

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

22 February 2007

**Question by Mrs P A Stockell to the
Cabinet Member for Finance**

Would the Cabinet Member for Finance please update Members on the progress, or rather lack of it, on installing an ATM here at Maidstone Headquarters (Sessions House/Invicta House)?

Answer

Officers have been following through all available options since this question was first raised. We have unfortunately come to a point where the only free managed service option requires a guarantee from KCC of a minimum of 3,000 transactions per month and our view is that actual usage given the proximity to the town centre and the reduced use made of cash by individuals would be much lower than this.

In the current financial climate I do not feel that KCC can subsidise the service.

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**Question by Mr C Hart to the
Leader of the County Council**

Given the recent White Paper on the future of local government and its emphasis on accountability, can the Leader of the Council please inform Members when the procedure of waving through, without debate, agenda items of great importance to the people of Kent at meetings of the full Council simply because of the 1.00pm lunchtime break, will end?

Answer

I believe we have made good progress in planning and changing County Council agendas in the last 15 months and have improved the quality of debate at County Council meetings.

The Council has agreed that each agenda should include one item for full debate agreed by the Chairman on the basis of a motion proposing an outcome. The Constitution also permits each political group to place a motion on the agenda for debate, not exceeding 30 minutes per motion.

With Council meetings ending at 4.00pm should two motions be submitted then this only allows for 1 hour in the afternoon for the item agreed for full debate.

The Constitution also states that any recommendations by the Leader or a Cabinet Member that have not been dealt with at the meeting shall be deemed to have been agreed as recommended and any other motions that have not been put to the vote fall. On this basis, and because of the limited time available in the morning, the Chairman attempts to allocate each agenda item a time for debate.

Should any Member feel strongly that a debate on any topic should continue they can, of course, move that the debate continue and, if seconded, the Chairman would immediately, without debate, put the motion to the vote.

A review of Council meeting procedures has been referred to the Informal Member Group on Going Local and Members are welcome to put forward any suggestions for further improvements.

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**Question by Mr T Birkett to the
Chairman of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee**

Would the Chairman of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee inform this Council whether Dover District Council received an answer to its letter of 3 November with regard to school closures in the Dover District area and if so, when was it despatched, and will the Chairman of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee inform this Council of the impact on his Committee's deliberations??

Answer

Dover District Council wrote to the Children, Families and Education Directorate on 3 November 2006. That letter constituted an agreed District Council response, on the basis of the evidence then available, to all the primary school closures within the District Council area and raised a number of questions requiring replies which would have been helpful to the Council in formulating further detailed input to the closure consultation process. The letter did not raise a formal objection to the closure proposals, though clearly a prompt response to the requests for further information and reassurance may have resulted in formal objections or, indeed, in support.

On 11 December 2006, Mr Gwyn Prosser, MP for Dover, submitted a written statement of evidence to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13 December. In that written statement, Mr Prosser made reference to Dover District Council's letter of 3 November and stated that, at the time of his writing, the District Council had not had the courtesy of a reply. Representatives of the CFE Directorate stated that a reply had been sent. It emerged through questioning that that reply was dated 12 December and had been despatched that day.

No copy of that letter was provided, nor has one been provided subsequently, to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, though clearly it would have been extremely useful to have had the Directorate's responses to the District Council's legitimate concerns.

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

Would the Chairman of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee inform this Council how many school closure proposals his Committee has considered, how many this represents compared to the total initially proposed and whether there may be any pattern in this?

Answer

Counting amalgamations as two proposals, because two schools are affected, the number of proposals considered by Cabinet Scrutiny Committee stands at fourteen, six of them having been considered twice. Thirty-four proposals were initially put forward, involving fifty-two schools. Thirteen proposals involving fifteen schools (two amalgamations, eleven closures) were dropped at various stages of the consultative process. Twenty proposals involving thirty-five schools have now been agreed (fifteen amalgamations, five closures). One proposal involving two schools – an amalgamation – is currently awaiting adjudication. This is the proposal for the amalgamation of Melbourne and The Powell primary schools in Dover.

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee took it as a general rule of thumb that it would not scrutinise amalgamations leading to a school closure where this involved the amalgamation of an infant school with a junior school. Given the number of schools which went through for closure, it was interesting to note that the bulk of those closed were in the Dover District Council area. Cabinet Scrutiny Committee considered the following proposals:

- on 28th June 2006, the amalgamations of South Deal & Mongeham Schools, and of Melbourne and The Powell Schools; and the closure of St Joseph's Roman Catholic School, St Radigund's School, Langdon School, Goodnestone School and Ripple School.
- on 12th September 2006, the amalgamations of Birchwood & Whiteoak Schools, of South Deal & Mongeham Schools (for the second time) and of Melbourne & the Powell Schools (again, for the second time); the Committee also considered the closure of Ripple School for the second time.
- on 27th September 2006, the closure of Hothfield School, and the amalgamation of Ashford South & Oak Tree Schools, and
- on 13th December 2006, the Committee considered for the second time the closure of St Joseph's Roman Catholic school.

Members will note that there is a clear preponderance of schools in the Dover area among those I have listed. It may be useful to highlight the fact that – taking figures for the past three years - the level of surplus primary school places within the Dover district stood at 15.98% for 2006, 14.04% for 2005 and 10.92% if we go back to 2004. Members may find it useful if I offer comparisons with the figures for Tonbridge & Malling in the same period: 15% for 2006, only 0.98% fewer surplus places than Dover; 13.45% for 2005, only 0.59% fewer than Dover; but 11.85% for 2004, so 0.93% *more* surplus places than Dover. I leave members to reach their own conclusions from the comparisons I have drawn in this response.

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

Would the Chairman of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee please inform this Council what concerns his Committee had over the decision of KCC Highways to recommending the siting of the West Kent Highways Depot on a green belt site of outstanding natural beauty?

Will this precedent allow KCC to ignore District Council views?

Answer

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee considered the Cabinet's decision on "Delivering a 21st Century Highway Service" at its meeting on 25 October 2006. The report to Cabinet included the proposal to site "super-depots" at Wrotham and Ashford. The Cabinet Scrutiny Committee did not formally express any concerns over the siting of either of the proposed "super-depots". However the Committee did express concern regarding the lack of consultation with the wider KCC membership, District Councils and other partners about the further changes to the KHS structure proposed in the Cabinet report.

The Cabinet Scrutiny Committee resolved that implementation of Cabinet's decision be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by Cabinet on the grounds that that the report to Cabinet on 16 October did not contain sufficient information on which the decision could safely be based. The Committee suggested that Cabinet's reconsideration should be on the basis of a much more detailed report, which should include the following:-

- (i) consideration of the central HQ option for KHS (one of the two options recommended by external consultants in 2004);
- (ii) a detailed financial breakdown of capital and revenue costs (including IT costs and any additional costs to contractors which they might pass on to KCC) allowing a proper comparison to be made between the three-depot option, the two-depot option, and the Central Office option;
- (iii) a full risk assessment of the option recommended to Cabinet for approval in the new report;
- (iv) a full environmental impact assessment of the option recommended to Cabinet for approval in the new report.

Response continues on the next page

All planning applications are considered on a case by case basis but in terms of the way that District Councils and other partners are treated I would refer you to the Committee's concerns as expressed above. I would like to think that KCC would hold true to its commitment expressed on page 16 of the *Towards 2010* document to 'a better, safer, cleaner, more sustainable county held in trusteeship for future generations'.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

22 February 2007

**Question by Miss S J Carey to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Since I last raised the unresolved problem of Operation Stack at County Council, Kent has once again suffered from Operation Stack being implemented twice in quick succession due to industrial action in France and bad weather on the English Channel. The disruption to individuals and businesses can hardly be exaggerated and not just to those who use the M20 but also the knock-on effects on the local road network.

Would the Cabinet Member please tell me what steps he is taking to expedite a long term solution to the intolerable disruption caused to Kent by Operation Stack?

Answer

The County Council is working with partners to identify a site for an emergency lorry park to accommodate lorries which would otherwise be parked on the M20 during Operation Stack. This work should be completed in three months and the County Council will work with partners to press Government to progress this proposal through to construction.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

22 February 2007

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

Would the Chairman of Cabinet Scrutiny Committee invite the Minister, Dr Stephen Ladyman, to attend Cabinet Scrutiny to explain the Highways Grant Settlement for Kent?

Answer

Yes.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

22 February 2007

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

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please give details of the new Kent County Council Car Club and just how Members can make use of this excellent project.

Answer

Kent Highway Service's Car Club pilot is a unique partnership between KCC and our immediate neighbours to help tackle congestion in Maidstone at peak times. The Streetcars will enable employees and Members requiring use of cars during their working day, to travel to and from work and then have reliable access to a quality fuel efficient and low emissions vehicle to undertake their duties.

This will replace the old pool car system, it will also help to relieve parking pressures, both on the County Hall site and in the immediate area. Full details of how KCC Officers and Members can sign up for the scheme, together with instructions on how to book, access and use the vehicles are to be found on KNet. Graham Tanner in Kent Highway Services will be delighted to assist anyone with a query.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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**Question by Mr R B Burgess to the
Cabinet Member for Education and School Improvement**

Would the Cabinet Member outline the new responsibilities that the Government has set Kent County Council for standards at nurseries and playgroups.

Response

The new responsibilities placed on Local Authorities by the DfES for standards in nurseries and pre-school settings are regulations introduced following the Childcare Act 2006 which make provision for two new statutory targets to be negotiated with Local Authorities.

The targets cover two dimensions, improvement and equalities:

- The improvement target is intended to increase proportion of children who reach the expected level of development at the end of the Foundation Stage. The expected development is for pupils to achieve at least 78 points overall in their Foundation Stage Profile score and achieve at least 6 points in both *Communication, Language and Literacy* and *Personal, Social and Emotional* development.
- The equalities target seeks to reduce the gap between the average total score of children in the lowest 20% in the Foundation Stage Profile and the middle of the range for all children

The targets will be based on the outcomes of Foundation Stage Profile data, an end of key stage assessment, undertaken in the summer term of the reception year. The assessment is against the six areas of learning in the curriculum entitlement for children in the Foundation Stage.

Meeting the new targets will be challenging. Kent has in excess of 740 private, voluntary and independent pre-school settings and 1800 childminders. This number of settings and their geographic distribution across the county is constantly evolving. Private providers account for 91.5% of nursery provision in Kent.

A further difficulty is that Kent's average Early Years setting achieves lower educational standards in comparison to the national context as evidenced in the 2006 HMCI annual report. This report deemed that 12% of all Kent pre-school provision is inadequate and 46% is merely satisfactory in comparison with 3% and 36% of the national provision respectively.

In order to rise to these challenges, we will require new ways of supporting and improving their performance and already we have commenced a dialogue with settings that require the most improvement. This will involve considerable time and human resource.

Additional information

Note on Kent Performance in 2006

The Foundation stage Profile data for 2006 when compared to National data identifies that children are entering Key Stage One at a lower level than the nationally in all 6 areas of learning, with significant differences in reading, writing, social, emotional and creative development. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is also higher in Kent compared to national levels.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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**Question by Mr R E King to the
Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Supporting Independence**

Would the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Supporting Independence update the County Council on the progress being made to reinstate the proposed cuts to the international passenger services from Ashford International Station and, in particular, to maintain a direct Ashford service to Lille and Brussels?

If we are unsuccessful, the economic regeneration not only of Ashford and East Kent, but of the South East as a whole will suffer badly and will greatly increase the already unacceptable congestion in North West Kent as people drive to Ebbsfleet to access Eurostar services.

Answer

Further to the November meeting, another meeting between Eurostar and the County Council and its partners Ashford and Shepway Councils; MP's Michael Howard and Damien Green; and SEEDA has been held to press the case to retain a direct service between Ashford and Brussels. East and West Sussex and Hampshire County Councils have added their support for the County Council's position.

At the European level, the County Council has been working closely with MEPs to put the issue on the European Union's agenda. A cross-party group of south eastern MEPs have written a joint letter to Eurostar and are pressing for the issue to be debated in the European Parliament. The County Council and the Nord Pas de Calais Regional Council convened a meeting with senior directors of the European Commission (Regional and Transport/Energy Directorates) to make the case for the need to retain intermediate stops on high speed lines to support economic regeneration, social cohesion, growth and jobs. A follow meeting, including Eurostar and SNCF, (French railways) is to be held in the near future.

The County Council is also in close contact with residents of Kent who use Eurostar services to Brussels regularly, including those who work in Belgium as well as on the UK side.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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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 comment on the progress made on the provision of an “easterly” entrance and exit to and from the M25 at Sevenoaks.

The provision of this facility will help reduce the nearly 120,000 traffic movements each day on the A25.

Additionally, would the Cabinet Member inform the Council of the lobbying pressures exerted on Central Government and also that Central Government has been made aware of the considerable benefits and relief which will be received by those many villages in the Sevenoaks District which are divided by the A25.

Answer

Central Government and the Highways Agency are fully aware of the County Council’s strong support for this scheme and the potential it has to significantly reduce traffic through Wrotham Heath, Platt, Borough Green, Ightham, Seal and eastern Sevenoaks. The Highways Agency intends to carry out a feasibility study into the scheme to assess its costs and benefits. It is understood that the budget for this study is secured and the intention is to start the study this year.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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**Question by Mr G Rowe to the
Cabinet Member for Community Services**

I am sure that the Cabinet Member for Community Services feels as angry and disappointed as I at the Home Office decision to cut recruitment funds for PCSOs from this April.

Does the Cabinet Member agree that a shortfall of 201 funded posts (from 474 to 273) will have a serious effect on the development of neighbourhood policing within the County and can he advise if he has identified any ways in which KCC can help to ameliorate the problem of the shortfall in uniformed officers patrolling our streets?

Answer

I am extremely disappointed at the Home Office decision to reduce the funding for PCSO's in Kent, which will reduce the number which were to be deployed across the county as part of the Neighbourhood Policing programme. Kent Police are revising their deployment plans for PCSO's to ensure that the Neighbourhood Policing programme is delivered and provides the most effective frontline service as possible, given the resources that will now be available.

Our intent, as indicated in "Towards 2010", is to fully support Kent Police in their visible neighbourhood policing programme. The reduction in PCSO numbers means that KCC's contribution to frontline activity is even more critical to the success of the Neighbourhood Policing programme.

We have tasked our 100 plus Community Wardens to work alongside Police Officers, Police Community Support Officers, Special Constables, District/Parish Councillors and members of the community as part of the Neighbourhood Policing approach, to tackle those issues which most concern communities and residents. Arrangements are also being put in place to ensure that other appropriate KCC frontline services such as Trading Standards, Education, Youth Services and Highways, to name but a few, will further support this programme via local Crime and Disorder reduction Partnerships.

The Kent Partnership, via the Safer Communities Group chaired by the Chief Executive, has/will be writing to the Home Office to state unequivocally that the partnership is disappointed and greatly regrets the Home Office decision on this matter.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

22 February 2007

**Question by Dr M R Eddy to the
Leader of the County Council**

Given that Oliver Letwin confirmed on 11 April 2006 that the Conservative Party was now committed to ending child poverty by 2020, is the present Leader of the Council able to say how much progress this Council will have made towards that target by the end of the Towards 2010 Programme?

Answer

We are all only too aware of the significant levels of social deprivation in Kent and the UNICEF report on child poverty published recently was not good reading. To make progress it is essential to break the cycle of deprivation from one generation to the next. Our *Towards 2010* document is fundamentally geared to doing this through innovation in education and creating job opportunities that support and grow the Kent economy.

Specific pledges include:

- Regeneration of Kent's deprived areas with a focus on business growth
- Improving the quality of early years education
- Ensuring Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 improve faster than the national rate
- Offer and develop further multi-agency support to parents
- Offer the very best careers guidance
- Expand our successful vocational programme
- Double the number of participants on Skill Force-type programmes
- Introduce the Kent Community Programme
- Introduce a Kent Apprenticeship scheme
- Introduce a hard-hitting public health campaign targeted at young people
- Engage all schools in the Healthy Schools initiative and promote the benefits of healthy eating, physical activity and sport to children and families

I believe that these initiatives will make a significant contribution towards lifting young people out of poverty by ensuring that we deliver a first-class programme of education, training and work opportunities, so encouraging self-reliance and thereby reducing benefit dependency and child poverty. I hope that both opposition groups will work with us to help realise the *Towards 2010* initiatives and thereby reduce child poverty in the county.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

22 February 2007

**Question by Mr G Koowaree to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please state with regard to street and public footpaths lighting in the Borough of Ashford:

- (i) the current budget allocated to street lighting maintenance;
- (ii) how many lights are currently not working; and
- (iii) how many have been out for over a month

Answer

Budget - Total maintenance budget for fault fixing in Ashford is currently £52,600.

The current outage of units not working is 584 (4.7% of total stock. This is not a performance measurement)

The outage of units longer than one month is 197. (1.6% of total stock)

I would add that at present the resources working on repairs has now been doubled in the Ashford area and significant improvement in reducing the faults is now expected.