439 16-18 year olds were at college, in January 2026 12,471.
- The number of NEET provision places in Kent run by small training providers has dropped from 1106 in academic year 2022/23 to 614 this year. These support those with low or no qualifications and focus on employability skills. This has been raised with the DfE over a number of years as a result Kent has been selected as one of three pilot areas for a DfE Provision Regional Improvement Team. They will work with KCC and local providers to unlock the barriers to provision expansion. Impact will be in the next academic year.
- In the meantime, the NEET Support Service provided by TEP under contract from KCC and their Post 16 lead are actively seeking short term funding solutions with some success from district councils, charities and housing associations.

- The NEET Support Service (NSS) have reviewed their operational processes to increase the number of young people it can help and ensure that those who actively want help get it. In April 2026, the service had 788 NEETs on caseload compared to 598 in April 2023. Despite this huge increase, in March 2026, 89% of engaged young people were still being matched to an EET (Education, Employment, Training) opportunity.
- Targeting vulnerable groups impacted by NEET increase, for example: since the pandemic there has been a rapid increase in young people Electively Home Educated (EHE) or Children Missing Education. In January 2025 there were 1009 Year 11 EHE learners and 202 CME. The NSS is running a pilot this year with the three college groups to create pathways into FE for those EHE/CME learners with no qualifications.
- The KentChoices GCSE clearing tool established last year to provide current online course availability information to help those looking for a place in September will run again this year, embedded with other support provided by the LCPAs and TEP.
- There is a growing focus on NEET prevention to stop the problem upstream. TEP are coordinating KCC services to ensure professionals working with young people know key points when their clients should be taking action and where they and their clients can access information and support. This is in addition to the work that TEP and LCPA are doing with schools to improve NEET prevention, targeting support on those that are at risk of becoming NEET and creating supported transition programmes.