

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 20 October 2011

Question by Mike Harrison to

John Simmonds, Cabinet Member for Finance & Business Support

We have had the new electronic system of claiming for our mileage in place for some time and I am given to believe that this is now being used not only by members but all staff.

My question therefore to the Cabinet Member is, can he please give me and fellow members an update on just how many members and staff are in fact using this new system?

Has this now been declared as the only way to claim your travel and mileage etc. and just what does he estimate are the savings by using this and what is the return to KCC on VAT from petrol etc receipts?

As a long time user of the system I would appreciate the opportunity to ask for one or two minor adjustments to the way the details are filled in on the electronic pages.

Answer

The electronic system for claiming mileage (and other expenses) is indeed available to staff and Members as part of the overall Employee and Manager Self Service offering from the HR Division.

This system has now been made available to all staff who have a KCC network login, equating to 8,700 employees. Also 69 Members have been trained and have made some use of the system since it was introduced. Since January this year, 30 Members have submitted claims using the system and 25 of those use it regularly.

Due to the fact that there are members of staff without a network login, it has not been possible to make this method the sole route for claiming expenses. However, it is considered that if a user has access to self service, then they should use this method as the only one to make these claims. Reviews are performed to check that this is the case and users are reminded of this periodically if they are claiming through the older, paper-based method.

Amongst the benefits of the system are the reduction in paper generation and improved management information, which provide cross - Authority benefits. In addition, as just over 60% of expense claims each month are processed via self service, it has allowed the HR Business Centre to make a cumulative saving of above £400K since its introduction. VAT reclamation on all claims in 2010-11 was £192.7K and current projections indicate a similar value in 2011-12. If receipts were provided with all mileage claims there is potential to reclaim a further £100K VAT per annum.

We always welcome feedback from our customers and would be happy to arrange to meet Cllr Harrison to discuss his suggestions.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 20 October 2011

Question by David Brazier to

Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer & Communities

What evidence is there that Turner Contemporary has been a public success and has contributed towards the regeneration of Margate?

Answer

Since opening on 16th April 2011 Turner Contemporary has received over 250,000 visitors, against an initial forecast of 156,000 for the full year. Of these visitors 32% are from Thanet, 38% are from the South East (including 16% from London), 28% are from the rest of the UK and 2% are from overseas. We are undertaking ongoing audience research and percentage figures are changing on a month by month basis.

We are successfully attracting visitors who are gallery goers and who visit galleries in London and other destinations, as well as reaching new audiences and attracting a non-traditional gallery audience. We are delighted that 5% of our visitors state that they have never been to an art gallery before.

Turner Contemporary is already having a positive economic impact on the surrounding area, with new businesses opening up in Margate and visitors who would not otherwise have visited the area adding to the local economy. A report in The Times on 5 October 2011 said "In the old town near the museum there's a detectable optimism evident in new cafes, art galleries and vintage stores".

Though it is still early days the evident success of the gallery is enormously encouraging and I am confident that the brave decision of the County Council to build Turner Contemporary will be fully justified.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**Thursday 20 October 2011****Question by Leslie Christie to****Graham Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health**

Following your decision to increase charging for non-residential social care despite the views expressed in the consultation exercise, how many of those facing the increase from December 2011 will see their charges increased by:

- a) Less than 5%;
- b) Between 5% and 10%;
- c) Between 10% and 20%;
- d) Between 20% and 30%; and
- e) 30% and above.

Answer

The number of people receiving non-residential care services is not static, as people come in and out of the care system. The analysis of a snapshot of 3,692 service users who are assessed to pay a charge towards their services provides the following breakdown in response to your question:

a) Less than 5%;	0	
b) Between 5% and 10%;	0	
c) Between 10% and 20%;	43	(average increase £39.01)
d) Between 20% and 30%; and	2533	(average increase £12.56)
e) 30% and above	1116	(average increase £7.21)

This breakdown does not include an estimated 250 service users who do not currently pay a charge but who are likely to be assessed to pay in the region of £4.00 per week.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 20 October 2011

Question by Martin Vye to

Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills

Will the Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills inform the Council whether the numbers of children in each category of special educational need in any of Kent's districts exceed the capacity of the special schools assigned to that district; and how many children with special educational need currently have to travel more than 20 miles per day to attend a special school?

Answer

There are approximately 6500 children with statements of SEN in Kent, of which just over 3000 are in special schools. In addition, there are children with SEN without statements who are supported in mainstream schools.

Whilst a child requires a statement of SEN to be admitted to a special school, not all children with statements are educated in special schools, nor do they need special school provision, as education within a mainstream or unit setting is more appropriate to meet the needs of many children, and meet parents' preferences.

The Local Authority assesses the special educational needs of each child referred and decides which school to name in a statement of SEN. This decision is made in accordance with Schedule 27 Section 324 of the Education Act 1996. During the statutory assessment process, parents are asked to express their school preference and if the Local Authority were to name a different school, the parent can appeal to the SEN Tribunal.

Kent County Council has invested £150 million in the recent years in the provision of special school and unit places.

If Mr Vye wishes to see a detailed breakdown of the incidence of SEN across the County, by district, by need type and by school attended, I have a copy of the School Census data from January 2011 available for him.

Turning to Mr Vye's second question, 216 of the 6500 children with a statement of SEN travel over 20 miles to a special school on a daily basis.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 20 October 2011

Question by Steve Manion to

Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer & Communities

I am given to understand that the KM group of newspapers have put in a bid for the various other local papers such as the Whitstable Times and others in the rest of East Kent and in particular the Dover and Thanet areas. They are the 'Kent Regional News and Media Group') if this in fact true my question to you is.

1. Have we (KCC) been asked to respond to the consultation? If so what did we say?
2. Will this become a mini Murdoch situation with only one major player in the local media as the KM has control of its own local radio?
3. Would we then be held to ransom as there would be only the one outlet for our statutory advertising apart from the KOS papers?

Answer

The KM Group proposed the acquisition of the KRNM titles. The KM Group had made it clear that if its proposed acquisition was referred to the Competition Commission by the Office of Fair Trading it would withdraw its bid.

This has since happened and the bid has been withdrawn. We will continue to work with Kent's various media agencies as we move forward.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

20 October 2011

Question by Tim Prater to

Trudy Dean, Chairman of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

Will the Chairman of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee say what lessons have been learned on the operation of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee since her last report in July 2010?

Answer

In our July 2010 report we called for the Forward Plan to be improved, and that more Scrutiny work should be carried out by the Policy and Overview Committees. We therefore welcome progress on both issues being made, and in particular welcome the proposal for Scrutiny Committees to examine impending decisions before they are approved by Cabinet.

But whatever structure the Council chooses for itself in the future, problems remain with the timeliness, adequacy and accuracy of key decision reports need to be overcome to ensure that members are able to carry out their work effectively.

1) During the year, we have called in issues which could and should have been considered by the relevant POSC had attention been paid to its meeting timetable. The report on the future of the Youth Service was presented for Cabinet on 18th July, only ten days after the Customer and Communities Committee met, to authorise consultation commencing at the beginning of August. The report on the Edenbridge Centre was called in, with the support of the Local Member, partly because it had not appeared on the agenda of any POSC for as far back as records could easily be searched

2) Approval has been requested for urgent decisions, sometimes in less than a working day, for decisions which were clearly either not urgent, or could have avoided urgency by proper planning including taking into account the timetable of Scrutiny Committees. The request for a loan facility of £100,000 to Kent Cultural Trading Company and the construction of Repton School were examples of the latter. Examination of these urgent decisions by Roger Manning has convinced us they have not been thoroughly thought through and we have warned that in future we will be less inclined to approve urgent requests.

3) We have continued to receive reports which do not contain sufficient information either to make it clear what decision was being authorised, or to answer the questions Cabinet Members would have had. The decision on Repton Primary School was an example of this.

4) One Committee meeting was held in the heart of the community affected by the decision under scrutiny. The Localism agenda should result in more such meetings. Our experience makes us suggest in future more care in choosing appropriate venues, ensuring good quality sound transmission, and appropriate advance local advertising for these meetings.

5) In general, we have been disappointed to receive very little support from the Communications Unit and ultimately produced our own press material. The Communications Unit should not be confined to supporting the work of Cabinet.

6) Over two years ago, the Committee asked permission to involve the public in its proceedings by taking electronic questions from them during the course of the meeting. No progress has yet been made.

7) We have had to request the Director of Legal Services to issue a reminder that Scrutiny Committees have the authority to require attendance of Cabinet Members and Senior Officers to answer questions, and that there is a duty in the constitution and in statute for them to attend. We do not consider it unreasonable for Scrutiny Meeting dates to be diaried by potential witnesses.

Against this background would like to commend Andy Wood, Dave Shipton and John Burr in particular for their positive approach to Scrutiny work, and commend the all party work done on charges within Adult Social Service and the Welfare Bill by Graham Gibbens which has resulted in our decision not to hold Scrutiny meetings in the last two cycles.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 20 October 2011

Question by John London to

Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer & Communities

Would the Cabinet Member for Customer & Communities please give Members a full up date with situation on the New Build of the Archives Centre and associated works?

Answer

Work on the new centre has progressed apace since the ground-breaking ceremony on 26 February 2010.

The shell of the building was completed and the topping out ceremony held on 7 February 2011. The lighting, plant and associated mechanical and engineering works have now been completed and internal decoration has commenced.

The date for practical completion has yet to be approved formally, but the construction of the building is three months ahead of the original schedule. The handover date for the building will be confirmed once final dates for the connection of utilities have been agreed with the relevant companies, and we expect to take possession of the building in December or early January 2012.

Working groups have been preparing the archive collections and the stock at the two libraries for the move into the new centre. Springfield Library has already closed to the public and Centre for Kentish Studies and the East Kent Archives will close finally in November so that their contents can be packed up for the move. Maidstone Library will close in February 2012.

External works have also commenced which will make the area outside the centre more pedestrian friendly and link it more closely with the town through upgraded footpaths, cycle ways and road markings that will alert drivers that they are approaching the pelican crossings.

It is anticipated that the new building will be opening to the public in March 2012, with a formal opening to take place later in the year.