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Dear Member

COUNTY COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2026

Agenda Item No
5. 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

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Question 1

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

**Question by Stuart Heaver to Linden Kemkaran,
Leader of the Council**

Given that 2,877 people have already died in England and Wales due to record breaking extreme heat, Kent Fire and Rescue have attended more than 130 grass fires since July, and that 2026 is on track to be the worst harvest since records began – has the Leader had any second thoughts about the Council rescinding the KCC Climate Emergency Declaration?

Answer

No.

Ten times as many people die from the cold than from heat and grass fires are not caused by an increase in temperature, but rather than by issues such as arson and poor land management practice.

In fact, I am delighted that we were able to bring some common sense to the debate, much to the annoyance of the doomsters and climate catastrophists in the parties opposite, who rely on often debunked science for their parties' continued existence – without the climate scare, they have little to offer.

They forget that the climate always changes; it always has and it always will.

- In Roman and Medieval times, the Earth was 2 Degrees warmer than it is today
- The Earth is coming out of a mini Ice Age – there is only one way for temperatures to go.
- Carbon Dioxide is a trace gas, essential for life on Earth. It has been much higher in the past with no adverse impacts on the world – but it does green the planet and increase crop yields.

In fact Members may not be aware of a number of recent studies that appear to show that Carbon Dioxide has reached saturation point and therefore that additional gas has no effect on warming. I would ask why are they only concerned with reducing the 3% of the Carbon Dioxide that is human induced and not the 97% that is naturally occurring?

But of course Carbon Dioxide is not the biggest greenhouse gas – that is water vapour. But I can't hear any of the parties taking action on that!

In the paper accompanying the motion we did ask by how much the KCC Climate Emergency Declaration had affected the world's climate? I would genuinely welcome the answer to be sent to me, perhaps by the Green Party or the Liberal Democrats or Labour.

As the motion that the Council passed stated, we remain committed to mitigating and adapting to any extreme weather conditions.

But as a responsible organisation, we could not support the continuation of a Declaration that flies in the face of scientific evidence questioning its assumptions from top scientists, geologists, solar physicists and Nobel Prize Winners.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

**Question by Alister Brady to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader**

We recently learned that Sessions House has been put forward for the Maidstone Borough Council's Local Plan - Call for Sites. Could the Deputy Leader explain if KCC intends to put the building up for sale for residential development, if not then why has this been proposed.

In answering this question, could he detail how much has been spent in total and projected regarding the previous proposed and cancelled sale of Sessions House including the costs to develop the building to date?

Answer

'The current Maidstone Borough Council local plan identifies Sessions House as part of a broad mixed-use town centre designation. KCC considered it appropriate to submit the site through the Call for Sites process in order to maintain future planning flexibility.

KCC therefore recently made a 'mixed use' submission as part of the Maidstone Borough Councils call for sites. The Local Plan 'call for sites' supports long term planning (15-20 years) in an area, is at a early stage with Local Plans typically taking up to three years to be adopted. The fact that Sessions House has been put forward for consideration for 'mixed use' in no way means that KCC are considering putting the asset up for sale or are obligated to change its use. It is foreseeable that the way that Sessions is used may well change over the next two decades. KCC have a duty to seek to provide it or its successor flexibility in the way that sessions house is used.

I can confirm that KCC's plans for Sessions House have not changed. The building continues to be KCC strategic headquarters and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

My previous decision carefully considered the financial aspects including abortive costs for previous work of £946k. As part of the assessment £4 million of capital was made available for sessions along with revenue provisions for day to day maintenance. The Medium Term Financial Plan and budgets were amended accordingly. Expenditure remains with the budgets allocated.'

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

Question by Luke Evans to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader

In light of the increasing levels of intimidation, abuse and threats directed at elected representatives across the United Kingdom, and recognising the importance of safeguarding democratic participation, can the Deputy Leader outline what assessment has been undertaken of the security arrangements in KCC buildings and whether any additional measures are required to ensure that all councillors, regardless of political affiliation, can carry out their duties, represent their residents and participate fully in democratic debate without fear for their personal safety?

Answer

KCC undertakes assessments at all its premises with regards to the safety and security for all staff, members, service users and visitors who access our buildings. This includes premises where public facing meetings take place and democratic debate is undertaken on a regular basis, with specific arrangements in place as appropriate based on the risks identified. KCC work across the Council and with partners such as Kent Police to manage known protests and risks, implementing and communicating additional safety and security measures when required.

In addition to physical security arrangements within Council premises, KCC works closely with Kent Police, emergency services and other partners through its CONTEST Prevent, Protect and Prepare arrangements to consider protective security, preparedness and resilience issues across the county, identification of emerging risks and consideration of proportionate mitigation measures to support the safe operation of public services, public-facing activity and democratic processes.

KCC has worked closely with Kent Police's Force Elected Official Advisor as part of Operation Ford which has provided Members with personal security training, incident reporting guidance, and ongoing support to help ensure the safety of elected representatives.

Further information is available to Members on the Member SharePoint and through Prevent guidance and resources. Individual Political Parties may also offer particular guidance and support to their Members and each Group should liaise with their party organisation to check details directly as that is outside of KCC functions.

I would encourage Members to report any specific concerns to staff within the Governance Division and to engage with Operation Ford as appropriate.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

Question by Paul Thomas to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

I understand that there is a shortage of in-year school places in Maidstone, caused by new housing and population growth, particularly with people moving down from London. Money from developers appears to be available through S106 and/or CIL. Given the urgency of the situation, why aren't schools being expanded, rebuilt, or otherwise increased in capacity now?

Answer

The position in Maidstone is more complex than a simple shortage of in-year school places. The borough has experienced significant housing growth, with 11,659 homes completed between 2014 and 2024, alongside office-to-residential conversions that have increased demand for school places in some parts of the town.

Kent County Council has responded by supporting schools to accommodate additional pupils and by delivering new capacity, including the Langley Park Primary School and support for a new free school in Bearsted, both partly funded through Section 106 contributions secured before the introduction of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) by Maidstone. Every child is offered a school place, although this may not always be their nearest or preferred school.

Since Maidstone Borough Council introduced CIL in 2018, KCC has generally been unable to secure Section 106 education contributions and has not yet received any CIL funding for education projects. While KCC remains responsible for planning school places, decisions on the allocation of CIL funding rest with Maidstone Borough Council, which must balance a range of infrastructure priorities. Questions about the use of developer contributions and future infrastructure provision are therefore best directed to the Borough Council. It should be noted that last week KCC finally secured Maidstone Borough Council's agreement that Section 106 obligations should be used to mitigate education impacts where CIL funding is insufficient.

However, developer funding cannot address every instance of in-year pressure. While funding may provide additional accommodation, opening and staffing new classes is only viable where there is sufficient, sustained demand.

Although some Key Stage 2 year groups remain under pressure, the latest admissions round showed more than 100 surplus Reception places as birth rates decline in parts of the town. KCC will continue to ensure every child receives a school place and will plan additional capacity where housing growth creates sustained demand.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

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

Between May 2025 and May 2026 4072 requests were made to assess Kent children for a Special Educational Need or Disability. In the same period EHCP's 3011 were issued. Only 56% as an annual rolling average are within the 20 week statutory guideline. The request and delivery figures are not directly correlated, but are indicative of inefficiency. These figures mask the monthly figures that are periodic but cyclical, which means some children are further disadvantaged simply by the time of year their school or parents apply for assessment.

Why does the CYPE directorate not have sufficient staff to meet its statutory obligations to disabled children which is made far worse by application during foreseeable periods of high demand?

Answer

Thank you for the question.

The question raises three important issues: how performance is measured, how performance is monitored, and the extent to which staffing levels determine outcomes. It is important to consider each of those in turn.

First, the figures being compared are not directly comparable.

The number of requests for an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment and the number of Education, Health and Care Plans issued during the same period relate to different groups of children at different stages of the process. Requests relate to children entering the system, whereas EHCPs issued relate to cases reaching completion, often many months later.

The difference between those figures is therefore not, in itself, evidence of inefficiency. The recognised statutory measure of performance is the percentage of EHCPs completed within the 20-week statutory timescale.

Second, the suggestion that the rolling annual figure masks underlying performance does not reflect the wider performance information available.

If the rolling annual average were the only measure available, that might be a reasonable concern. However, it is not. The annual figure is only one measure within a much broader set of SEND performance information that is routinely monitored, reported and scrutinised. Members receive regular performance information and SEND performance is also scrutinised externally, including by the Department for Education.

In addition to the statutory 20-week measure, Kent routinely monitors and reports:

- Monthly performance trends;

- Demand levels and assessment volumes;
- The number of cases exceeding the 20-week timescale;
- The age profile of those cases;
- Decision-making performance against the six-week statutory deadline.

We also go beyond statutory requirements by monitoring the age and number of older cases to ensure transparency and maintain focus on children waiting longest.

Given the breadth of information available, I do not believe it is accurate to suggest that underlying performance is hidden or masked by the annual figure. The data beneath that figure is visible, routinely reported and actively scrutinised.

Indeed, the wider performance data shows:

- Decisions on whether to proceed with an assessment are now made within the six-week statutory timescale in approximately **95% to 99%** of cases;
- Current year-to-date EHCP performance is **72.5%**, compared with a national average of around **50%**;
- At the latest reported position, only **six cases** were more than 24 weeks old and **none** were more than 28 weeks old;
- Performance has improved from **2.3%** compliance just a few years ago; and
- This improvement has been achieved despite assessment requests increasing from **3,983** in the twelve months to May 2024 to **4,562** in the twelve months to May 2026.

These measures provide a much fuller picture of performance than any single statistic considered in isolation and demonstrate the significant progress made by the service despite continued growth in demand.

Third, staffing is only one factor influencing performance.

The question asks why the Council does not simply employ sufficient staff to remove delays during periods of higher demand.

The answer is that SEND performance is not determined solely by the number of staff employed by the Council, and increasing staffing alone would not necessarily resolve the causes of delay.

EHC assessments are part of a complex, multi-agency process involving Educational Psychologists, health professionals, schools, social care services, families and young people themselves. Whilst KCC is accountable for the overall process, successful delivery depends on effective contributions from across the wider SEND system, and delays can arise at various points that sit beyond the Council's direct control.

For that reason, our focus has been on increasing overall system capacity through the SEND Transformation Programme rather than simply increasing headcount. This includes strengthening Educational Psychology capacity, investing in workforce development, improving recruitment and retention, redesigning assessment pathways and introducing more effective ways of working. The evidence suggests this approach is delivering results, with performance improving significantly despite sustained increases in demand.

It is also important to recognise that demand is not always predictable. Following the announcement of SEND reforms, Kent experienced the highest level of assessment requests seen in five years. This demonstrates why staffing permanently for peak demand would not necessarily prevent delays or guarantee 100% compliance.

Equally, maintaining staffing levels to meet the highest possible demand at all times would inevitably create excess capacity during quieter periods and would not represent an efficient use of

public resources. The challenge is therefore not simply to employ more staff, but to build a service that is resilient, flexible and sustainable, both operationally and financially.

Finally, whilst timeliness is important, speed is not the only measure of a successful outcome. There will be occasions when taking additional time is in a child's best interests, particularly where further consultation is required to secure the most appropriate educational provision. Our responsibility is not simply to issue plans quickly, but to ensure children and young people receive the right support and provision for their needs.

In conclusion:

- **First**, the figures cited in the question are not directly comparable and do not provide a reliable measure of SEND assessment performance. The recognised statutory measure is performance against the 20-week timescale.
- **Second**, SEND performance is not being hidden or masked. A wide range of performance information is routinely monitored, reported and scrutinised, and that information demonstrates significant improvement in both timeliness and outcomes.
- **Third**, the suggestion that SEND performance is principally determined by the number of Council staff employed does not reflect the reality of a complex, multi-agency process. Increasing Council staffing alone would not address all the factors that influence performance.

The evidence shows a service that has improved substantially whilst managing increasing levels of demand and performing significantly above the national average. That progress reflects the commitment and professionalism of officers, schools and partners across the SEND system. Our focus now is on continuing the improvements being delivered through the SEND Transformation Programme, strengthening capacity, improving processes, developing our workforce and working effectively with partners.

However, we must also recognise that SEND operates within a complex statutory framework and an evolving national policy environment. Whilst we will continue striving for further improvement, some pressures and constraints extend beyond the Council alone. That is why our objective is not simply to pursue individual performance measures, nor to assume that increasing the number of Council staff is, by itself, the solution. Our focus is on delivering sustainable system-wide reform that is operationally effective, financially sustainable and capable of delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

Finally, I recognise the importance that all Members place on SEND services and on securing better outcomes for children and families. If Councillor Streatfeild, or indeed any other Member, would like a more detailed discussion about the performance data or the transformation work currently underway, I would be very happy to arrange a meeting outside of County Council. A greater understanding of the complexities involved can only help us work collectively towards improving outcomes for Kent's children and young people.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

**Question by Dean Burns to Linden Kemkaran,
Leader of the Council**

A recent Freedom of Information response confirmed that Kent County Council spent approximately £3,122.69 on delegate fees, accommodation and travel for five attendees at the Local Government Association Annual Conference in Bournemouth in July 2026. The delegation comprised four Members and one senior officer.

At a time when residents continue to face significant financial pressures and the Council is required to make difficult spending decisions across a range of services, can the Leader of the Council explain what tangible benefits, outcomes, partnerships, funding opportunities or policy influence were secured as a result of attendance and what alternative arrangements were considered to lower costs, for example, car sharing and twin room sharing.

Answer

The LGA Annual Conference is the principal national forum for local government, bringing together council leaders, members, chief executives, senior officers, ministers and regulators. It is where national policy is debated, relationships are built and councils seek to influence decisions that affect residents and services.

For an authority of Kent's scale and significance, attendance is a proportionate investment in ensuring our voice is heard on issues such as local government finance, adult social care, children's services and local government reorganisation.

The conference provided direct access to ministers, senior civil servants and sector leaders, enabling us to raise Kent's priorities, strengthen partnerships, share best practice and better understand emerging policy. The value of that engagement cannot always be measured in a single funding bid or spreadsheet entry, but it is an important part of effective local government leadership.

I must say that the question seems to be based on the assumption that the LGA Conference is some sort of holiday. Anyone who has actually attended will know it consists of a demanding programme of meetings, workshops, policy sessions and stakeholder engagement from early morning until late evening.

Indeed, I attended multiple workshops, meetings and spoke on the main conference stage about the importance of attracting and retaining talented young people into local government and was able to showcase some of the excellent work Kent is doing in that area.

We always seek value for money and keep costs under review. However, there is also a cost to not being in the room when policy is being shaped, partnerships are being formed and opportunities are being identified. For Kent, choosing not to engage would be a false economy.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

**Question by John Finch to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

There has been considerable confusion arising from differing and, at times, seemingly contradictory reports in the press and on social media regarding the proposed bus service cuts in Thanet.

Various explanations have been given regarding the reasons for these service changes, including references to the role of Kent County Council.

Could the Cabinet Member please clarify the situation and explain the factors that have led to these changes?

Answer

Thank you for your question. I need to make clear that the proposed changes in Thanet concern commercial bus services operated by Stagecoach. Decisions about the routes and frequency of these services are made solely by the operator, not Kent County Council. We understand that the changes reflect the operator's assessment of the services' commercial viability.

We recognise the concern these changes may cause for residents, and we do not support reductions that leave communities without access to essential public transport links. Within our role and the funding available to us, we are working with operators to explore replacement or alternative provision.

However, I am pleased to advise that following the work undertaken by officers we have secured the services by providing subsidy for their continuation. Confirmed information has been published through the Council's usual communications channels so that residents receive clear and accurate updates based on agreed arrangements.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

Question by Paul Stepto, to Brian Collins
Deputy Leader of the Council

In December last year, the Gravesend Adult Education Centre was sold at auction for £1,523,000, which was £1,123,000 above the £400,000 guide price.

Would the Deputy Leader explain who was responsible for agreeing the guide price, and whether any lessons have been identified from the significant difference between the guide price and the eventual sale price?

Answer

Thank you Mr. Stepto for this question. The Council's Constitution sets out KCC's decision making processes and scheme of delegations.

In this case, the asset in question was expected to sell below £1m, therefore a decision over the guide price was initially delegated at an Officer level in accordance with the scheme of delegations in the Constitution. Following the auction result, an urgent decision process was initiated to ensure correct the governance arrangements were in place and I took the decision to sell at £1.523m on 31st December before the transaction completed. The report and decision were transparently published online as Decision 25/00114.

A guide and reserve were set following professional advice from auction specialists. The auction created competition and the market ultimately determined the final price. You will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for the Council to comment in detail on reserve prices, valuation assumptions or bidding behaviour as this is commercially sensitive and may undermine future disposals.

Officers have confirmed that the service regularly reviews its processes alongside best practice. I understand that disposal activity was subject to an Internal Audit review which reported in January to the Governance and Audit Committee.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

**Question by Mark Hood to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Councillors in Tonbridge have been attempting to improve access for disabled residents by amending or removing a motorbike gate at London Road to ensure access for those using mobility scooters and wheelchairs. The process has been complicated but progress appears to have completely stalled despite the correspondence between elected Members and officers.

Can the Cabinet Member tell us when we can expect to see the current gate amended or removed and what assistance can be provided to ensure an accessible active travel route from London Road to Trench Wood.

Answer

An investigation was undertaken which identified three landowners whose agreement would be required for any proposed changes to the existing barriers, as the footpath across their land is secured through agreement rather than being a publicly owned right of way. Initial discussions indicated that the proposals were not considered acceptable as widening the barriers would allow unauthorised vehicles such as motorbikes to access the land.

Officers have recently agreed to undertake further engagement with all landowners to explore the matter in more detail and will also include KCC Member Mark Hood in future discussions with a view to providing a path accessible for all but still provide a barrier to unauthorised vehicles.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

Question by Stuart Jeffery, to Brian Collins
Deputy Leader of the Council

During the debate on Reform's motion at July's Council meeting, entitled "The Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty and Kent County Council's Approach", Reform councillors stated that they wanted a meritocratic society and to not provide any support towards any particular group.

With the gender pay gap at KCC currently in excess of 10%, does the Deputy Leader consider that women are less deserving of pay than their male colleagues or does he agree that there are structural and societal differences that are imposed on women that create this gap? If he feels the latter is true, will he now support meaningful actions for women at KCC who have more than demonstrated their merit and mettle, to overcome the barriers?

Answer

KCC is clear: gender should never limit opportunity or determine pay. We pay men and women equally for work at the same level, and our gender pay gap is continuing to fall.

Our mean pay gap has reduced from 9.7% to 9.3%—well below the South East mean of 16.4%, the Kent mean of 14.3% and the national average of 13.8%. That is strong evidence that KCC is making progress and compares favourably with employers locally and regionally.

A gender pay gap is not evidence of unequal pay. It reflects the distribution of men and women across an organisation. Women make up around 79% of KCC's workforce, 73% of the upper pay quartile and 59% of our leadership cohort.

We will not be complacent. Through fair pay strategy, flexible working, accessible development and stronger career support, KCC is tackling the barriers within our control.

We will continue to publish and scrutinise the data, support men and women equally to progress and take practical action. The direction of travel is clear: KCC's gap is narrowing, our position is stronger than the wider benchmarking and we remain committed to meritocracy.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

Question by Mike Sole to Jamie Henderson,
Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health

The online booking system for Household Waste Sites is a continuing frustration for many residents who cannot understand why red tape and bureaucracy have been put in the way of responsible waste disposal.

What is the annual cost of the online booking system, including both the back office and IT costs, and the employment costs of a person at every site to tick off registration numbers? When answering please can the Cabinet Member comment on what benefits this cost brings to Kent residents

Answer

Thank you for your question regarding the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) booking system. The booking system is delivered through a contracted service and the associated costs form part of the Council's waste management budget. Detailed contract pricing is commercially sensitive; however, I would be happy to share the full contract terms with the member on a confidential basis. There are no additional staff employed specifically to check bookings; this forms part of the existing duties undertaken by site staff.

Introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, the booking system has evolved into a valued service that helps residents access HWRCs quickly and conveniently. Residents can book up to two weeks in advance, make same-day bookings in most cases and amend or cancel appointments if required.

The booking system provides several significant benefits:

- It has virtually eliminated queues by helping the Council to manage demand across our 19 HWRCs, reducing congestion on site and surrounding roads, making better use of available capacity, and giving residents greater certainty when planning their visits.
- If sites need to be closed, bookings can be suspended and customers notified to avoid wasted journeys, while usage data supports service planning.
- It supports safe and responsible waste disposal through an efficient and accessible service, with no evidence that it encourages irresponsible practices.

Customer feedback remains overwhelmingly positive and in the latest customer satisfaction survey:

- 97% of respondents were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their HWRC visit.
- 96% found the booking system easy or extremely easy to use.
- 97% secured either their preferred booking date or an acceptable alternative.
- 77% had used the system to make a same-day booking.

The service continues to improve, with digital vehicle vouchers and permits in development.

Although the detailed annual contract cost is commercially sensitive, the booking system supports a service handling hundreds of thousands of visits each year. It improves the customer experience and enables operational efficiency and flexibility. The Council therefore considers that the system represents good value for money for Kent residents.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

Question by Rob Yates to David Wimble,
Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects

There is significant public concern about the water usage of data centres in an already water-stressed county. Can the Cabinet Member outline what information the Council currently holds regarding existing and proposed data centres in Kent, including the nature of that information and whether it will be shared with Opposition Members?

Answer

Chairman, thank you.

I think the first thing we need to do here is separate what we actually know from what we simply do not yet have reliable evidence for.

At the moment, the Council holds information from publicly available sources identifying five existing data centres in Kent. These are located in Sittingbourne, Maidstone and Sandwich.

We are also, of course, aware of the emerging proposals for a major AI data centre campus at Ebbsfleet.

We have information about the broad location and potential scale of that proposal, together with some of the infrastructure requirements and the environmental and planning issues that will need to be properly considered as those plans develop.

But I want to be very clear with Members about one particular issue, and that is water.

At present, Kent County Council does not hold verified, site-specific figures showing precisely how much water each of Kent's existing data centres uses, or exactly where that water comes from.

And I am not going to stand here and invent a figure simply because we have been asked for one.

This is not just a Kent issue. There is a wider national shortage of consistent, publicly available information about water consumption by data centres.

That matters because as data centres become larger, and particularly as demand for AI infrastructure grows, we need to understand their impact on local infrastructure.

Water is clearly part of that.

That is why Water Resources South East has been asked whether it, or the relevant water companies, can provide us with further information. We also want to understand the involvement of the water companies when major new data-centre developments are being assessed.

When it comes to Ebbsfleet, I think Members quite rightly will want considerably more detail as that proposal progresses.

How much water will it require?

Where will that water come from?

What cooling technology is proposed?

Can recycled or non-potable water be used?

And, importantly, what measures will be put in place to minimise reliance on the public water supply?

These are perfectly reasonable questions.

Kent wants investment. We want economic growth, new technology, skilled employment and the infrastructure that can help make this county competitive for decades to come.

But growth has to come with the infrastructure necessary to support it.

We cannot simply look at the potential economic benefits of a development of this scale without also considering its demands on electricity, water, transport and the wider environment.

So our position is straightforward.

We will continue gathering the evidence. As further substantive information becomes available, and where it can properly be shared, we will make that information available to Opposition Members.

And as the Ebbsfleet proposal develops, Members will be kept informed, particularly as we obtain more detailed evidence about its water requirements, cooling systems and the measures proposed to reduce pressure on the public water supply.

I would much rather give Members verified information when we have it than provide estimates today which may subsequently prove to be wrong.

That is the responsible approach, and that is what we will continue to do.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

Question by Trudy Dean to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Could the Cabinet Member for Education please state what level of Education achievement is being achieved by White British Boys and Girls in comparison with other ethnic groups and say what action is being taken by KCC to achieve equality between ethnic groups?

Answer

Chairman, thank you for the question.

The available data does show differences in attainment between groups. At Key Stage 2, 60% of Kent's White British pupils achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths, compared with 61% nationally. At Key Stage 4, Kent's White British pupils achieved an Attainment 8 score of 44.6, compared with 44.8 nationally. Across other ethnic groups in Kent, attainment is generally higher.

This reflects wider national evidence. The Outcomes by Ethnicity in Schools in England report published by the Department for Education found that educational outcomes vary significantly between ethnic groups, with many minority ethnic groups outperforming White British pupils. National research has also highlighted the importance of understanding the wider factors that influence attainment, including deprivation and disadvantage.

That is why equality of opportunity is a key priority within Kent's Education Strategy. Our focus is on ensuring that every child and young person has access to high-quality education, strong attendance, inclusive provision and the support they need to succeed.

It is also important that we understand the experiences and challenges faced by all groups of children and young people, including White British children. As Cabinet Member, I shall be ensuring that our data collection is analysed and presented in a way that allows us to identify how these trends relate specifically to Kent, so that we can better understand any underlying inequalities and take action where those factors fall within our influence and control.

Ultimately, our aim is to ensure that every child and young person in Kent has the opportunity to thrive and achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.

1 Key Stage 2 combined Reading Writing and Maths - Kent's White British is 60%, national for is 61%. Kent Ethnic groups Reading Writing and Maths varies from 61% to 72% against the national for all children at 62%. Key Stage 4 Attainment 8 for Kent White British 44.6 compared to national at 44.8. Kent Ethnic groups Attainment 8 varies from 54.5 to 51.5 compared to national A8 for all students of 46.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

Question by Antony Hook to Richard Palmer,
Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

The newly agreed UK-EU Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) framework, scheduled to take effect mid-2027, will eliminate routine physical border checks and paperwork for EU food and agricultural imports. These checks came in as an expensive extra burden for Kent Trading Standards at the end of the Brexit Transition Period.

Can the Cabinet Member outline the projected cost savings for Kent Trading Standards resulting from this agreement, and confirm how these freed-up resources will be redeployed to benefit the Kent public?

Answer

Thank you, Mr. Hook, for your question and I am pleased that I can clear up this point and provide clarity for members, the wider public, and businesses.

No. This agreement will not save Kent Trading Standards a penny.

Kent Trading Standards has no role in checking food, plant, or animal imports at the border. That sits with the district and borough councils as Port Health Authorities, and with the Government's Animal and Plant Health Agency. The one exception is investigating breaches in live animal transport, and even most of those checks happen at destination, not here in Kent.

What Trading Standards does at the border — and does well — is check the safety of non-food consumer goods. That work has nothing to do with this EU deal. It's paid for in full by the Office for Product Safety and Standards because it protects the whole country, not just Kent.

So, there are no savings, no spare capacity, and nothing to redeploy.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 September 2026

Question by Maxine Fothergill to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader

KCC's own previous documentation confirms that Sessions House is subject to restrictive covenants in favour of the Ministry of Justice designed to protect and maintain security at the prison.

Given this, why has this Administration now put Sessions House forward through Maidstone Borough Council's Call for Sites process for potential housing development, and what assessment has been made of whether the Ministry of Justice restrictions could materially limit its development potential and therefore the value of this important public asset?

Answer

It is correct that there are covenants that relate to Sessions House in favour of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) that are designed to protect the security of the neighbouring prison. I can confirm that KCC recently made a 'mixed use' submission as part of the Maidstone Borough Council call for sites. The Local Plan 'call for sites' supports long term planning (15-20 years). It is foreseeable that the way that Sessions is used may well change over the next two decades. KCC have a duty to seek to provide it or its successor flexibility in the way that sessions house is used.

Land and building covenants are separate to planning policy and can be amended with the agreement of the parties. Any future uses will need to ensure compliance with the covenants that are in place at that time.

I can confirm that Sessions House is and will remain the strategic headquarters for KCC. This has not changed.