

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 25 May 2023

Schedule of Questions received by the General Counsel delivered to him pursuant to Section 14.17 of the Constitution in order of receipt.

Question No	Questioner	Cabinet Member	Subject Matter
1	Alister Brady	Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services	Youth Investment Fund
2	Barry Lewis	Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport	Thanet Parkway
3	Karen Constantine	Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport	Dropped kerbs, access points and pedestrian crossings in Ramsgate
4	Kelly Grehan	Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services	Childcare Provision in Kent
6	Neil Baker	Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport	Highways Network Monitoring
7	Peter Harman	Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport	A226 Road in Swanscombe
8	Sarah Hudson	Cabinet Member for Community & Regulatory Services	Coronation Celebrations in Libraries

Note: As provided by Section 14.18 of the Constitution thirty minutes is the maximum time allowed for this item of the agenda, with any questions not answered receiving a written answer

Benjamin Watts
General Counsel

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday, 25 May 2023

**Question by Mr Alister Brady to Mrs Sue Chandler,
Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

Members will be aware of the Youth Investment Fund, a Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) initiative within the 'levelling up' agenda. The purpose of the funding is to provide new, refurbished or upgraded youth facilities in the most disadvantaged areas / wards across the country, as identified by DCMS. Two of these identified wards are in my Canterbury City North Division. However, CYPE Cabinet Committee in March 2023 was told by Officers that KCC was not able to submit an eligible bid to the fund due to it only offering capital funding.

Bearing in mind that Framing Kent's Future included a commitment to maximise the National Youth Guarantee, which includes the Youth Investment Fund, can the Cabinet Member please clarify and provide further detail on why KCC was unable to submit an eligible bid? In answering the question, can the Cabinet Member be clear about the extent to which Executive policy choices contributed to this being the case (e.g pursuing the Family Hub Programme and Kent Communities Programme)?

Answer

In March 2022 DCMS contacted the Authority regarding Phase 2 of the Youth Investment Fund (YIF). This fund provides capital for new build and refurbishment of youth buildings in targeted wards. The emphasis of the fund is on increasing the availability of youth activity in these wards. Additionality is a key criterion. The point was made that the fund was capital, not revenue.

DCMS indicated that they would be looking for a single application for Kent, co-ordinated by the County Council. Work commenced, in conjunction with the Local Children's Partnerships, to try and map what facilities existed in the priority wards and the condition of these, plus whether any local organisations were looking to deliver youth opportunities in these areas, the intention being to facilitate a co-ordinated bid which could benefit a number of organisations. At this stage, DCMS had not issued any application guidance for Phase 2 but pointed authorities to that for Phase 1 which reinforced that approach.

DCMS appointed a Grant Awarding Body to run the YIF process for them. They opened the portal for applications in August 2022. Contrary to the information previously provided by DCMS officers, applications can be made by individual organisations, there was no mechanism of a co-ordinated bid led by the Local Authority.

By autumn work was underway towards the Community Services Consultation which ran from 17 January to 23 March 2023. This sets out our vision for service delivery to the residents of Kent. This covers youth hubs. The feedback from the consultation

is currently being analysed and will be reported to Members in due course. It is right and proper that the Council has not applied for YIF money to invest in any buildings that are subject to this consultation and does not do so ahead of any decision made about the future of these.

Given the budget pressures faced, the Authority was also not able to commit further revenue resource to the delivery of youth services in any of the targeted wards.

For these reasons, it has not been appropriate for the Authority to seek capital funding via YIF.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday, 25 May 2023

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

Thanet Parkway was originally set to open in May 2023, but this has now been pushed back until the end of July. When it does eventually open, journey times to the other stations will be affected, with some journeys set to take longer than before as a result of the additional stop, despite assurances from the outset that this would not be the case.

Keeping the above in mind, can the Cabinet Member please explain the cause of the delay and whether or not KCC will incur any additional costs as a result, and can he also explain if any other associated works have been undertaken to help mitigate against increased journey times?

Answer

Thanet Parkway Station was expected to open in May 2023 and the new station itself is almost ready to be brought into use. However, the opening has been dependent on Network Rail successfully delivering several complex signalling and line speed projects along the railway line.

This includes a major upgrade to Cliffsend level crossing and modifications to Sevenscore level crossings to support the opening of the station. These are required to maintain safety as well as train performance at both crossings, with the station located between the two. Unfortunately, the project has experienced issues due to the worldwide supply chain issues that projects across the country are facing at the moment. However, these issues have now been resolved and Network Rail have a very high level of confidence in delivering the works ahead of the revised opening date of 31st July 2023.

All budgets are handled with great care. Network Rail has applied to KCC for further funding as a result of their delay and, like any responsible Local Authority, KCC is scrutinising this request and cannot comment further at this time.

There will be no additional journey time for people travelling on the line as a result of trains calling at Thanet Parkway because of the separately funded project to enhance line speeds along the route between Ashford International and Canterbury West. This work has been delivered incrementally over a number of years and so the correct baseline comparison is the May 2019 timetable, against which end-to-end journey times with Thanet Parkway take no longer. Thanet Parkway therefore receives the full benefit of the reduced journey times enabling a headline journey time of 70 minutes to London St Pancras International.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday, 25 May 2023

**Question by Ms Karen Constantine to Mr David Brazier,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, we as a Local Authority must ensure that we duly consider how our policies and decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act.

Unfortunately, over the years I have received many complaints from residents about the lack of access points across the division, which makes crossing roads extremely difficult and dangerous for people with disabilities and the elderly, particularly those with mobility issues such as wheelchair and mobility scooter users.

There is also a shortage of dropped kerbs and pedestrian crossings, which means some are forced to cross busy roads to reach shops, GPs and other vital services. This is neither practical nor safe.

Can the Cabinet Member please explain when a review of dropped kerbs, access points and pedestrian crossings was last undertaken in the division of Ramsgate, and in answering can he also please explain how equality considerations are used to improve accessibility?

Answer

Thank you, Ms Constantine. We regularly receive requests for pedestrian dropped kerbs. We prioritise action on these by location, pedestrian footfall, and the local environment including proximity to care homes, schools, and shops. We have limited budgets and must prioritise to achieve the best value and outcome for all highway users including those with disabilities without treating any less favourably and seek to provide appropriate access where possible. I am sure Ms Constantine appreciates that it would not be practical for us to install dropped kerbs at every location, which is why we concentrate our budgets on where the works will have the most benefit to a higher number of users.

Formal pedestrian crossings are often requested where people have difficulty crossing the road, but they need to be located where road safety is not compromised. As with dropped kerbs, we have to prioritise according to the funding available, but with support from a Parish Council or Member we are able to bid annually for monies from our Local Transport Plan budget.

We do work closely with Ramsgate Town Council and, although we have not reviewed the town as a whole for dropped kerbs, access points or pedestrian crossings, if they wish to identify some locations of particular concern for our consideration, we would be happy to assess and consider them.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday, 25 May 2023

Question by Ms Kelly Grehan to Mr Rory Love, Cabinet Member
for Education and Skills Services

According to Coram, a group of specialist charities who support children, young people and their families, only half (48%) of councils in England have sufficient childcare places to meet the demand of parents working full-time, down from 59% in 2022. This shortage, along with longer waiting lists and the increasing costs of nurseries, means some parents are actually considering whether or not it is worth them going back to work.

Keeping the above in mind, can the Cabinet Member please explain what assessment KCC has undertaken in relation to the availability of childcare provision in Kent and what plans are there to ensure that demand is met?"

Answer

It is acknowledged both nationally and in Kent that assessing the childcare market and ensuring sufficiency and long-term viability of provision is complex and presents a significant challenge for Local Authorities. In Kent, when assessing supply, the criteria set out in the DfE's 2018 Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities is used. This states that childcare places should be high quality, accessible, inclusive, affordable and sustainable, thereby able to meet the needs of all children and families. The Local Authority (in Kent, as commissioned through The Education People) is required to work with providers in making available a sufficient range of flexible provision, in the right geographical areas, at the right times and offering the right sessions to fit with both standard and atypical working patterns.

Levels of provision fluctuate regularly but as of the most recent published information from Autumn 2022 based on Ofsted data, examples of the kind of provision in Kent are as follows:

- 417** Private providers, offering **31,355** childcare places for 0-4 year olds
- 187** Voluntary providers, offering **8,294** childcare places for 0-4 year olds
- 43** Independent schools, offering **1,942** childcare places for 0-4 year olds
- 5** School run providers, offering a total of **236** childcare places for 0-4 year olds

There are a number of further providers offering over 9,500 childcare places, the full details of which can be found in the current Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision.

The annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment enables officers to identify the supply of, and demand for, early years and childcare provision across the County, including where there might be a deficit in provision. The assessment of sufficiency is calculated by comparing the total available childcare supply of places with the

forecast number of eligible children in each age group living within in each area of the County. The Education People's Early Years and Childcare Service works with providers and potential providers to encourage the establishment of additional provision where it is required.

Since the Pandemic the childcare market nationally has faced significant challenges, not least of which is the ability to recruit and retain high quality staff. These challenges have been exacerbated by rising fuel and energy bills, and the rise in the National Living Wage in April 2023. The recent spike in inflation has partly eroded the Government funding for the free entitlement schemes, presenting an additional challenge for some settings as they look to balance their finances and remain sustainable.

Despite these significant challenges group-based provision in Kent has remained relatively stable with the number of closures broadly equivalent to the number of new openings. However, new entrants to the market have not always set up in the areas where provision is most needed and at a granular level, this has led to some primary planning areas in the County seeing place deficits. At a district level, only Dover has moved to a small deficit, for the first time in 2021/22.

The detailed results of the assessment and broader plans for seeking to address any need for additional childcare places is set out within the Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday, 25 May 2023

Question by Mr Neil Baker to Mr David Brazier,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

"A new and improved highways fault report system is currently under development and I'm confident it will make it much easier for everyone to log problems. However, this still relies on people taking time to make reports so it would be positive if a more technological approach could help streamline things even further and help road users across Kent.

Can I therefore ask the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to outline any consideration being given to automating the monitoring of the condition of the county's highways network and whether there are any plans to use, for example, drones and cameras attached to vehicles, underpinned by suitable software, to ensure we can target our resources where they are needed as quickly as possible?"

Answer

There is a lot of technology on the market that can be used to detect potholes. Highways and Transportation are currently trialling 3 systems:

1. Vaisala -RoadAI, combines an Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology tool, high-quality video data, and methodology to assess pavement surface conditions quickly and accurately up to four times faster and at half the price of a manual road survey. Inspectors can quickly create thorough, accurate reports about pavement conditions using just a mobile smart phone to support strategic monitoring and decision-making about asset management. We have fitted this to 12 of our inspection vehicles. The trial is for 12 months, and we are about half way through. We will then as a business, assess the outcome and see where and how this can fit into our plans for carriageway defect inspections and condition surveys.
2. UAV/drone trials, Kent County Council working with Amey and Collins Aerospace has developed an innovative programme to identify complimentary technologies from aerospace and defence. This includes the ability to collect large swaths of technical data, quickly process the data in an automated fashion and then generate targeted information to support teams on the ground.

We are about to embark on phase 3 of this project, having conducted 2 previous phases. During phase 3 we will be using the technology to identify asset deterioration over two stretches of high-speed road. The project is for

18 months and there will be an evaluation report drawn up and recommendations for future use.

3. Route Reports provides predictive analytics for transport providers through sensors and AI technology monitoring. The innovation involved the installation of bespoke front-facing cameras in vehicles' windscreens and telemetry sensors on the dashboards of the chosen vehicles.

The cameras scan the road to identify defect locations and provide spatial information. Telemetry sensors detect vibration as the vehicle drives over a defect, such as a pothole. This project was started as a Live Labs project and funded by the Kent Lane Rental fund. We will be carrying out evaluation of this and the Vaisala system in the autumn of 2023.

Highways and Transportation has an Innovation Board and we are constantly looking for opportunities to trial and test and test new tech and bring efficiency to our way of working.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday, 25 May 2023

**Question by Mr Peter Harman to Mr David Brazier,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

The major collapse of the A226 Road in Swanscombe on 10th April this year has caused serious ongoing traffic disruption, and the loss of mains water supply for over 1,000 dwellings and commercial premises for the past five weeks. An additional concern has been the lack of information being made available for local residents, and for myself as the County Member. Can the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport please confirm how residents will be updated on the progress that is being made and in answering the question, can he clarify or outline how members of the public can give their feedback?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Mr Harman, we recognise the major impact this has had on the local community and the need to ensure that residents are given the right information. We have created a web page, Galley Hill Road which has the latest information regarding the closure and diversion, changes to bus routes, and who to contact with specific enquiries. The Leader will be referring to this in more detail in his report.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday, 25 May 2023

Question by Ms Sarah Hudson to Mr Michael Hill
Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

It was wonderful to see so many people embrace the spirit of the Coronation across our amazing County, including local street parties in my own division and at the local library at Hadlow and at East Peckham with amazing Knit and Knatter displays, bunting, miniature royal family members, Coronation colouring sheets and general displays. I congratulate all the staff involved, particularly those at Hadlow and East Peckham.

Can the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services tell the Council more about how other libraries celebrated the coronation in Kent and does he know how many children and adults took part?

Answer

Libraries, Registration and Archives embraced the Coronation spirit by organising a wide range of events and entertainment for children and adults. There were 70 events and activities across libraries attended by over 500 adults and a similar number of children. The events included a special Citizenship Ceremony with flags and Coronation themed cakes at Oakwood House, a Heraldic Animal themed craft activity at Sevenoaks Museum and the splendid Coronation Party and live screening of the Coronation from Westminster Abbey at the Kent History and Library Centre attended by over 100 people and including a display from our Archive collections.

Library activities involved Coronation themed Baby Rhyme Time, Storytime and Craft sessions, treasure hunts, work with schools to produce colourful displays, Coronation themed Macmillan Coffee Mornings, parties, Lego Clubs and quizzes. At Ashford Library the Books Beyond Words group for Adults with Learning Disabilities made and decorated crowns. Knit and Natter customer groups across the county were all very involved and as highlighted at Hadlow Library the group created a display with bunting, miniature royal family members, and a themed post box topper.