

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**Thursday, 14 October 2010****Question by Mike Harrison****To John Simmonds, Cabinet Member for Finance**

Will the Cabinet Member for Finance be able to explain the reasoning behind Members being asked to include the VAT petrol/diesel receipts with their monthly mileage claim? Could he also explain how the amount is deducted per receipt, as it is not always that receipt which covers certain sections of the Members claim?

Could he also give the amount collected from these receipts for the past 12 months?

Employee Services Centre response

The reason for requesting VAT receipts from both staff and Members is to maximise recovery of VAT from HMRC thereby reducing the cost of expenses to KCC and the public of Kent. HMRC require VAT receipts as evidence in order to allow such a recovery to take place against mileage costs, a change that was announced in December 2005 and took effect from January 2006.

The current level of submission of VAT receipts allows recovery of around £185,000 per annum for the whole of KCC including £2,500 from Members. If every mileage claim was supported by a VAT receipt the amount reclaimed would be increased by around £100,000 per annum.

KCC's expenses policy is designed to accommodate staff at all levels and Members to ensure transparency, consistency and fair use of public funds.

	Members		All Employees	
	<i>Amount reimbursed for VAT miles</i>	<i>Potential VAT lost</i>	<i>Amount reimbursed for VAT miles</i>	<i>Potential VAT lost</i>
Aug-09	£273.85	£186.23	£17,291.44	£9,352.45
Sep-09	£62.08	£96.98	£11,341.60	£7,124.56
Oct-09	£194.18	£251.79	£11,279.90	£7,300.04
Nov-09	£268.83	£263.09	£16,658.34	£9,166.39
Dec-09	£123.52	£243.21	£16,908.34	£9,403.28
Jan-10	£171.52	£89.66	£13,803.31	£8,496.58
Feb-10	£155.17	£203.31	£11,729.43	£7,138.87
Mar-10	£176.52	£230.95	£15,714.93	£8,423.37
Apr-10	£437.87	£429.86	£17,933.60	£9,212.28
May-10	£130.80	£59.22	£16,063.18	£9,516.84
Jun-10	£280.82	£173.99	£17,268.72	£7,728.36
Jul-10	£304.66	£130.59	£18,116.05	£7,360.11
Total	£2,579.82	£2,358.88	£184,108.84	£100,223.13

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Thursday, 14 October 2010

Question by Roland Tolputt

To Sarah Hohler, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education

Will the Cabinet Member consider writing to the Secretary of State Mr Michael Gove, to review Ofsted's system of assessing Schools in very deprived areas, with a high proportion of Special Needs pupils and many EAL pupils recently having come to Kent?

The present system of basing their overall assessment on attainment takes no account of Value Added, which is a much more constructive and realistic view of the progress of pupils and the quality of teaching in the school. In the past many such schools achieved a high grade on Value Added.

Inspections based solely on attainment will demotivate good teachers in such schools, and make it very difficult to attract future Head teachers and new staff to work in such areas. Obviously many Teachers will choose to work in schools in more affluent areas. There are a large numbers of Head teachers in such schools nearing retirement in Kent, and these schools should be accorded priority.

Response

I have considered writing to the Secretary of State requesting a review of Ofsted's system of assessing schools with a high proportion of special needs and new arrivals with English as an additional language. However, Ofsted will respond that the inspection criteria for all schools needs to be consistent and the judgements made need to be based on clear evidence of pupils' progress and attainment.

Ofsted argues strongly that the progress of individual children is taken into account when making an overall judgement and that it is triangulated with lesson observation and the pupils' progress as evidenced in the pupils' workbook. The perception that inspections are based solely on pupil attainment has been raised with Ofsted in the past, following the inspection of the current Inspection Framework (2009). Ofsted is quick to point out that this is not the case and that their judgements are made following the consideration from a range of criteria clearly set out in the Ofsted Framework and with a very clear evidence base.

I appreciate that some schools do not agree with Ofsted's explanation but, given past responses to this issue, I am not confident that writing would be productive.

I believe we should continue to work with schools, especially those in more challenging circumstances, and help schools implement systems and processes which clearly track and record each pupil's progress and, the intervention being provided, in order for them to make the anticipated progress.

This way, a school can argue strongly that the provision is of the highest quality and their value added can be evidenced through a combination of outstanding teaching, early and successful intervention and progress that is monitored very regularly.

The issue you raise in relation to attracting Headteachers and staff to schools in more challenging areas is a very real one and I know Governors are concerned about this. I believe Kent is well placed to be more creative about the way in which it addresses this issue in the future. New models of leadership[are emerging; there is a more pronounced focus on developing the complex learning needs of pupils, and schools have looked at a variety of ways of attracting staff who are keen to work in schools where additional challenges also provide additional professional satisfaction.

I am pleased that the Coalition Government is reviewing the current inspection framework and, along with other educational initiatives, will, perhaps, consider a change in approach.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, 14 October 2010

Question by Mr Leslie Christie

To Mrs Sarah Hohler, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education

What is the financial cost and implications for Kent County Council and the taxpayers of Kent of this Government's decision to abandon the Building Schools for the Future programme?

Response

I would like to thank Mr Christie for keeping this issue live as he asked a similar question at the last County Council meeting.

There is widespread disappointment in both Gravesham and Thanet that BSF Wave 4 was halted. Half of these two districts have new facilities which risks creating a two-tier system which may impact on parental choice in respect of admissions. It also means that the process and funding by which the Special Schools Review implementation was going to be completed has been delayed.

It is widely recognised that the BSF methodology was unnecessarily bureaucratic and costly. Kent County Council did incur financial costs planning for wave 4 and it is currently difficult to assess the costs incurred. The situation will be clearer when we know what our future capital allocations are. I hope we will be able to put this preliminary work to good use when we know from the Government how the capital programme will be run in the future.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, 14 October 2010

Question by Mrs Trudy Dean

To Mr Paul Carter, Leader of the Council

Can the Leader of the Council please say whether, in the event of the Alternative Vote system being used in National Government elections, this council will lobby for the same system to be used in Local Government elections?

Response

No – I am opposed to the Alternative Vote system. For 101 good reasons why I do not support AV, I asked my good friend Keith Ferrin, who gave me the following:

I am not surprised that Mrs Dean favours the alternative vote system since Liberal Democrats have always believed that it would give them a political advantage.

In my experience people who vote almost always have a very clear view about which political party they want to win an election and they do not want to vote for anyone else.

Those who cannot make their mind up usually do not vote at all.

It seems wrong to me to try and force people to make a choice they do not want to make.

I certainly do not want to vote Labour or Liberal Democrat and I doubt very much that Mrs Dean would want to vote Labour or Conservative – perhaps we ought to ask her who she would vote for when the Liberal Democrat was eliminated?

Without doubt the alternative vote system will make hung parliaments and councils much more likely, and that will mean that who runs the country or a council will be settled in back room deals rather than in the ballot box. Surely that cannot be right.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

14 October 2010

Question by Mr Martin Vye

To Mr Paul Carter, Leader of the Council

Given the likely growing need for the County Council to make use of voluntary/not-for-profit organisations to deliver core services, and on the other hand to bear down on expenditure of all kinds, will the Leader explain to the Council how he will ensure that the County Council makes every possible effort to help voluntary organisations to grow their capacity; and at the same time to ensure that cuts in grants to the voluntary sector are carried out in accordance with the Kent Compact and have regard to the vulnerability of the voluntary sector.

Response

Bold Steps for Kent envisages that the voluntary and community sector will be a critical partner in delivering the outcomes for the people of Kent, particularly in the context of the Big Society. Bold Steps will set out the following propositions:

- Establish a 'Big Society' Fund for Kent to provide start up monies for social enterprises and social entrepreneurs (with a significant fund).
- Reform our procurement framework to open it up more widely to the voluntary and community sector
- Introduce a 'Right to Bid' process for KCC services if local groups think they can run them better through mutuals/co-operatives
- Continue to support and use the Sustainable Communities Act

This programme of action enhances our commitment to the Kent Compact which recognises the need to establish financial stability within the voluntary and community sector and work with them on developing commissioning and procurement policies and protocols.

Clearly there will be less public money available, and the voluntary and community sector won't be immune from this. We will make every effort to give the sector as much notice as possible when funding is to be reduced, whether core grants or contracts for the delivery of services which is where the vast majority of KCC funding is spent. It is also important for the sector itself to rise to the challenge of delivering greater efficiencies along with other public agencies.

The sector is ambitious to improve its capacity and respond to this challenging agenda. Exploratory discussions are already taking place between us and the sector to establish how they can be engaged in the full range of options that will be set out in Bold Steps for Kent. This will ensure their existing skills and capacity are utilised but also that new approaches are developed that will offer a variety of different ways to respond to local need, including social enterprises.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

14 October 2010

Question by Mr Ian Chittenden

To Mr Nick Chard, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste

Bearing in mind the recent call by the Communities Secretary Eric Pickles to cut street clutter and the promise by Maidstone Council to remove 200 pieces of clutter from our streets, what action will KCC take to remove many of the redundant signs, posts and other items that litter our highways and pavements throughout Kent?

Response

Kent Highway Services is actively working on this issue.

Policy proposals on permanent highways signs will be considered by the Environment, Highways and Waste Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting on 4 November. This will include proposals to reduce sign clutter, as well as stricter criteria for installation of new signs and their replacement following damage.

Plans are being developed to undertake sign reviews aimed at consolidating and reducing the size of directional signs to reduce their environmental impact. The sign review will include identification and if appropriate removal of redundant and unnecessary sign clutter. This will need to be a rolling programme in view of the scale of the task, accompanied by a programme of public awareness.

Removal of illegal advertising boards on the Highway continues, and a programme is in hand to identify the owners of redundant and unapproved private signs, and their subsequent removal.

The situation with housing and event signing is improving but there are still significant numbers of signs being put up each year without consent. The only temporary signage allowed is for traffic purposes and not as an advertising tool.

Lists of approved temporary signs are available to Highway Officers; they are empowered to remove illegal signs.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

14 October 2010

Question by Mr Tim Prater

To Mr Paul Carter, Leader of the Council

Can the Leader of the Council explain the process that will be used to deliver the restructuring of this Council's Senior Management outlined in the "First Bold Step" proposals and "Changing to Keep Succeeding" Framework, and what risk assessment has been undertaken for the changes?

Response

I believe this question may now be somewhat out of date.

As Mr Prater is only too aware, a comprehensive Cabinet paper outlining the process that will be used to deliver the restructuring of the top tier of management and the associated risk assessment has been published and discussed at open Cabinet and Scrutiny Board on Monday of this week. The Cabinet paper is available for all to view.

A special Cabinet Scrutiny meeting on this subject is taking place tomorrow.

I trust Mr Prater now has all the information he requires.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

14 October 2010

Question by Mr Malcolm Robertson

To Mr Nick Chard, Cabinet Member for Environment Highways and Waste

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment Highways and Waste please:

1. Report the responses from Joint Transportation Boards on his decision Policy for the Management of Obstructions and Temporary Items on the Highway.

Response 1

The response from JTB's have been to note the Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommendation of 25th May, at which you were present, to approve the Managing of Obstructions Policy.

2. Say what action he proposes to take to respond to their representations and the response of the public to its implementation?

Response 2

Implementation of the policy has commenced in line with Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommendations. There have been no specific issues raised by the public, but I am aware that a petition may be due.