

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

4 September 2008

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

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please explain what the current progress is on preventing heavy vehicles from using unsuitable narrow roads and lanes in my Division and Kent in general?

Answer

The County Council is currently reviewing the existing lorry maps and will be updating and publishing revised maps during 2008. These will be widely distributed by organisations including the Freight Transport Association, Road Haulage Association, ports and Eurotunnel.

It is also collating a comprehensive inventory that will provide accurate data relating to road widths, height restrictions, gradients and traffic orders for Ordnance Survey and the satellite navigation companies to download into their devices. Parish and Town Councils will be approached to share their knowledge of local HGV problem areas. The introduction of multilingual route signing is also being considered at locations which have an historic problem with foreign drivers.

A countywide Freight Strategy is being developed to be published by March 2009 and will include an action plan which, amongst other things, outlines a range of measures to be implemented to ensure that freight vehicles stay on the most appropriate routes.

But can I add that in spite of all our efforts it is very likely that this will prove to be a long, slow, process before we get to the point of resolving the current problem.

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**Question by Mr R J Parry to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please explain why this year's grass cutting of verges and other KCC land has been so delayed and of such a dreadful quality?

Additionally, will the Cabinet Member outline the corrective measures he has instituted to recover the situation and for next year to ensure that the number of cuts is adequate, start early enough in the year and are sufficiently frequent and result in high quality work and finish which are acceptable to both the County and its residents?

Answer

Grassed areas on an amenity cut regime should have had 5 cuts by now and our monitoring has shown some contractors are currently behind programme and below specification in a limited number of areas.

They have been instructed to remedy these issues and a meeting has been arranged to understand why this has happened and what safeguards they have put in place to prevent further occurrences.

Once this is back on programme and specification it is hoped there will be a less noticeable difference to adjacent authorities although some differences may still exist, particularly if they have funded a higher frequency cutting regime.

We will continue to monitor across Kent, most of which is on programme, and to specification.

Part of the role of the KHS Landscape Manager is to review the whole process across Kent and in particular to develop a consistent specification, frequency and contractor performance. The main priority will be to ensure the safety of users of the highway and to also provide an acceptable visual standard.

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**Question by Mr R King to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

It is now several years since the Highways Agency promised my constituents that the M20 between junctions 8 and 9 would have its noisy concrete surface replaced by a silent tarmac one. It featured as a priority to be addressed within the first five years of a ten year programme which appears, subsequently to have been withdrawn.

Would the Cabinet Member please use his considerable influence to get the Highways Agency to address the problem of road noise on this stretch of the M20 and reinstate the promised resurfacing programme, which I believe was dropped as a result of government funding cuts? The road surface noise from this part of the M20 has increased to an unacceptable level since the road opened 14 years ago. This has become a matter of great concern to all those who live along the line of the motorway, and I would like the Cabinet Member's promise of help to get this problem addressed. Is he also able to give my constituents any indication at all as to when this final concrete section of the M20 in Kent is likely to be resurfaced?

Answer

Mr King is correct to say that the Highways Agency had plans in place to treat the concrete section of the M20 between junctions 8 and 9. However, in 2004, Government policy changed to the effect that no road should be maintained ahead of maintenance need. This concrete section is structurally sound and has not experienced the maintenance issues of other similar roads.

Thin surfacing treatments are not in themselves sufficient for this stretch of motorway. Any future scheme will require a new sub-base as well as resurfacing and alterations to the barriers along the central reservation. The scheme for this 22km stretch of motorway will cost £20m+ and will be programmed for 2012 or later.

Nevertheless, I entirely agree with Mr King that this is a very real problem for many residents living alongside the M20 and I will do everything I can to encourage the Highways Agency to apply quiet surfacing to the road as soon as possible.

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**Question by Mrs E Tweed to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste inform us if there are proposals to install controlled pedestrian crossings and speed limits outside ALL primary and secondary schools on main roads, and if not, why not?

Answer

We do not have a policy to install formal crossings (zebra, pelican, puffin or toucan) on main roads outside Kent schools. Many have school crossing patrols which are recognised as the safest method of getting children across the road at these sites. Where traffic levels and the speed of traffic has suggested that formal crossings are required then these have been provided where site conditions allow. Formal crossings are very expensive and are not suitable for all locations.

There is no specific policy for setting speed limits outside schools. We do receive requests for 20mph limits but these are generally inappropriate without traffic calming which is very expensive. We recently plotted crash data in relation to schools and found that there is more danger away from the site than in the immediate vicinity.

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

Two things that I dislike most are (i) duplication and (ii) repetition!

However, this time I have no choice but to repeat and embellish my question of 6 September 2007 with regards to advertising hoardings, both mobile and static, along our highways and fields adjoining them. I received a response to that question but once again I see a proliferation of these dreadful adverts appearing alongside out motorways and highways.

A new type of advert has made an appearance and that is older type vehicles both van and private type cars with adverts printed on them saying they represent a car or van hire company. These are placed at times in lay bys or, even worse, in the most dangerous positions along the public highway.

My question is: what is the legal status of these static adverts and is there anything that we at KCC can do to have them removed?

Answer

Hitherto Kent has not suffered from the proliferation of unauthorised roadside advertising as much as other parts of the country, because of the vigilance of the District Planning Authorities, who are responsible for advertisement control in the county. However, there is evidence of growing colonisation particularly from vehicles and trailers parked either in adjacent private fields or on highway verges by roundabouts and junctions. In nearly all cases, these types of advertisements require consent, whether mobile or static, but appear in advance of obtaining any such consent in the knowledge that consent would be unlikely to be forthcoming anyway.

Clearly it is important to nip this trend in the bud before it becomes too widespread to effectively control. Since the County Council as Planning Authority has no remit to directly intervene to secure their removal, we will prevail upon the District Councils through the Kent Planning Officers' Group to be extra vigilant in this regard.

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**Question by Mr R J Parker to the
Leader of the County Council**

Are there any proposals to remove the three elected County Councillors from the Board of Kent TV?

Answer

No - there are no proposals.

Any changes to the Membership of Kent TV's Board would be a decision taken by Kent TV's Governors.

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4 September 2008

**Question by Mr R A Pascoe to the
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services**

An elderly lady (who is now 91) is living with one of my residents; she has been looking after her the past two and a half years. That is from January 2006.

Since the elderly lady moved in the resident has been drawing 'Carers Allowance'. That was until 29 March this year. The carer continues to care for this elderly lady – washing her, cooking for her and providing clean clothes as well as taking her to the doctors and doing personal shopping for her on a regular basis.

After 29 March the carers allowance stopped – why? Because the carer celebrated her 60th birthday and now draws her old age pension. She still does all the work required to care for this elderly lady but receives no government help for so doing. If she was in social care it would cost much more than the carers allowance.

There are many, many more unpaid carers in this same situation; what are KCC doing to alleviate this problem or to influence Government to change the rules.

ANSWER

I welcome the fact that there is greater recognition by KCC and central Government of the valuable contribution carers make. However, as this case demonstrates, there is an outstanding issue regarding entitlement to carer's allowance that disadvantages elderly carers.

KCC is directly able to help with this difficulty by ensuring that trained staff offer benefit advice and where necessary support service users and their carers. We ensure service users and their carers are aware of the rules and claim all the benefits to which they are entitled. In this particular case it may still be worthwhile the carer claiming Carer's Allowance as, for many people, this opens up entitlement to the Carer's Addition with means-tested benefits like Pension Credit. We always take carers into account in assessments and offer all carers a specific carer's assessment of their own needs if they wish.

Indirectly, KCC also helps through its grant allocation to the voluntary sector organisations who assist carers with information, advice and practical assistance.

KCC will continue to use every opportunity to press that this matter is addressed speedily by central Government. KCC lobbied for provision of better benefits for carers through the "Carers in Kent" report submitted to Ivan Lewis, Minister for Care Services. We will continue to lobby central Government as it reviews the structure of benefits available to carers as part of the wider benefit reform and the fundamental review of the care and support system, in the run up to the impending Green Paper on Adult Social Care. I very much welcome the fact that there is support from all parties to work together to influence this review for a positive outcome.

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**Question by Mr R Truelove to the
Chairman of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee**

Would the Chairman of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee inform the Council what lessons he has learned from the consideration of the Kent Concessionary Travel Scheme for the over 60s at the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 May?

Answer

There are three main lessons to be drawn from consideration of this particular issue:

- 1) that the present administration, despite all its protestations to the contrary, is able to find whatever money it wishes for political stunts;
- 2) that the present administration takes decisions on the hoof, and
- 3) that the present administration failed in this case (and I suspect fails in other cases) to communicate effectively with Conservative district council colleagues, thus giving the lie to any notion of 'enhanced two-tier working'.

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**Question by Mr T Maddison to the
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services**

With the imminent closure of the Queen Elizabeth Foundation Centre in Dartford on 17 October, would the Cabinet Member inform the Council of any mechanisms put in place by KCC to ensure that adequate respite care is being provided for the many carers who will be affected by service and venue changes?

Answer

Carer issues are a high priority for the department and as such are central to the re-provision plans. Identification of carers' needs formed part of the individual assessment process that took place earlier this year. Consideration of carers' needs, including transport issues, was also included in the individual care planning interviews which took place during August.

The new networking sites will provide care for those attending them when required and care will be available, as now, for external activities such as bingo and ten-pin bowling, and other outings.

A meeting was held with the Carers group which meets at the Queen Elizabeth Foundation Centre on 25 April 2008 and no issues were raised at the time. It has also been agreed that an officer will attend the Carers group meeting later this month to discuss the final arrangements that will be in place after the 17 October closure.

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4 September 2008

**Question by Mr I Chittenden to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please explain why the first areas to receive the Kent Freedom Pass were areas of low deprivation with the lowest numbers of families in financial need such as Canterbury, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling, whilst the areas such as Thanet, Dartford and Ashford, with the highest levels of deprivation and the highest numbers of families in financial need, have been left until last?

Answer

The Kent Freedom scheme is designed to achieve a number of key KCC objectives particularly reducing congestion, affordable school travel and access to out of school facilities for students.

In setting up the pilots, we wanted to be sure that Freedom would work as there are no comparable examples elsewhere in the UK. We therefore chose two of the three most congested towns in the County which also have quite complex home to school transport arrangements.

We considered the deprivation angle but as Freedom will be fully Kentwide by June 2009, we felt it was more important to undertake the most robust testing of the scheme to ensure its practicality.

I am pleased to say that the pilots were very successful with over 5000 students opting for a Freedom pass in the pilot area.