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Date: 5 November 2026

Dear Member

COUNTY COUNCIL - THURSDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2026

Agenda Item No
7 **Questions (Pages 1 - 26)**

Yours sincerely

Benjamin Watts
Deputy Chief Executive

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Question 1

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Stuart Heaver to Jamie Henderson, Cabinet Member for Environment and Costal Regenration

Can the Cabinet Member please explain why KCC tree planting plummeted by more than 90% - from 149,945 in 2024/25 to less than 12,000 last year?

Answer

The reduction in tree planting reflects a significant change in the funding available to KCC. There is no base budget for this work, so delivery depends on securing external funding. The substantial government grants that supported previous planting levels ended after 2024/25, leaving much smaller grants available from 2025/26 onwards.

The final Local Authority Treescape Fund award of £299,039 supported planting in 2024/25. In contrast, the two grants secured in 2025/26 totalled £47,500 and supported 11,940 trees. Although KCC secured the maximum awards available under the two grant schemes accessed, these could not sustain previous planting levels. The constraint is therefore the scale of funding available, rather than an inability to secure it.

We are actively pursuing additional funding and supporting partners to bring more investment into Kent. Work will begin early next year to develop green finance and investment opportunities, with increasing tree planting a key priority.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Paul Thomas to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council

Can the Leader of the Council explain why she has taken legal action on LGR without discussing at Full Council or the Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation Cabinet Committee, leading to further expenditure?

Answer

Thank you for the question. I am delighted to have the opportunity to clarify that I have, of course, kept the Members fully informed of all my correspondence with government seeking clarification on the reasoning and process used to reach their previous decision on LGR for Kent and Medway.

It is worth noting that this decision, to implement 4 Unitary Councils in Kent and Medway, was withdrawn on 29 October – just five working days ago. I have referred to my quest to get answers to simple questions about the decision making reasoning and process in this Chamber and in public statements shared with Members.

This quest started with my letter to Angela Rayner on 26 July and was followed up in several further letters to government – to which I received no substantive reply.

The papers for the scheduled Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee on September 8 included an update on the Judicial Review process. Although the Committee was postponed due to the government decision to “pause” LGR the day before, the papers were published.

I therefore completely reject the inference in the question that there has been any lack of transparency in the action taken or the reasons for it.

In the ongoing absence of any response from Ministers, KCC issued Judicial Review proceedings against the Government’s July LGR decision within the statutory time frame. The Monitoring Officer exercised express delegated legal powers given to her by Council through the Constitution to issue legal proceedings.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

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

In March 2026, Kent County Council declared an “Illegal Migration Emergency” and called on Government to provide full funding for the costs associated with illegal migration, alongside additional support for Kent’s emergency services, resilience structures and emergency-planning arrangements.

Since that declaration, what tangible outcomes for Kent residents does the Leader consider the declaration to have achieved and on what basis has its success been evaluated?

Answer

Thank you for the question.

My Restore friend opposite is quite correct Mr Chairman.

My Reform UK administration did indeed declare an Illegal Migration Emergency in March, and we did so because Kent experiences the consequences of illegal migration in a way no other county does.

In fact I’m surprised, but delighted, that my friend opposite wishes to discuss the day we passed our motion, because he, along with all his Restore members, joined the Conservatives, the Greens, the Lib Dems and Labour in walking out in objection to our motion.

Which is a shame because it was an important motion that highlighted the impact on cost, culture, community cohesion and crime. It called on Government to stop small-boat arrivals, properly fund the costs falling on Kent and our public services, and support our emergency and resilience arrangements.

Since then, we have continued to press Government where national arrangements have consequences for Kent.

We have been particularly clear about the need for an effective national system for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, rather than Kent carrying a disproportionate burden simply because of our geography. Recent challenges in Dover and Portsmouth have again demonstrated the importance of getting those national arrangements right.

But there is an important point at the heart of this question. The principal levers for material change do not sit in County Hall, and he knows that, he knows that Mr Chairman.

We – sadly - do not control the border, immigration policy or the national asylum system. Those powers sit with central Government.

We know that the Conservatives welcomed open borders and that mass immigration occurred during their 14 years in power. We also know that since Labour came to office in 2024, over 100,000 people have arrived here illegally, the vast majority coming in boats and arriving on the shores of Kent.

So the test of the declaration is not whether Kent County Council can solve illegal migration itself. We plainly cannot. The test is whether we use the voice of this Council to stand up for Kent, press Government to act, secure proper funding and make sure our county is not expected simply to absorb the consequences of a national system over which our residents have no control.

That is exactly what we have done and I make no apology for using Kent's voice to press the Government that actually possesses those powers.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Maxine Fothergill to Brian Collins, Deputy Leader of the Council

Can the Cabinet Member confirm the total cost of the additional security works undertaken at Sessions House in 2025, the separate cost spent in 2026 on the new reception security gate system, and why the further measures were considered necessary given the additional security already put in place in 2025?

Answer

KCC assesses safety and security risks across all its premises to protect staff, Members, service users and visitors. At Sessions House, where public meetings and democratic debate take place regularly, proportionate measures are implemented in response to identified risks. The additional works at Sessions House created a secure line within the building to complement the physical security presence.

In March 2025, the physical security presence was increased from 6 to 12 hours a day at an annual cost of £41,826. In 2026, security barriers were installed at Sessions House at a cost of £44,650.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Luke Evans to Peter Osbourne.
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

Could the Cabinet Member clarify the Council's policy on the inspection and cleansing of gullies and road drains, particularly in locations that are known to block repeatedly within short periods of time?
My understanding is that most problematic gullies are cleaned on a standard annual cycle. However, where there is a well-documented history of drains becoming blocked much more frequently, is there scope for exceptions to be made and for those locations to be placed on a more frequent maintenance schedule, such as a six-monthly cycle? The specific example I would like to highlight is Willets Hill in Monkton, where blocked drains have resulted in surface water flooding properties at the bottom of Seamark Close on numerous occasions over many years.
Given this recurring problem, would the Cabinet Member consider whether a more frequent cleansing regime could be implemented at this location, and explain the process by which such decisions are made

Answer

Kent County Council maintains highway drainage assets through a combination of cyclical cleansing and reactive maintenance. Following the commencement of the new Highways Term Maintenance Contract in May, we reviewed our drainage data and redesigned the cleansing programme to improve efficiency and make the best use of available resources. The revised programme operates on a two-year cycle, with annual cleansing prioritised on the strategic road network. Gullies on high-speed roads are covered by a separate programme, delivered between April and September.

In addition to this planned maintenance, the Highway Drainage Maintenance Team assesses reports submitted through our fault-reporting system. Each enquiry is subject to a risk-based assessment, taking into account the severity of the issue and its potential impact on properties, highway users and the wider network. Where the relevant intervention criteria are met, reactive work is arranged to address locations that require attention before their next scheduled visit.

This approach enables us to direct resources to where they are most needed while maintaining a countywide programme of preventative maintenance

In relation to Willets Hill, Monkton, we received two maintenance enquiries from a resident through the fault-reporting system in July 2026. Reactive maintenance works were subsequently arranged and completed under a road closure on 17 September 2026. Any further drainage problems at this location should be reported through the Highways Fault Reporting Tool so that the Highway Drainage Maintenance Team can assess them.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

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

Crisis Resilience Funding is an essential government fund to support our most vulnerable residents in Kent. We should be doing everything in our power to ensure this money flows to the residents who needs it as quickly as possible. There is a risk that not all of this funding is allocated to our most vulnerable residents.
Can the Leader provide a district-by-district breakdown of the £3.84 million allocated for District and Borough Council Delivery from KCC's 2026/27 Crisis and Resilience Fund, setting out the amount allocated to each authority and summarise how each authority intends to use its allocation?

Answer

Thank you for this question.

£3.84 million pounds, has been allocated to Kent's district and borough councils for local delivery through the 2026/27 Crisis and Resilience Fund. The allocation to each district/borough council was calculated using a needs-based formula incorporating UK Government data on population, deprivation, and debt, helping to direct a greater proportion of the funding to areas with higher levels of need.

The district-by-district allocations along with current delivery intentions will be fully detailed in the written answer. In the interests of time, I will summarise the position now.

The average allocation is around £320,000 per district.

Funding ranges from £185,571 in Tunbridge Wells to £451,875 in Thanet because allocations are based on the agreed needs-led formula.

The funding is overwhelmingly focused on helping vulnerable households meet essential living costs and improve their financial resilience. Providing household essentials such as white goods and beds; supporting food banks; funding debt advice; and reducing household energy costs is common.

Areas receiving the largest allocations are generally delivering the broadest programmes of crisis support and community resilience. Lower funded districts place greater emphasis on targeted advice, partnership and community-based support.

District and borough councils are continuing to develop the operational detail of some elements of their plans. KCC will work with them to monitor delivery, expenditure, and outcomes to ensure funding reaches vulnerable residents and supports both immediate need and longer-term financial resilience.

In addition to the allocations outlined, district and borough councils have received a share of separate additional government funding for heating oil support. This funding does not form part of the initial £3.84 million allocation and has therefore not been included in the district delivery breakdowns shown in the written answer. The additional heating oil funding provided to KCC for 2026/27 totals £998,009.

Written Response:

District Breakdown

Ashford Borough Council: £313,811.70. Funding will support the provision of essential white goods, carpets, beds, and mattresses to eligible low-income households. Welfare Intervention Officers will assess applications and provide benefits advice where appropriate.

Canterbury City Council: £336,426.86. The council intends to provide essential household items, including carpets, white goods, children's beds, furniture, and small kitchen appliances. It also plans to establish community hubs in Canterbury and Herne Bay and fund a Food Bank Link Worker to provide practical support with benefits, debt, employment, and financial resilience.

Dartford Borough Council: £297,339.01. Funding will support essential household items and energy-efficiency measures, food banks, the Dartford Larder social supermarket and tailored Citizens Advice provision. It will also support food and resilience activities for families during school holidays.

Dover District Council: £342,813.69. A dedicated Crisis and Resilience Fund Officer will assess applications, administer local financial assistance, and coordinate support with delivery partners. Local provision will be reviewed regularly against needs including material deprivation, food insecurity, and debt.

Folkestone and Hythe District Council: £359,072.08. Funding will provide help with exceptional essential costs, household items, energy-efficiency measures, clothing, food pantry membership, and other targeted assistance for residents experiencing financial hardship.

Gravesham Borough Council: £319,021.91. The council plans to provide essential household items alongside debt, budgeting and welfare advice. It will also use targeted outreach to identify vulnerable households and support community-based food and resilience services.

Maidstone Borough Council: £338,152.31. A locally branded Household Assistance Fund will provide a single route to crisis and preventative support, including essential household items and energy-efficiency improvements. Funding will also expand debt and welfare advice, support sustainable food projects, and provide targeted outreach to households at risk of financial crisis.

Sevenoaks District Council: £211,118.71. Funding will support essential household and energy-efficiency measures, local food banks and community cupboards, family cooking and budgeting programmes, and digital inclusion support. Residents will also be able to access assistance through family events and community-based services.

Swale Borough Council: £437,864.28. The council will commission voluntary and community organisations to provide food and wraparound support, community pantry memberships, debt and welfare advice, and help with household utility costs. Funding will also strengthen local employment and skills provision, outreach and coordinated community support.

Thanet District Council: £451,874.71. Funding will support professionally referred households experiencing an acute financial crisis and deliver the "ColdBuster" programme, providing essential white goods and practical home energy-efficiency improvements. It will also support community organisations and the development of more coordinated local support.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council: £241,286.03. The council will invest in community-based services providing food, essential goods and advice to low-income households. Local advice agencies will help residents address debt, access welfare entitlements and improve their longer-term financial resilience.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council: £185,571.40. Funding will establish a centrally located Voluntary Sector Hub managed by Citizens Advice, bringing charities together to provide face-to-face financial, debt, housing, and legal advice. The hub will also be able to provide targeted assistance with essential expenses where required.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

**Question by Robert Ford to Peter Osbourne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Could the Cabinet Member explain why KCC considers it appropriate to spend £23,135.77 on road patching works at Laws Lane (Mersham, Ashford), serving four houses, while declining to allocate £12,000 to address the longstanding flooding issues affecting residents of Church Street (Loose, Maidstone), which serves a similar number of properties and has experienced repeated flooding for more than 25 years, on the grounds that it does not represent value for money for Kent residents?

Answer

The two cases are fundamentally different. At Laws Lane, ground movement had created a safety-critical defect in the public highway, including a 75–100mm level difference and a split in the carriageway. KCC therefore had a duty to act to remove the immediate risk to road users.

At Church Street, KCC's investigation concluded that the flooding is caused by exceptionally high groundwater and insufficient capacity in privately owned culverts. Responsibility for those culverts, and for any improvements to them, rests with the landowners.

The number of houses served is not material to these decisions. The relevant considerations are the nature and severity of the risk, KCC's statutory responsibilities and ownership of the asset. The expenditure at Laws Lane was necessary to make the public highway safe; using highway maintenance funding to improve privately owned drainage infrastructure at Church Street would not be appropriate.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Paul King to David Wimble, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects

KCC adopted a Position Statement on Solar Farms earlier this year and is proposing to adopt an Energy Strategy to set out the administrations Strategic view on Kent's energy needs in the future. However, I am seeing that there is still an issue with how local views about protecting good rural land are balanced with the National Planning policy focus on progressing solar developments and other renewables. KCC has a role in the planning process even though it doesn't decide applications - I have seen how KCC feedback on plans and the renewables vs rural land principles are discussed at Dover District Planning committee on cases like the Tilmanstone Solar Farm application.

In view of the above challenges, can the Cabinet Member clarify KCC's role in these matters and update Council on the application of his Solar Farm Position statement, including what more KCC is looking do within its powers on this matter to help local people protect rural land from excessive renewables development?

Answer

The districts and boroughs in Kent are the local planning authorities who determine planning applications for solar farm proposals. Where a proposal has a generating capacity of 100 MW or greater, it will fall within the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project regime, and the relevant Secretary of State will be the decision maker. Kent County Council has an important role to play in the planning process as a statutory planning consultee on a range of matters including highways, flood risk, biodiversity, heritage and public rights of way.

The 2026 Position Statement on Solar Developments sets out the position of Kent County Council. The County Council supports, in principle, solar farm proposals but considers they should be well-designed and appropriately located and not on the best and most versatile agricultural land. The Position Statement cannot override local or national planning policy; however, Kent County Council will continue to respond to solar farm proposals on a case-by-case basis and make appropriate representations as part of its key role as a statutory planning consultee.

The proposed Energy Strategy reinforces this position and recognises Kent's future energy needs should be met through a mix of energy infrastructure.

The County Council will continue to use its strategic position to influence emerging regional and national policy in the best interests of Kent residents, businesses and communities. This includes active participation in the preparation of the first South East Regional Energy Strategic Plan to ensure future energy infrastructure responds to Kent's needs, supports housing and economic growth and is appropriately located with proper regard to Kent's communities, the environment and productive agricultural land.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

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

Would the Cabinet Member kindly state how many Post-16 SEND home-school transport appeals have been brought to the members' panel since Easter 2026, and of these how many have been upheld and how many rejected?

Answer

Out of a cohort of 1250 students, since Easter there have 93 appeals heard, that means 7% of the cohort appealed at Stage 2 Appeal by members of the Regulation Committee Appeal Panel .

These 93 students did not meet the criteria to be eligible for transport and their appeal was based on why their extenuating circumstances mean they should be provided with transport anyway.

Of the 93 appeals heard, 46 were upheld and 47 were not upheld.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Martin Paul to Chris Hespe, Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficency and Local Government Reorganisation

What is true cost of the work KCC has undertaken to date with regards to LGR?

Answer

I am very grateful for Mr. Paul's question. It gives me the opportunity to state that the Reform Administration was absolutely right, and that the Greens, Liberal Democrats, Labour, Conservatives and Restore were wrong once again. For a year and a half, we have constantly said we did not need to put in place a dedicated budget or special reserve in 2026/27 for Local Government Reorganisation. Our position was proven to be absolutely right.

We have estimated the cost to KCC of the Labour government imposing Local Government Reorganisation on our residents then pausing it, to be in the region of £1 million. Justifiably so, Reform UK has written to the government seeking to claim financial recompense for the costs incurred in the abortive LGR process by all the Reform Councils in England who were involved.

We have spent from existing budgets and used government-provided funding, but the lion's share of our costs have been in the use of our staff. These costs

have simply had to be swallowed by the authority. All members of Corporate Management Team, especially the Chief Executive as the Principle Responsible Officer for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway, and the Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance, have had their workstreams determined by LGR. Staff at all levels were involved in the extensive Service Complexity Assessment exercise and a huge number of our employees were concerned and insecure. I'd like to thank all staff for their hard work and resilience. The main cost to KCC is the opportunity cost, which is significant – that is, how those staff could have been deployed had it not been for the government's massive distraction.

This Reform UK administration is ambitious for the County, its residents and businesses. We want to plan for the long-term. The limbo that we find ourselves in currently makes planning, budgeting and implementing long-term plans extremely difficult - That is the real cost of what we have had to go through in the last 18 months with Local Government Reorganisation – at a real cost to the residents of Kent.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question Withdrawn

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Dean Truder to Chris Hespe, Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficency and Local Government Reorganisation

Is it true that the DOLGE - initiated Staff Incentive Scheme, inviting staff to come forward with their ideas for income generation and efficiencies, was closed early in its first round due to the overwhelmingly high number of proposals submitted?

Answer

Yes.

I'm delighted to report that the response to the DOLGE Staff Incentive Scheme was exceptionally strong, with more than 300 ideas submitted by staff within a relatively short period. Given the volume of submissions, and following discussion with the Chief Executive, it was decided to close the scheme early so that the ideas received could be properly assessed and we could get going at looking at the deliverability of those ideas.

By the close of the scheme, a total of 359 proposals for income generation and efficiencies had been submitted and reviewed through the process. The early closure was advertised and ensured that each proposal received appropriate consideration and that decisions on implementation could be made within the current financial year to deliver sooner for residents of Kent.

Not only does this demonstrate the innovation and creativity of KCCs excellent staff, but it demonstrates they are fully supportive of the requirement for greater efficiency and income generation, even if this is not a consideration of the opposition parties.

We have said the work to achieve best value for our residents is an authority-wide effort involving officers and the Administration's Members, as clarified in the DOLGE Strategy.

I would like to express my thanks and admiration to our staff.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Diane Morton to Peter Osbourne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

The villages such as Meopham,Cobham, Istead Rise, Culverstone and Higham are potentially taking on significant new housing . How does KCC as highway authority assess the cumulative effect of several developments on narrow rural lanes, rather than judging each application alone?

Answer

KCC, as Highway Authority, considers both the impact of individual planning applications and the cumulative effect of development across a wider area. This is assessed through Transport Assessments and transport modelling submitted in support of planning applications. These assessments typically consider existing traffic conditions, committed development, forecast background traffic growth and, where appropriate, reasonably foreseeable development. The extent of any cumulative assessment depends upon the status of developments and Local Plan allocations at the time the application is being considered.

Whilst cumulative growth is assessed to understand the operation of the wider network, each planning application must be determined on its own merits and is required to mitigate the impacts arising from that particular development. Developers cannot lawfully be required to solve background or existing congestion.

Where modelling indicates that development could result in unacceptable impacts on the highway network, KCC will seek appropriate mitigation and, where necessary, may recommend that the Local Planning Authority refuse planning permission or defer a decision until sufficient information is available. However, national planning policy sets a high threshold for refusing development on highway grounds. Impacts must be severe before a refusal can be sustained, particularly where decisions may subsequently be tested through the appeal process.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Richard Streatfield to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council

Ofsted found significant weaknesses in Kent's SEND services; inconsistent provision, unacceptable delays in assessments, failure to prepare young people for adulthood, poor understanding of the experiences of children and families, weaknesses in leadership and oversight, and a failure to ensure that children and young people consistently receive the support they need.

Given this level of unacceptable performance can the Leader explain why the Cabinet Member is still in her post?

Answer

Thank you. Mr Chairman - yes I can explain – it is because she is excellent.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question Withdrawn

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Mr John Finch to Georgia Foster, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Given that adult social care represents nearly half of KCCs budget at approximately £785.5 million, while supporting a vital but relatively small percentage of Kents residents, could the Cabinet Member explain how we are balancing essential statutory commitments with the need to protect the broader preventative services that benefit the wider Kent community?

Answer

Thank you for your question.

Adult Social Care spends a significant amount of public money, and I recognise the responsibility that comes with that.

Much of our spending is driven by our statutory responsibilities to meet eligible care needs and safeguard the residents of Kent, all in the most effective and proportionate way.

You're correct in highlighting that it's a relatively small proportion of people who are using adult social care directly, but the impact is much wider because we are supporting families and we and are enabling unpaid carers to continue caring.

Our prevention services are also fundamental to making sure that our commitments are sustainable and we will continue to promote residents living independently and safe within the community.

Achieving balance requires us to continually scrutinise spending, but in that budgetary scrutiny we have to consider and give proper weight to the protection of our broader prevention services and always assess whether reduction in services would create greater needs and costs elsewhere.

We will continue to work closely with health and voluntary organisations to make the greatest collective impact in our support for Kent residents.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by John Moreland to Peter Osbourne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

The parished village of Rusthall falls within my Division. It has had a thought through, community focused and considered HIP outstanding with no works completed for many years now. Walkway improvements, funded through Active Travel England were due to start in Autumn this year yet have been postponed to June 2027, at the earliest, for reasons unknown. This is inevitably going to delay the works on the A264, which we hoped would start in 2027. The reality is, despite funding having been obtained for highways improvement projects, there is no guaranteed start date in sight and no explanation for why KCC's new contractor is delaying planned works and failing to offer prompt start dates for other, funded projects.

Please may the Cabinet Member explain why, despite the funding being secured, Rusthall is not receiving the works it has been promised? Why is this Council neglecting this village and community?

Answer

I note the Member's frustration about the time being taken to bring forward some of the planned highway improvements in Rusthall. However, I do not agree that the village is being neglected. Rusthall is currently benefiting from a significant programme of investment through our Road Safety and Active Travel programmes.

Highway improvements have taken place in Rusthall in each of the last three years, including improvements to the 20mph signs and markings, the bus stop clearway on Rusthall High Street and new SLOW markings on Southwood Road. Further works at Common View are also being progressed through the Parish Council's Highway Improvement Plan.

Alongside these smaller improvements, we are progressing three significant schemes: the Langton to Rusthall Active Travel scheme, the Lower Green Road traffic-calming scheme and a pedestrian crossing improvement on the A264 near Neville Park.

For Phase 1 of the Active Travel scheme, road space and contractor resource constraints have contributed to a revised programme, with construction now anticipated to commence in summer 2027. Whilst this is disappointing it has been communicated to stakeholders.

The Lower Green Road scheme is also currently programmed for summer 2027, with the design being revised following discussions and requested changes from Rusthall Parish Council during the meeting on 27th June.

The A264 crossing is at an earlier feasibility stage. Surveys have been commissioned and issues including utilities, land ownership and engineering constraints need to be understood before we can provide a reliable construction date.
Securing funding understandably creates an expectation that works will follow quickly. However, larger highway schemes must still pass through design, procurement, Streetworks permitting and construction planning before delivery. Officers have continued to meet and engage with Rusthall Parish Council throughout this process. The investment being made, the improvements already delivered and the significant schemes now being progressed demonstrate our continued commitment to Rusthall.

We will continue to work with the Parish Council and our delivery partners to progress these schemes as quickly as practicable and keep the community updated.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question Withdrawn

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Mike Sole to Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council

Kent County Council plays an important role in welcoming new citizens to our country through its citizenship ceremonies. These ceremonies recognise not only the privilege of British citizenship, but also the importance of integration, participation and contributing fully to our communities. To become a British Citizen an individual must be deemed by the Home Office to be of good character and satisfy certain residency criteria.

Can the Leader confirm that, contrary to social media posts, this council does not have any powers to restrict prisoners accessing the official home office statutory guide for those wishing to take the British Citizenship test, as only prison governors can make the decision to ban or remove books?

Answer

I can confirm that it is prison governors who make the policy decision to ban or remove books from prison libraries.

However books in KCC owned libraries are a different matter, driven by policy which is being looked into by my administration.

Question No. 20 – Not Progressing

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

**Question by Antony Hook to Peter Osbourne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Along Ospringe Street in my division, people's homes open directly onto narrow pavements with no setback or front garden buffer. In recent years, there have been numerous alarming incidents where vehicles have mounted the pavement and smashed into homes or the village pub, causing massive damage. Given the severe and ongoing risk to pedestrians and structural safety, what assessment has the Highways department made of this location, and what physical protection measures—such as high-containment kerbing, protective bollards, or vehicle restraint systems—can be installed to safeguard residents and pedestrians from errant vehicles?

Answer

Kent County Council recognises the concerns raised regarding vehicle speeds and incidents on Ospringe Street.

Our records show four personal injury collisions along Ospringe Street during the five-year period to June 2026, all recorded as slight in severity. We recognise that not all damage-only incidents or near misses will necessarily be reported. Speed data also shows that vehicle speeds vary along the route, with the most recent available data indicating a mean speed of around 28mph and an 85th percentile speed of around 32mph.

Following the petition regarding speeds on Ospringe Street, the Council agreed to investigate a reduction in the speed limit. We are now preparing to advertise a Traffic Regulation Order for a proposed 20mph limit through Ospringe Street. This will provide an opportunity for residents and other stakeholders to formally comment on the proposal. Village gateway features have also previously been installed.

In relation to physical measures such as barriers or bollards, KCC does not normally install highway features solely to protect private property. Such features can themselves introduce additional highway safety risks, particularly if struck or damaged, as well as creating additional barriers to width in restricted areas.

We will therefore continue to progress the proposed 20mph limit through the statutory consultation process while keeping road safety on Ospringe Street under review.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 5 November 2026

Question by Alex Ricketts to Brian Collins, Deputy Leader of the Council

AI is a revolutionary technology. Is the council measuring how many staff are using AI tools, in what ways and to what quantum AI tools have improved the quality or efficiency of work, and is the Council developing its own AI tools? Can the Deputy Leader confirm there is a process for tools to be approved bearing in mind the need to protect sensitive personal data and can he, by written answer, list the AI tools that staff are using?

Answer

The Council recognises the significant opportunities presented by AI and is taking a controlled, evidence-led approach to its adoption.

We are measuring both use and benefit. Microsoft Copilot Chat is available to all KCC staff, alongside Microsoft 365 Copilot, and our evaluation considers adoption and benefits such as efficiency and quality of work. The evidence also shows that the level of benefit varies between users and roles.

We are also developing our own AI capability, including Copilot Agents designed around specific Council tasks and services. These have the potential to reduce repetitive administration, improve consistency and release staff capacity for higher-value work.

There is a formal approval and assurance process for AI. KCC's KCC Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policysets the framework for safe and responsible use, and staff must use KCC-approved AI tools rather than unapproved services. Appropriate assurance includes data protection, information governance, cyber security, ethical considerations and human oversight.

The principal AI tools approved for use currently include:

- **Microsoft Copilot Chat**, available to all KCC
- **Microsoft 365 Copilot**, the Council's approved generative AI solution for licensed users.
- **Microsoft Copilot Studio**, supporting the development of Copilot Agents.
- **Microsoft Designer**, for approved generative AI design requirements.
- **Magic Notes**, used within Adult Social Care to support recording and documentation.
- **Invision360 VITA**, an AI-assisted EHCP drafting tool, which has been through KCC's CaRT, DPIA and AI Ethics governance processes.

Other AI-enabled functionality exists within established systems and new AI use cases continue to be assessed through the Council's governance arrangements.

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