

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**22 July 2010**

**Question by Mrs J Rook to the  
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Whilst the introduction of High Speed rail services is very welcome and is a service that undoubtedly will bring economic success to Kent, there have also been quite a number of other service reductions which have, and will have, a detrimental effect on people getting to work or young people getting to school and college. I understand that Environment, Highways and Waste Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have an analysis of those affected services but my specific question to Mr Chard is what were the findings and the outcomes of your rail summit?

**Answer**

The first Rail Summit, held on 25 March, proved a very successful forum bringing together rail user groups and Passenger Focus (the independent rail consumer watchdog) with Southeastern, the major train operating company in Kent and Network Rail. It gave the opportunity for rail passengers to voice their concerns about the current rail services directly to the rail industry representatives and to receive responses. Another Summit will be held in October and be repeated every six months.

Despite the success of the High Speed domestic services from East Kent via Ashford, the timetable introduced in December has had a detrimental effect on rail passengers, particularly on services from Maidstone; services between Thanet and the City and Victoria; and to and from Deal. Some minor adjustments to the timetable were made in May to lengthen some trains to match passenger demand, adding stops to improve schoolchildren's journeys, and some minor changes to train timings to enable better connections between services, but much more needs to be done.

There is concern that the current economic climate has worsened the prospect of any significant changes being made within the current Integrated Kent Franchise which is likely to run to 2014. This view needs to be challenged and the County Council has sought to engage with Ministers of the new coalition Government to restore these service reductions.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday, 22 July 2010**

**Question by Mike Harrison to the  
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services**

My question is directed at the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services with regard to the proliferation of Blue Badge Parking Permits being issued both nationally and within the County.

I am given to understand that the number of these permits issued nationally is in the region of 2½ million to nearly 3 million. I am not sure nor can I find out the exact number issued and still in daily use within Kent County Council area.

My question therefore to Mr Gibbens is: “(i) just how many Blue Badge Permits are at present issued within Kent; (ii) how many of these Permits are in fact in use on a daily basis; (iii) are these Permits reviewed in any way, for example on an annual basis; and (iv) would it be possible to have a break down of the number of Permits issued and are still active?” For example is there any way that once the badge holder becomes deceased is there some mechanism in place where the permit is automatically cancelled?

Finally: “Why is it that once in possession of one of these Permits the recipients no longer has to pay for parking?” Whilst I fully appreciate that many of the permit holders require all the assistance and help that can be given I fail to understand why they are not charged the same as the rest of the residents of Kent or for that matter nationally.

**Answer**

The Blue Badge Scheme is based on the requirements of Section 21 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, 1970.

There are currently 78,647 valid badges in circulation within the Kent County Council area that were issued over the past few years. In 2009 the Contact Centre handled 27,941 applications and issued 24,956 blue badges.

Blue badges are available to use by holders as and when they need. It is therefore not possible to indicate how many are used on a daily basis.

Blue Badge recipients must renew their badges every 3 years and are assessed on the same basis as new applicants.

When KCC is aware that a recipient is deceased, the Contact Centre requests that the badge is returned for cancellation and shredding. However, there is no legal requirement to do this. There are no national or local statutory mechanisms for cancelling a Blue Badge when it is no longer required. This is one of many issues

that are being addressed in the Blue Badge Reform Programme that is currently out for consultation and to which KCC will be responding.

Finally, parking charges are set by car park operators. There is no requirement for free parking to be provided in car parks. On-street parking is currently provided free of charge nationally for Blue Badge holders, usually for a time limited period. However, if the vehicle is causing an obstruction, the person is liable for fines and removal of the vehicle, just like anyone else.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday, 22 July 2010**

**Question by Leslie Christie to the  
Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education**

In view of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Government's announcement that at least 40 of Kent's secondary schools "have been stopped" with their abandonment of the Labour Government's £55 billion Scheme "Building Schools for the Future", can the Cabinet Member tell the pupils and parents of these schools how this Administration intends to undertake the maintenance which has been deferred pending the proposed new build and how this Administration intends to provide comparable accommodation and learning methods for those pupils just abandoned by their Government?

**Answer**

Mr Christie, in common with all members, will have seen the Press Release that the Leader put out on this subject and the letter Gary Cooke and myself sent to all County Councillors.

At the same time as the announcement by Michael Gove was very disappointing, so has been the scale of the financial problems the previous administration has left the new coalition government with. The last government had already recognised this and had indicated there would have had to be a 50% reduction in education capital investments. Michael Gove has not changed the quantum of the reduction but, unlike the previous government, addressing it.

Before turning to the challenges, it's important to recognise what has been achieved in the recent past. BSF, under the last government, has delivered 11 new or significantly refurbished schools. This month alone we have taken possession of three new PFI schools in Gravesham. Alongside this, the Academies Programme and over six school PFI schemes brought in some £300m.

Our programme has also brought significant investment into Kent businesses and the upskilling of some of the local workforce.

We were particularly surprised and disappointed with the "stopping" of our Wave 4 programme as this would have completed the secondary estate in Gravesham and Thanet and we have started making representations on this, as the educational and community impact of a half finished job in those districts is not to be underestimated. We are also working with the sponsors of the proposed Academies to re-negotiate their building programme.

With regard to the deferred maintenance and future improved accommodation, we will need to take a long hard look at what we need to do and this will clearly be influenced by the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October. We need to remember that, of the schools currently "stopped", many were not due to see

new facilities for some 4–5 years and were expecting to operate in the existing facilities until then. We do, of course, continue to address urgent health and safety works.

Now that it has been recognised nationally that the previous system was overly bureaucratic, costly and time consuming, we are optimistic that the programme for capital spending on schools, which we hope will be announced in October, will mean savings in time and cost such that the 50% reduction in educational investment will in part be alleviated and much-needed maintenance and building plans will be able to proceed, albeit on a reduced scale.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday, 22 July 2010**

**Question by Bryan Sweetland to the  
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services**

This Council, and successive governments, have all recognised the significant impact on many people caused by having to care for family members. Last year the Council launched the Kent Carers Strategy and the importance of this was highlighted only three months ago at our April meeting.

In the light of the recent national decision to cut funding for the Caring with Confidence training for carers, can you please let the Council know what steps are being taken to support carers in Kent in their vital role?

**Answer**

I welcome the continued interest from Members about the important role that Carers do play, both from the launch of the Kent Adult Carers Strategy last year and the ongoing discussions more recently in Council.

KASS and their partners recognise Carers in the Kent Adult Carers Strategy as the main providers of community support and do not underestimate their contribution to society. They are committed to supporting Carers in their role and fund the main Carers voluntary organisations and other providers to assist with providing this support. The Kent Carers Annual Report 2009/10, which was endorsed by ASSPOSC in their June meeting, gives a comprehensive overview of the full range of support available for Kent Carers.

To give examples of support provided to Carers in Kent:

- The Carers Assessment Policy enables eligible Carers to receive a one off Direct Payment which they can choose to spend on anything that will make their life easier, to relax away from their caring role or access training or leisure facilities.
- There is also the West Kent Carers Strategy demonstrator Site 'Live life to the full in West Kent'. This project provides Carers with specialist support workers, trained in Carers awareness, who assist Carers to navigate their way through the health system and ensure they receive the correct information advice and guidance to assist them in their caring role.

More specifically in relation to the Caring with Confidence programme, the Kent Adult Carers Strategy promises to 'Put in place plans to ensure that Carers have the skills and information necessary to care with confidence'. In spite of the announcement of the Caring with Confidence funds ceasing after September 2010, the Department of Health has indicated that it will consult with national carers' organisations, and others, as how best these funds will be used for carers.

KASS will continue to deliver against the Kent Adult Carers Strategy and will support local carer organisations to lobby for Caring with Confidence funds to continue to be routed through the voluntary organisations.

I also welcome the announcement by the Department of Health that the materials used in the Caring with Confidence training will be made publicly available, so that more carers will be able to access this.

The Kent multi-agency Carers Joint Commissioning Group are currently in the process of prioritising commissioning intentions for April 2011, these priorities will be confirmed following the comprehensive spending review in the autumn when available funding is finalised.

The Carers Joint Commissioning Group will next meet on the 28 July and will be asked to consider resources that may be available for the remainder of this financial year to support the voluntary sector to continue to deliver the Caring with Confidence programme to Carers.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**22 July 2010**

**Question by Mr M J Vye to the Cabinet Member  
for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Given the harmful impact of recent installation of Traffic Management signage on important views of the cathedral and of other historical buildings in Canterbury; and given insensitive replacement of road and footway surfaces in the Old City with locally inappropriate materials; will the Cabinet Member for Environment Highways and Waste agree to instruct Highways Services commissioning officers to insist that contractors have proper regard for the special sensitivity of the historical environment of the Old City of Canterbury when planning and implementing highways improvements?

**Answer**

Kent Highway Services will always have proper regard for the special sensitivity of historic locations and this has to be balanced with effective location.

I shall ask that the signage that Mr Vye refers be investigated to see if a more suitable location can be mutually agreed.



**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**22 July 2010**

**Question by Mr G Koowaree to the  
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services**

Will the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services please inform this council why there have been a 2-year delay in the introduction of a Disabled Person's Registration Card (proof that they are eligible to use disabled facilities) for people who have as a significant disability:

- are registered as blind with a local authority
- have a Blue Badge parking permit
- receive Disability Living Allowance (either care or mobility component)
- receive Attendance Allowance or Industrial Injury Constant Attendance Allowance
- have a long-term indwelling catheter or stoma.

and need to use facilities provided for disabled people or need to ask for assistance; and inform members when this card will finally be available?

**Answer**

I met with Mr G Koowaree over the last two years, together with officers, to discuss the particular issue of people with hidden disabilities needing access to disabled facilities such as toilets.

Based on this discussion, it was agreed that the best way forward was to build links with local businesses and communities to look at the possibility of developing a suitable scheme in Kent.

Subsequent to that meeting, I also asked KASS officers to investigate a similar scheme in Nottinghamshire. Discussions are ongoing and I shall inform Members when further progress is made.

It is important that this is seen in the context of wider public health issues and to note that the council already provides means of identification for disabled people such as Blue Badges and disabled registration cards

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**22 July 2010**

**Question by Mr T Prater to the Leader of the Council**

Will the Leader accept that the statement of the Chief Executive in writing to staff on 12th January 2009 informing them they would receive just a 1% pay rise but adding that "The highest paid of our colleagues, the Chief Officers Group, have decided not to take any bonus next year in recognition of the financial situation we all face." has caused upset amongst staff who now see from the 2009-10 accounts that some Chief Officers did take bonuses in 2009-10 totalling around £53,000, albeit for performance in 2008-09.

Will the Leader explain how the Chief Executive could make a statement to staff which was not true as it was written, explain what the real intention and meaning of that statement was, assure staff that there will be no Chief Officer bonuses in the accounts for 2010-11, and offer an apology to all KCC staff who may feel that the authority said one thing on officers bonuses and then did another.

**Answer**

I think Mr Prater has confused his dates which I will clarify in this answer.

I do admit that Peter Gilroy's statement to staff could have been better worded. There was certainly no intention to mislead staff but because the wording was not explicit it was open to misinterpretation.

Let's make one thing quite clear - performance reward monies can only be paid to individuals after the completion of the year to which they relate. The payments made to Chief Officers in 2009-10 relate to performance in 2008-9 and this is where much of the confusion lies.

The intention of the Chief Executive's statement was to make staff aware that Chief Officers would not be considered for any payments relating to their performance during 2009-10 - this will be apparent in next year's statement of accounts. Chief Officers will not be receiving any performance pay for the current financial year, 2010/11, either as will be evidenced in the accounts published in the summer of 2012.

I hope that this clarifies the situation and I would like to apologise to staff who may have felt misled.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**22 July 2010**

**Question by Mr M Robertson to the  
Chairman of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee**

Will the Chairman of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee say what lessons have been learned during the last year of the Committee's operation?

**Answer**

On my appointment as Chairman of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee I asked the Conservative/Labour Group Spokesmen and the Independent Member to serve as my Vice Chairmen. This has worked well as we share the responsibility and operation of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee.

Scrutiny is the main tool available to all back bench members to examine and improve the decisions made by Cabinet and Cabinet members on behalf of the residents of Kent.

We have been pleased to see the latest improvement in quality of response from Cabinet to the recommendations made by Cabinet Scrutiny Committee.

However, what continues to cause concern to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and across the whole suite of Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committees is the information available to back bench Members to perform their role and serve the people of Kent more effectively.

There needs to be a fundamental change in the culture of the whole organisation to see Cabinet Scrutiny Committee as the "constructive critical friend". The Cabinet Scrutiny Committee has worked hard to lobby for more information to be included in the Forward Plan and the provision of quality and timely information.

Information requests need to be responded to promptly to avoid unnecessary call-in. Likewise recommendations for items to be considered by the appropriate Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been ignored. Recommendations from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee which have been agreed by Cabinet have on occasions been delayed in their implementation. (In the interest of expediency I have set out specific examples at the end of the formal written answer).

I look forward to a period of improved communication with staff and the members of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, and scrutiny work being increasingly focused on the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committees, leaving Cabinet Scrutiny Committee to pick up pre scrutiny, cross cutting and major decisions.

## Examples:-

- **Commonly long delays in responding to questions:** in a recent example five weeks elapsed before the officer responsible for making a decision was identified by the Children, Families & Education Department. Questions raised on gulley emptying in December 2008 remain outstanding. As a result scrutiny meetings have been held which could have been avoided had these questions been answered promptly.
- **Delays have also been experienced in following up recommendations accepted by Cabinet:** a report on Kent Design Guide Parking Standards has taken over seven months to be presented; and three months for a satisfactory report on Kent Digital Service; we still await review of the 15% Chief Officer Bonus scheme which remains outstanding since April 2009; so far there has been no review of the members feedback forms required as part of the Chief Officer appraisal process as requested in September 2010.
- **The information were incomplete:** The Future of Older Peoples Provision had neither the number of clients, or the number of staff affected detailed.
- **The decision as written was unintelligible:** such as a report on school maintenance contracts, or the report was unrelated to the decision being made as in the case of Community Wardens scheme called in yesterday.
- **Would have been best dealt with by the specialist Policy Overview Scrutiny Committees but did not appear on their agendas:** The Cabinet Member decision on the revision of Community Warden deployment was signed off two days before the Communities Policy Overview Scrutiny Committee but did not appear on its agenda. The £4.1m cuts in Integrated Transport Schemes do not appear on the agenda for Environment Highways and Waste Policy Overview Scrutiny Committee for 29<sup>TH</sup> July. Yet these are both issues in which there is likely to be intense public interest.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**22 July 2010**

**Question by Mr I Chittenden to the  
Cabinet Member for Community Services**

Would the Cabinet Member for Communities please provide the total costs and an individual breakdown for each of the 6 people (identifying Member and KCC Officers) who travelled to the Open Golf Championship at St Andrews including:

- Air travel
- Transport or mileage to/from Gatwick
- Transport & accommodation in Scotland
- Subsistence (i.e. meals, refreshments etc.)
- All other costs (incl. cost of officer hours)

**Answer**

The Open Golf Championship coming to Sandwich next year is a major event for the County Council. It is coming two years earlier than usual due very largely to the efforts made by the County Council and Dover District Council to persuade the Royal & Ancient to bring forward the date on account of the Olympics in 2012. The Open is expected to generate approximately £70m worth of inward investment to the County and it is absolutely critical that we make a real success of the Championship and at the same time maximise the benefit to Kent of this opportunity. The visit to St. Andrews last week was entirely in pursuit of these two objectives.

Of the total of five people attended St Andrews; one Member and two Officers from KCC; one Member and one Officer from Dover District Council.

The visit was undertaken at the request of, and as guests of, the Royal & Ancient. The travel and accommodation related expenses for the party were paid from the project budget which is provided by local authority partners for this work and the element for KCC representatives was as follows:

Air travel via Easyjet		£341
Transport to and from Gatwick		£50
Transport and Accommodation in Scotland	Transport	£105
	Accommodation	£660
Meals		£123

There were no other officer costs. Officers worked their normal hours including significant unpaid overtime.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**22 July 2010**

**Question by Mrs Dean To The  
Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education**

Will the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education please say what the consequences could be for Kent County Council Support Services, and for future admissions if a number of Kent schools opt for Academy status and can she say what representations KCC has made to the government on this issue?

**Answer**

As far as support services are concerned that is a difficult question to answer at this point. The current methodology for funding new academies and the low number seeking to convert mean that in the current year the impact will be very small. Services currently operating on a traded basis with schools can continue to offer services to converting schools. One of our key concerns – as highlighted in the report to CFE Resources & Infrastructure POSC this week – is that the government may seek to change the methodology of academy funding from as early as next year. This issue is one of the many questions we have been raising through all avenues with Ministers and DfE officials but to date we have not had any answers.

In terms of Admissions the new academies would become Admissions authorities in their own right – but many of those seeking to convert already are as they are Foundation Schools. Kent will continue to administer the admissions process for all schools in the county and as with the existing arrangements all schools will have to abide by the national Code of Practice.