

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 14 July 2022

**Question by Richard Streatfield to Sue Chandler,
Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

Following correspondence with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services regarding a pupil in my division who was deemed not suitable for placement in a specialist school despite information from relevant medical professionals and teachers recommending specialist provision rather than mainstream education, I have concerns about the capacity of specialist provision in Kent and the processes used to consider relevant admissions.

Could the Cabinet Member confirm the County has sufficient places for those who need specialist provision in Sevenoaks and across Kent this September and in doing so could she clarify that it is not the policy of the County that only non-verbal children are suitable for Specialist provision?

Answer

The professional advice and information, obtained following an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment of every child is carefully considered, which results in the LA issuing a final EHC plan, naming the nearest appropriate school.

I can confirm it is neither the practice nor the policy of the Local Authority that only non-verbal children are suitable for Special School places. In your question you are referring to a response to a previous enquiry that was about a particular case.

We fully expect mainstream schools to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate all children, and in the vast majority of cases this happens. We understand that all children, including those with SEND, have an entitlement in law to a mainstream school place, if this is what their parents want. Ideally this should be in their local area, so they are not travelling long distances away from their friends and family.

The expectation of the SEN and disability code of practice is that the Local Authority is committed to the inclusive education of disabled children and young people and to the removal of barriers to learning and to support participation in mainstream education.

Since 2016 in Kent we have invested in developing the numbers of places available in our Maintained Special School sector well above the National average. The number of Maintained Special School places in 2016 in Kent was 3628, last year that had risen to 5197, this represents a 43% increase in capacity across the county. In September this year we will have 5517 places and September next year we envisage having 5637 places available. In comparison our Statistical neighbours saw a growth in capacity of just 19% and nationally there was a 16% increase in this sector.

We have also seen an increase in the use of Non Maintained Independent Special Schools by Kent of 144% over the same period. This compares with a national increase of 50%, and an increase amongst our statistical neighbours of 44%.

We are a national outlier regarding the numbers of children in Special School with 33.4% of Children with an EHCP attending a special school in Kent, nationally this figure is at 19%. We have 8% of our children with an EHCP in Independent Special Schools and again nationally the figure is lower with 4% in the same provision.

Kent has invested considerably in capacity in our special schools. In the future clearly it can not continue to grow at this rate and our approach has to be in line with the inclusion in local schools agenda as proposed in the Green Paper for SEN and AP. I am pleased to say this is completely in line with the County Approach to Inclusive Education(CAtIE) which we have already adopted as an approach to our delivery of inclusion across Kent.

The 2021 SEND benchmarking return shows that Kent have 33.4% of school aged children with an EHCP in maintained or Free special schools, this remains at a higher level than both our statistical neighbours and National comparators. Bucks have 31.6% in this category, East Sussex 31.3%, West Sussex 28.6%, Surrey have 25% and Hampshire 24.9%, as you can see all are considerably lower than Kent who have been developing this sector at a faster rate than all these statistical neighbours.

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**Question by Barry Lewis to David Brazier,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Joint Transportation Boards (JTBs) between KCC and the District/Borough Councils were first established in 2005. In 2019 a key decision was taken by the then Cabinet Member for Planning Highways, Transport and Waste, to adopt a revised JTB Agreement, which sought to bring uniformity across the County. The stated purpose of the JTB is to facilitate discussion and co-operation on local highway and transportation issues. However, from my recent experience (and many of my colleagues have expressed a similar view), JTB meetings no longer appear to be effective – so much so that in some cases representatives have decided not to attend the meeting altogether.

Keeping the above in mind, can the Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport please explain to me whether or not they believe JTB meetings are, in their current format, effective and indeed useful?

Answer

Thank you, Mr. Lewis, for your question.

JTB's are a long-established way of involving Members of both County and District Councils in all local highway and transportation matters. Having attended each and every one over the years, I am aware that some are more effective and harmonious than others. My local JTB in Sevenoaks operates very well, having taken advantage of remote facilities that have dramatically reduced the amount of time and fuel spent travelling to the Council offices there. Whether or not to travel will always be a matter for the individual member. In this digital age, I would wish to see them continue on this basis of choice and do not agree with the generalisation Mr Lewis makes. Whether Members find the content of their JTB meetings satisfactory is rather a matter for them than this administration.

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**Question by Peter Harman to Tony Hills,
Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment**

There are a number of Waste Authorities (including Surrey County Council and Trafford Borough Council) that have introduced schemes at their recycling centres to encourage residents to leave unwanted but serviceable items (such as items of furniture) for resale onsite to members of the public. This then ensures maximum reuse of these items in accordance with the waste hierarchy, and any income derived can be used for further positive environmental gain.

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment please confirm whether any projects of this kind are being considered by Kent County Council at any of its HWRCs, and if so, what progress has been made to date?

Answer

Reuse at KCC's Household Waste Recycling Centres is a key area which we are now actively exploring. Reuse is near the top of the 'waste hierarchy' and would be our preference wherever possible.

Working together with our contractors FCC and CSKL we are exploring options to see what reuse activities may be set up at sites that have the appropriate space. As you can imagine, the activity in recent times has been focused on managing the sites during the pandemic, however, as the situation is evolving, reuse is now a priority. We regularly liaise with other local authorities and are always keen to see how activities such as reuse are working in other areas. Indeed, waste Officers are visiting Suffolk next week to review reuse activities being undertaken there.

Opportunities will be considered across all KCC HWRCs, although the possibilities may differ depending on site restrictions, size, and layout for example. It's likely we may start with some test pilots at a couple of our sites with more space and expand offerings as applicable. The new Allington HWRC is a focus site as there is an allocated 'reuse space'—opportunities are being considered with a service planned to start later this year.

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**Question by Kelly Grehan to Clair Bell,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

While domestic abuse affects women (and men) from all ethnic groups, Women's Aid advises that, whatever their experiences, women from ethnic minority groups are likely to face additional barriers to receiving the help that they need.^[1] They warn that women may find that service providers are basing their responses on particular cultural, ethnic or religious stereotypes – and that in some cases, they may even avoid intervening for fear of being perceived as racist. In response to this, several community groups have been created to bridge the gap in domestic abuse services for ethnic minority groups. These groups have advised that relevant organisations and providers should ensure that their staff receive culturally appropriate training.

Considering that KCC commissions the Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service, and because there is an overarching safeguarding duty on KCC, can the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Health please advise what culturally appropriate training our staff currently receive in relation to domestic abuse?"

^{1[1]} Women's Aid, 'Women from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities' – available here: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/women-from-bme-communities/>

Answer

There are a range of courses available which can be accessed through the Kent Academy including Domestic Abuse eLearning, Domestic Abuse Levels B&C as well as the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board Domestic Abuse Workshops. Although predominantly aimed at staff in Adult Social Care and Health, they are open to other practitioners on request.

The Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS) is commissioned to raise awareness, provide education and training to all practitioners across all sectors who may potentially be in contact with those impacted by domestic abuse. It is actively training practitioners across all agencies. By working alongside the commissioned service in Medway, KIDAS has launched a standardised training framework which includes relevant cultural practices and is available to all partners.

KIDAS has developed a "Champions Programme" to upskill professionals and individuals within the community to enable them to become a domestic abuse 'lead' in their organisation and has sourced support from specialist agencies such as the Southall Black Sisters to deliver training on bringing cultural awareness and knowledge up to date.

In 2020, the KIDAS Training Conference was held and considered the intersectional impact of domestic abuse and how it manifests within different communities, with one session focussing on how DA impacts on Black Asian Minority Ethnic people and

refugees. The conference content was shared to all Domestic Abuse Forums and disseminated to wider audiences such as businesses and community groups.

In addition to this, there are ongoing training and development opportunities through Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) which are led by the Kent Community Safety Partnership, with findings shared widely across Adult Social Care and Health and the broader partnership including Kent Police, NHS partners and Kent Fire and Rescue Service. The aim of this is to influence the way practitioners see, understand and respond to domestic abuse which may be occurring in Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

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**Question by Antony Hook to Tony Hills,
Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment**

What action will KCC, as highways authority and in its other guises, take to significantly reduce air pollution around the Ospringe Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), which is primarily caused by highway emissions?

Answer

KCC is a key representative on the Kent and Medway Air Quality Partnership, with representation from Public Health, Highways and Sustainable Business and Communities. Tackling poor air quality is also an ambition under the Energy and Low Emissions Strategy, given the strong link between tackling climate change and air quality.

KCC highways officers are active members of Swale Borough Council's Strategic Air Quality Action Steering Group working on updating Swale's Air Quality Action Plan. Specific actions are being looked at by both Swale and KCC which would assist in reducing the long standing and historic issues of air quality on the A2 through Ospringe through both the Air Quality Action Plan and associated transport policies within Swale Borough Council's emerging local plan. It is anticipated that these will be available for review towards the end of this calendar year.

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**Question by Jackie Meade to Sue Chandler,
Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

At the March County Council meeting, I asked the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services a question relating to EHCP assessments and applications. In her answer, the Cabinet Member stated that at a County level, only 29% of Educational Psychology reports had been submitted within the statutory six-week timeframe but that the Council expected this number to reach 80% by June 2022.

Can the Cabinet Member please therefore confirm if this 80% target has been reached, and if it has not, can they outline what steps they are taking to improve this percentage? In answering the question, can they clarify any actions taken to help ease the anxiety experienced by families who are waiting for the outcome of their assessments and applications?

Answer

As outlined in my March response I am pleased to report that there remains no waiting list in Kent for an Educational Psychology assessments, this is at a time of considerable challenges across the country for this type of specialist involvement.

I would like to remind you that at the beginning of September 2021, there were 460 historic referrals (from the previous academic year) in the waiting list/backlog.

In June 2022 the EP service received 212 requests, 90% were submitted within 6 weeks following an allocation to an EP and at the end of June 213 plans were issued. Whilst a number of these plans fell outside of the total 6 week timeframe I can confirm that 100% of these were completed within 10 weeks of a referral, so reducing any distress that may have been caused by a wait for a completed assessment. This is quite some achievement at that level of demand upon the service.

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**Question by Mr Sole to Mr Brazier,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

"Many Kent residents have successfully used the Fix My Street app to report potholes and other highway faults. This app is easy to use with helpful features, unlike the KCC clunky online reporting tool.

Would the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport please explain why this council is no longer accepting reports via this app, which will undoubtedly lead to less fewer faults being reported? In answering the question, can the Cabinet Member reassure Members that he is exploring KCC developing its own app or making improvements to the existing KCC tool?"

Answer

We have recently reviewed the use of Fixmystreet by Kent Residents and had to take the decision to stop accepting reports in this way for a number of reasons, only 3 complaints have been received about this decision

The level of information provided by Fixmystreet doesn't include enough detail, leading to our staff being unable to locate defects or leading to unnecessary delays in getting the issue to the right teams. It does not meet our service standards.

The Fixmystreet system generates an email to KCC which can take up to 5 working days to be processed and then has to be manually entered into our own highway system. This leads to delays in investigating and repairing defects as well as placing unnecessary resource demands on KCC and the Contact Centre.

Where many Districts and Borough Councils in Kent no longer offer an email service, we have found that most types of issues are being forwarded to KCC to deal with and where problems are not our responsibility, this again leads to delays for customers.

Very few enquiries came in via Fixmystreet, less than a hundred per month, compared to up to 5000 that customers report via our own reporting system. We received 63,000 enquiries via our on-line tool last year representing 60% of all enquiries, this is an extremely high level of self service and directs calls away from the contact centre.

KCC have spent many years listening to our customers' needs for our own reporting system and we believe that our reporting tool has evolved to capture the right level of information required, to enable an instant response to be provided to our customers by defects being sent straight to the right teams within highways. Customers can search for locations using a variety of maps, asset numbers, What 3 Words and address lookups and they can upload photos as well as add the necessary detail to help us prioritise repairs.

Our reporting tool is fully mobile responsive, so can be used from tablets, smartphones, iPad's etc and the maps / screen will automatically adjust according to your device type.

We are carrying out a review of the existing reporting tool and further enhancements will be coming over the next year and we will be able to provide much more functionality so not only report issues but also find improved information for our services within a locality.

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**Question by Ms Hamilton to Mr Brazier,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

"In light of the need to withdraw funding to subsidise buses, please would the Cabinet Member reassure me that KCC will actively support development of sustainable Community Transport initiatives in the rural areas to meet the rapidly changing market for travel. Please would he refer to available grants and Government funding for BSIP and how we might best access those opportunities for pilot studies."

Answer

KCC has actively supported Community Transport for many years. We provide a toolkit on setting up a community transport operation, specific advice to groups on request, an officer with a focus on community transport and the community transport grant. The grant has been used by a several groups to invest in vehicles, expanding services or delivering specific projects. This approach will not change and queries in respect of community transport, should be directed to Public Transport.

We are also seeking £100k per annum within the BSIP to provide an increased grant. The intention is to launch the grant within the next two months with the overall allocation being influence by whether our BSIP proposal is agreed.