

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

13 December 2007

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

Would the Chairman of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee inform the Council of the lessons he learned from the Committee's consideration of the Cabinet's decision made on 15 October 2007 to set up a so-called "Health Watch"?

Answer

The subject of a "Health Watch" provoked an extremely interesting set of questions and responses at the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 24 October. As members will be aware, the Committee voted by a majority of 12 to 3 to recommend to Cabinet that it should "make every effort to establish the Local Involvement Network (LINK) by 1 April 2008, or before, rather than establishing any other non-statutory fora such as a "Healthwatch".

The Committee's consideration of the "Health Watch" concept stemmed out of the urgent report to Cabinet of 15 October 2007 concerning the Healthcare Commission's investigation into the *Clostridium difficile* outbreaks at the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Hospitals Trust. The report to Cabinet recommended that a feasibility study for setting up a "Health Watch" be approved, but this was amended at Cabinet to approval for a "Health Watch being set up as soon as possible".

Questioning revealed that there were no details about:

- how a "Health Watch" would operate;
- who would work up the proposal (except that a working group would include the Chief Executive, a staff member in the Chief Executive's Directorate, the Director of Trading Standards, and unspecified senior Members and officers from the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee);
- how "Health Watch" would relate to the LINK, before, during or after the establishment of the latter.

In terms of the lessons learnt from this scrutiny exercise, I believe it is clear that the whole "Health Watch" proposal was designed as a publicity stunt, a view which was shared by at least one member of the Conservative majority on the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee at the meeting and reported in the local press. "Health Watch" was demonstrated to be unworkable previously, which is why it

was not progressed after first being proposed in the Conservatives' manifesto for 2005. Reviving the idea, just as the council is involved in the preliminary work for setting up a truly independent, integrated health and social care complaints system, the LINK, is unwanted even by members of the ruling group on this Council and is likely to prove unhelpful to patients, carers, and residents of Kent in general.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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

Would the cabinet member for Highways, Environment & Waste review the arrangements by which the roads in new housing developments are adopted?

Many of my constituents in the new developments in Ashford have lived for years now on estates where the roads are still unfinished and have therefore not been adopted by KCC.

Is there a duty on developers to complete the work to these roads within a reasonable timescale? If there is, can the Highway Authority enforce it and if there is not, can one be introduced in future through the planning process?

Answer

A review of the current situation of the adoption of roads on new developments was carried out about a year ago to identify and quantify the scale of the problem across the County of these older developments that Mr King refers to in his question. It is clear that Kent Highway Services has inherited a substantive backlog of adoptions from the Highway Units numbering approximately 500. Staff have been allocated to work through the programme and I am confident that the majority of adoptions will be completed by the end of 2008.

If the developer has entered into a voluntary S38 agreement, Highways Act 1980 there is a duty on the developer to complete the works to an adoptable standard within the timescale agreed or to any agreed extension of time. If the developer fails to do this then the Highway Authority has the right to complete the remainder of the works and can call in the necessary funding from the bonding arrangements contained within the agreement.

We are looking at ways, together with Developers, of improving the adoption process for the future as we would normally expect them to be completed within three years of commencement.

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

How many highway improvement projects across Kent have been removed from the 07/08 programmes unless additional funds become available?

Where are these projects sited throughout Kent by ward? Why cannot the schemes removed from this year's programme be prioritised for future years?

Answer

I am not aware of highway schemes being removed from the 07/08 programme unless additional funds become available. This programme is in the process of being implemented. 07/08 was a transitional year prior to the introduction of the PIPKIN prioritisation methodology. Allocations were made by area according to a simple budget allocation model which related back to how Government makes its funding allocation to Kent.

The proposed programme for 08/09 was reported to Highways Advisory Board in September. All schemes have been ranked according to PIPKIN. This measures how the schemes score against key Government and County Council priorities for tackling congestion, improving public transport, road safety and air quality. Since reporting the programme in September I have learned that we will receive some additional funding next year and we should know this by mid December. I have asked for additional schemes which score highly under PIPKIN to be added to the programme and this will be reported to HAB early in the new year and thereafter to the Joint Transportation Boards. Any schemes not funded for 08/09 can be submitted and assessed for funding for future years.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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

There is a considerable amount of money being spent on repairing bye-ways which have been damaged by off-road vehicles. Would the Cabinet member say how much it is going to cost the County this financial year?

Answer

It is not possible to disaggregate the cost of repairs made to byways because of the use of off road vehicles from the total cost of byway repairs.

In total we will spend £205,000 Capital and £18,000 Revenue in this financial year on byway management.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

13 December 2007

**Question by Mrs P Stockell to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Would the Cabinet Member tell us what the implications are for Maidstone and other District Councils in Kent following the latest changes to the Concessionary Fares Scheme by Government.

Answer

I have written on two occasions to Government this year supporting the free travel scheme for Senior Citizens but requesting sufficient funding be provided.

To date, bus operators and District Councils in Kent together with those elsewhere in the country believe that insufficient funding has been allocated compared to seemingly more generous arrangements in Wales and Scotland.

Under the national scheme arrangements due to start on 1st April, it appears that District Councils will reimburse bus operators on the basis of trips originating from its area. It is my belief that major towns such as Maidstone could be severely disadvantaged although we are still awaiting confirmation of the reimbursement formula.

It is a shame that this scheme, worthy though it is, has triggered discontent between bus operators and local authorities over levels of reimbursement. I believe that the Department for Transport has failed to provide absolute clarity in what is an important arrangement for many Kent residents.

I will continue to press this case.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

13 December 2007

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

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please tell Members just what the present situation is with regard to the upkeep/refurbishment of white/yellow lines/road numbers/speed limits etc is? I mean those painted on the road surfaces which indicate your correct route, ie road numbers or stop signs etc. I am referring mainly to the KHS roads. However I note of late the Highway Authority roads are beginning to deteriorate. Add to this the continual theft of the metal road signs, ie directional and speed, all adds up to what I believe will sooner rather than later be the cause of a very serious accident.

Therefore, my question is: "Is there a regime/timetable for the refurbishment of these signs and lines on the Highway Services?"

Answer

At the beginning of the current financial year, KHS decided that it should spend the part of the maintenance budget allocated to signs and roads markings in a risk based way. To this end, the budget for road markings (£408k) is being spent on the highest risk roads and sites. On these roads all give way, stop and double white lines are being refreshed. A additional £200k is now available for lining and is being used in urban areas to replace lines at roundabouts, pedestrian crossing and level crossings; some other high risk lining will also be replaced. Across the county 6 lining crews are working virtually flat out until the end of March.

Regarding signs, the budget of £311k was also targeted towards high risk roads and signs that are critical to safety. However the need to replace signs has been less that was initially thought. Therefore at the KHS half year review, it has been decided to work on 'non-safety critical signs' that need replacing and that work is now being undertaken. Funds are also being used to clear sight lines of vegetation on the approach to safety critical signs.

By taking this approach we are spending our budget in a much more cohesive way than has previously been the case.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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

What efforts are being made by this council to advertise the benefits of the Freecycle community on the internet? Members may be aware that this community exists to enable households to give away unwanted items to others who will use them. (see: www.freecycle.com)

Also what efforts are being made to promote the use of biodegradable carrier bags in shops and supermarkets?

Answer

This question fell as Mr Pascoe was unable to attend the meeting.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

13 December 2007

**Question by Mr I Chittenden to the
Cabinet Member for CFE Operations, Resources and Skills**

Please would the Cabinet Member for CFE Operations, Resources and Skills inform me what processes are in place to ensure collection of recyclables within schools and the engagement of children in the recycling message in the County's schools.

Answer

There are two KCC Schools' Waste Contracts which are let by CFE and cover approximately 500 schools, which opt to use this service. Alternatively schools can make local arrangements. The two contracts, operating in different parts of the county, provide both paper/card recycling and residual waste collection.

There has been a long history of engaging school children in the recycling message through the use of drama with programmes of theatre performances and workshops. Most recently the focus has been around litter. Previous topics have related to waste minimisation and composting. Compost bins are available to schools, for example in connection with the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme.

A key route to encourage participation and awareness of pupils and their families in waste reduction and recycling is the Eco-Schools programme. This includes a focus on waste reduction, which is a popular topic within our schools in Kent. Currently almost 40% of Kent schools are registered with this programme and over 20% of Kent Schools hold a Bronze, Silver or Green Flag award.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

13 December 2007

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

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please tell Members the cost so far for the reconfiguration of the Ashford Ring Road and if its within the budgeted sum?

Answer

The actual total expenditure to the end of September is £4.1m and £4.7m when estimated to the end of December.

While the objective of Phase 1 of the Ring Road transformation is to achieve a high quality public realm environment of the southern and western quadrants between Church Road and New Street the current extent of the works does have to be limited and managed to match the funding available. The cost of the works and the funding availability is currently being reviewed to inform the extent of the works that can be achieved at the present time.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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

Would the Leader of the Council inform Members to what purpose flat screen TVs are appearing throughout County Hall, particularly along what is colloquially known as the "Conservative corridor" of County Hall? how many of them have been purchased and installed and how many more we may expect to be purchased and installed? where they have been installed so far, or will be installed? and the cost of purchasing and installing the TVs which have appeared so far and those we may expect to appear?

Answer

KCC is a 21st Century Authority and proud of it. This is part of our process of modernisation. Television screens have been installed in the Corporate Communications Corridor and on the first floor as these are high footfall areas. The purpose in the Corporate Communications area is to show twenty four hour news so that Press Office staff can be aware of breaking news to which they may need to respond. The cost of the screen in this corridor was £799. Installation costs were included with other work in this area refurbishing the corridor and it is therefore difficult to give a precise figure but would have been approximately £600. The purpose of the screen on the first floor is to raise awareness of Kent TV and show the range of programmes available. The cost of the screen was £594. Installation cost £1146. A smaller touch-screen enabled television is on order for the Members' Lounge and will cost £642.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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**Question by Mr R Truelove to the
Cabinet Member for CFE Children, Families and Educational Achievement**

Would the Cabinet Member for CFE Children, Families and Educational Achievement tell the Council how many secondary schools in Kent have adopted the American system of managing schools within a school, in response to the Head Teachers' Study Tour of the USA?

Answer

Headteachers were impressed during their study tour in the USA by the system of managing *schools-within-schools*. These internal units are designed to encourage and secure positive relationships between both pupils and between pupils and adults. For several Kent headteachers this supported their thinking and plans for future organisation.

Major changes to the management structures and buildings of schools would be required for the total separation of each school within a school, with an overarching strategic leadership team across the whole institution, but it is possible to adapt management approaches and the use of space. Three Kent schools, which are furthest along in this approach, are Homewood School in Tenterden, The Leigh Academy in Dartford and Hugh Christie Technology College, in Tonbridge.

However another sixteen schools, including two selective schools, have implemented elements of the *schools-within-school* approach. In most schools this relates to the ways in which pupils are taught and generally supported.

For example, one or more year groups of pupils may be grouped together under one senior leader, who will be responsible for overseeing pupil progress and development.

In the first BSF area of Gravesham many of the schools are adopting the approach of mini schools or schools-within-schools, as part of their Building Schools for the Future development. St John's RC Secondary School will consist of three schools and Thamesview will be organised into four schools based on a house system.

I have a list that I would be delighted to give Mr Truelove listing the names of schools operating elements of a 'school within a school' system.

Appendix

Other Kent schools engaged in developing some aspects of the *schools within schools* strategy

Mini schools

Hugh Christie

Minster College- schools of learning

Meopham School - four learning alliances

The North - learning communities

Aylesford - 4 schools of learning

Christ Church - learning communities

Vertical tutoring

Astor of Hever, Charles Dickens, Folkestone Girls Grammar, Highworth, Towers School, St George's C of E, Hillview,

Mini school and vertical tutoring

Hartsdown, Homewood, Leigh Academy, Brockhill, Community College Whitstable and St George's C of E - Learning communities

Pairing of year groups

Axton Chase

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**Question by Mr J F London to the
Cabinet Member for CFE Operations, Resources and Skills**

Would the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education please give an estimate as to the cost to the County of fire setting to its schools over last two years and whether he will arrange for new schools, and new extensions to existing schools, to have sprinkler systems fitted?

Answer

For the period 01/11/05 to 31/10/07

- 16 fires were reported as arson at a value of £1.7m
- 8 fires were reported as accidental at a value of £4.4m

The Department for Children Schools and Families have recently published Building Bulletin 100 "Design for Fire Safety in School". This document amongst other advice provides guidance about sprinkler systems and there is clearly a presumption that all new state funded schools will have sprinklers fitted.

The County Council's position is that Property Group Project Managers make use of a risk analysis tool provided by the DCSF (and included in the Building Bulletin 100) to inform decisions on a project by project basis as to whether a sprinkler system should be installed.

We will install sprinklers wherever possible.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

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**Question by Mr J Muckle to the
Leader of the Council**

In view of his comments at the 6 September County Council meeting regarding Government Infrastructure funding for Kent, would the Leader inform the Council how much funding the Government has provided to Kent directly or indirectly over the last five years for infrastructure needs?

Answer

Government capital directions over the past 5 years (2003-04 to 2007-08) to Kent County Council have totalled £648m, £413m for education, £226m for roads, £9m social care. However, the vast majority of these allocations is not for new infrastructure, but is to maintain the status quo in modernising and maintaining current assets.

Approximately £101m of this is the devolved formula capital which is handed over direct to individual schools for them to spend as they wish.

The only Government funding allocations to KCC which allows for new infrastructure is the Integrated Transport allocation of £44.3m, and allocations for major new road schemes, which total £84.1m over the past 5 years.

To take the Integrated Transport allocation alone over the past 5 years, Merseyside received a total allocation of just over £200m – compared to Kent which received just £44.35m over the same period. This is despite Kent being the strategic gateway to Europe and hosting two of the Government's growth areas in Kent Thameside and Ashford. A significant number of new homes will be built in Kent over the next two decades – the draft South East Plan incorporates 28,099 new homes a year or 578,000 by 2026. Without the appropriate investment in roads, drainage and other essential infrastructure, these areas will not be viable places to attract people to live and locate their businesses.

There is a further £55.2m approved funding by Government which relates to road schemes which are ongoing into future years: Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road, Rushenden Link, Ashford Ring Road, Everards Link, Newtown Road Bridge and Thamesway.

However, of 188 schemes submitted to the South East Regional Transport Board, only 16 were included in the 2011-16 programme.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

13 December 2007

**Question by Mr M Angell to the
Chairman of the Superannuation Fund Committee**

What effect has there been on the Kent Pension Fund as a result of the Northern Rock issue?

Answer

There has been no impact on the Pension Fund as none of the investment managers owned Northern Rock in their portfolios for Kent.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

13 December 2007

**Question by Mr G Rowe to the
Cabinet Member for CFE - Operations, Resource and Skills**

At Aylesford School Sports College delay after delay has meant that local residents have suffered from noise and disruption to their lives and, more importantly, the students have had an unacceptable working environment which will have affected the quality of their education.

Would the Cabinet Member for Operations, Resource and Skills please give me some indication when the PFI contractors will finally vacate the site of Aylesford School Sports College, and his assurance that any future working operations will be in accordance with planning permissions granted in order to protect local residents quality of life and students learning, both groups having had to suffer disruption for well over two years?

Answer

Construction work is due for completion by the end of February 2008. Most of this work involves final demolition of the last parts of the old school, and then completion of ground works, car parking and fencing.

There are no plans for any further construction works by the PFI contractor at Aylesford, but if this was to change in the future, then KCC's PFI/BSF team would ensure the contractor is fully aware of their responsibilities under planning regulations whilst working on their site.

The PFI contractor and KCC have endeavoured to ensure that the construction company minimises noise and inconvenience to both pupils and neighbours, but we are aware that at times this has fallen short of expectations, and caused upset to neighbours and for this we apologise.

The school, PFI contractor and KCC team will continue to work together to ensure works are completed as soon as possible, and with the least disruption.

It needs to be recognised that the new school is a considerable improvement on the previous buildings and one the community will be very proud of.