

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 12 May 2011

Question by Mike Harrison to

Sarah Hohler, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills

Will you be kind enough to update the Members on the consultation that you instigated on Home-to-School Transport for faith and selective schools, and in particular, comment on whether it might be possible for Members to be provided with information and/or a demonstration of how digital transport systems could assist in bringing down the cost of our Home to School transport system.

Answer

In our home to school transport consultation, which ran from 21st March to 6th May, we consulted on proposals to:

- Remove the discretionary elements of home to school transport provision from 1st September 2012.
- Continue to provide transport assistance to church or grammar schools for those children who are eligible under existing arrangements until such time as they change school or are no longer of statutory school age.

We have received a good number of responses from schools, parents and the wider community, and we are currently reviewing their comments. Once this review is complete, I, in consultation with my Cabinet colleagues, will be making a decision on how to proceed, including a decision about possible concessions. I will naturally keep members informed of my progress.

Turning to the comment regarding digital transport systems, I am aware that Mr Harrison, together with other Members of the Regulation Committee visited Transport Integration in March to understand more about how the operational aspects of the Council's client and public transport functions are conducted. I understand that Mr Harrison raised this question then and a discussion took place with the Transport Integration Manager and the School Transport Manager on the merits of the existing digital systems which have delivered a saving of more than £5m against the 2010-11 budget. We are confident that our system provides the best value for money compared with its market competitors. The business units of Commercial Services are always looking to deliver improved value to the authority and the latest local authority benchmarking for these areas of spend continues to put Kent at the lower-cost end of the spectrum.

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Question by Martin Vye to

Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities

Will the Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities inform the Council how many District Councils have signed up to Locality Boards, and in the case of those which have not, give the reasons for the difficulties in achieving this?

Answer

The Leader of the Council wrote to all Members on 31 March with an update on various proposed changes to the County Council's arrangements for partnership working.

One of these changes relates to setting up Locality Boards which will involve County and District Members working together in the interests of the residents that we all serve. The Boards support the localism agenda and will help to shape public service delivery so that services are good quality, value for money and deliver against the priority needs of each of our very different district areas. It is important to emphasise that one of the underlying principles behind Locality Boards is that 'one size does not fit all' and that it has always been expected that the Boards will evolve in different ways and at different speeds.

Clearly the timing of District Council elections has had an influence on the capacity to develop models for Locality Boards. Despite this, I am pleased to report that there has been a lot of progress across the county in a fairly short period of time.

- Three District Councils have agreed to develop Locality Boards;
- A further three Councils are actively developing models that will be discussed now the District Council elections are over;
- Four District Councils have wanted to wait until after their elections before giving serious thought to Locality Boards;
- The remaining two District Councils have indicated reservations about Locality Boards and we are in discussion with these Councils in order to address their concerns.

Locality Boards are a developing area. There will be lessons to learn as we move forward with different models across the County. Exploring the concerns and reservations are all part of the development process and I shall be meeting District Council Leaders to hear their views.