

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 17 May 2012

Question by Leslie Christie to

Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills

Could the Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills provide the following information relating to GCSE results for the year 2011:-

- (i) the number of secondary schools in Kent which were at or below the floor standard of 35% for 5A* - Cs, including English and Maths
- (ii) the number of secondary schools in Kent, excluding grammar schools, which were at or below the floor standard of 35% for 5A* - Cs, including English and Maths
- (iii) the number of secondary schools in Kent which are grammar schools.

In providing the answer, could I ask for statistical neighbour comparisons and for all responses to be given both in numbers and percentage terms.

Answer

In 2011, in Kent, 87 secondary schools (87.9%) exceeded the floor standard set by the DfE of 35% of pupils achieving five GCSEs graded A* to C, including English and maths. Three schools (3%) achieved the floor standard, and nine schools were below it (9.1%). Of this last group, those below the floor standard, six are academies and three are maintained schools.

Excluding grammar schools, the number of secondary schools (66) which achieved the floor standard was three (4.5%), while the number below the floor standard was nine (13.6%).

None of those at or below the floor standard are grammar schools.

There are 33 grammar schools in Kent, which is 33% of the total (99).

Turning now to our statistical neighbours, these are East Sussex, Essex, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Staffordshire, Swindon, Warwickshire, West Sussex and Worcestershire. According to figures published by the DfE, their performance, in terms of the number of schools below floor standard, ranges from 0% in Swindon (total of 10 schools) and 5.3% in Northamptonshire (38 schools). I do not have figures for schools in our statistical neighbours who hit exactly the floor standard of 35%.

When we look at the results of the all pupils rather than the result of pupils per school, we see a very different picture.

Looking at the percentage of all pupils in each of those areas who achieved five GCSEs at A* to C, including English and maths, Kent lies in fourth place at 59.4%, with Warwickshire at 60.7% and Lancashire and Worcestershire both at 60.1%. I note that in Swindon, while no schools were below the floor, only 52.4% of their pupils achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths, which is 7% below what was achieved here in Kent.

Last week, we launched our Bold Steps for Education which outlines our ambition to be the most forward looking area in England for education and learning so that we are the best place for children and young people to grow up, learn, develop and achieve. We aim for Kent's key stage 4 attainment to be amongst the best for our statistical neighbours and improve to at least 70% of pupils attaining 5 good GCSEs including English and mathematics.

In order to bring about these rapid improvements we will work in partnerships with schools and governors through KAHT and the KGA to support that focus effort and energy in the same direction to ensure improvement is sustained and the pace of change increases.

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Question by Mike Harrison to

Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste

It is now over six months since the change over of contracts for both KHS and the Street Lighting.

From a local Member's perception things would appear to be running smoothly apart, that is, from the odd hic-up with some of the street lights which would appear to be out of our hands.

Will the Cabinet Member be kind enough to bring we the Members up to date with these contracts?

Answer

Enterprise and KCC Highways have worked well together in the first 8 months of the contract and it's notable that both organisations have commented that there has been a common approach to deliver a successful contract that delivers work to high quality and to the negotiated price.

The Street Lighting element of the new contract encountered a few issues within the first few months. In response Enterprise appointed an experienced Manager in January 2012, who made several operational changes to improve the speed of repair.

There are still a few improvements to be made in other response times. These include those streetlights requiring attendance by UK Power Networks. These supply faults initially need to be investigated by KCC engineers or Enterprise, who then place the order for UKPN to resolve.

In March, thirty streetlights required attendance by UKPN, from the point of order these were completed in six days. The speed at which these investigations and orders were made needs further improvement by Kent Officers now that the backlog is cleared.

In March, 99% of Kent's 118,000 streetlights were on and working without fault and for the second month running, all Highways performance indicators were all met.

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Thursday 17 May 2012

Question by Elizabeth Tweed to

Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills

Can the Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills confirm progress on two new schools for Ashford, namely Repton Park, due to open with two forms of entry in September this year, and Goat Lees, due to open with one form entry in September 2013?

Answer

Thank you Elizabeth. For those members not as familiar with the situation in Ashford, I think it might be useful to know that Repton Manor is a new primary school being built to serve the new Repton Park housing estate, a phased development of 1,250 units, sandwiched between the A28 and the A20.

I am pleased to report good progress is being made with regard to Repton Manor Primary School. To date, we have appointed a headteacher, Mr Matt Rawling, and a temporary governing body is in place. Interviews are currently underway for teaching staff.

The School has a planned admissions number of 60 this year and the reception year places have already been offered. Places for other year groups will be offered at the end of May.

I am looking forward to visiting the school in the autumn and seeing the ground, I helped to break, transformed into a modern, purpose-built primary school and nursery. The build is underway and the contractor is working well with Kent County Council to ensure that partial handover is delivered on time, so the school can open in September 2012. I say partial handover, because, due to the decision to construct the school in one, rather than two phases, a partial handover timetable has been agreed. As a foundation school, the governing body set the term dates to allow for a later opening in September in order to accommodate the build programme, and ensure no days were lost to pupils. The remaining Phase 2 works will be completed in February 2013.

The total budget cost for the construction of the 2FE school, including fees and fit out is £6.1million.

Turning to Goat Lees, this is a housing development comprising of 750 dwellings, and a new 1FE Primary School is planned to serve this community. The tender documents for the new school are being finalised, with a view to going out to tender in June 2012. Completion is expected in August 2013, at the very latest, with a view to opening the new school in September 2013.

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Thursday 17 May 2012

Question by Dan Daley to

Graham Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health

A recent Kent County Council (KCC) report states that vulnerable elderly people and disabled adults may have to stay home for longer instead of being moved into residential care. KCC will depend on voluntary and private sector providers, our *'Partners in the Community'*, to provide home based care for these vulnerable people whilst they wait to move into residential care.

Can the Cabinet Member tell us what safety nets will be in place to guarantee appropriate daily care for those whose transfer is delayed; and as the predictions are that many more people will reach one hundred and be living alone (possibly without nearby relatives) how does he propose to address issues such as increasing vulnerability or isolation in his plans for transformation of KCC's involvement or responsibilities?

Answer

As members know, we will be discussing the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme today. Mr. Daley is incorrect in suggesting the report states that either:

- 1) adults may have to stay in their home for longer, or
- 2) vulnerable people will have to wait to move into residential care.

People want to stay in their own homes for longer and these changes will improve the availability of preventative services to allow people to do so. This includes further developing services tackling social isolation, which is a major contributory factor for why some people enter residential care.

This is about giving people, and their carers, options and choice over the support they require. We will maximise the opportunity for people to recover with enablement support so that they don't have to take long term care decisions at a point of crisis. Where people can't stay in their own home they will be given the support and information to fully consider the options available to them, including extra care housing as a real alternative to residential care. For some people residential care will be a positive choice and their admission will not be delayed.

As for *'depending on voluntary and private sector providers'*, this is how we already run social care. 90% of all provision is commissioned from the private and voluntary sector organisations. During 2010/11 they supported nearly 15,000 people at home and nearly 8,000 people in residential care.

I take our responsibilities to these vulnerable people very seriously and we work closely with providers to ensure that safeguarding remains the top priority. This is done through regular reviews, actively monitoring contracts and continually seeking to improve safeguarding. It is worth noting that, although there are nearly twice as many people supported at home compared to in residential care, in 2010/11, there were just 125 safeguarding alerts about home care staff compared to 425 about residential care staff.

People feel safer in their own homes. It is where most people want to be cared for and, quite rightly, the Transformation Programme will help more people achieve this.

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Thursday 17 May 2012

Question by Tim Prater to

John Simmonds, Cabinet Member for Finance & Procurement

In view of the damning KPMG report of governance of the Laser scheme and the lack of any committee scrutiny of the setting up of Kent Cultural Trading, will the Cabinet Member for Finance agree to a review of the Governance of all KCC Trading Companies & Business activities to ensure they all represent best value for Kent's residents?

Answer

Mr Prater is quite right that the report on Laser did reveal shortcomings in control and execution. I am pleased to confirm we have learnt from this and believe this strong business will continue to flourish with the appropriate controls. Valuable lessons were learnt.

Having confirmed Mr Prater's accuracy, I now have to disagree with him when he includes in his criticism, comments to the effect of a lack of any committee scrutiny of the setting up of Kent Cultural Trading. May I draw his attention to the minutes of the Governance & Audit Committee Trading Activities Sub-group 17th May 2010 at 2.30pm, Item 6 Business Case for the creation of Kent Cultural Trading. There is reference in the minutes to a question from Mr Prater to the Director of Cultural Services re: commercial opportunities in the Libraries to generate their income. The discussion concerned Kent Cultural Trading and the Committee resolves that approval be given to the business case for setting up Kent Cultural Trading Ltd. Hopefully Mr Prater will withdraw his suggestion that there was no committee scrutiny.

As Mr Prater will be aware there is new management within Commercial Services as our current portfolio of companies are re-evaluated. There would be no point in their existence if they did not represent good value for Kent Residents and substantially contribute to our income.

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Thursday 17 May 2012

Question by George Koowaree to

Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste inform this Council of the criteria for resurfacing deteriorated concrete roads, and provide me with copies of the analysis data reports for:

1. Bond Road, Ashford &
2. Osborne Road, Ashford

as both these roads have the same degree of surface deterioration as far as the travelling public are concerned, yet only Bond Road is listed for resurfacing in June.

Answer

The highway network including concrete roads is inspected on a regular basis in line with national standards. Concrete roads are therefore treated in the same manner as the rest of the network. Data collected from inspections is used to produce a prioritised list of schemes for treatment within the available budget.

Certain sites within the list can be elevated to address community needs enabling a balanced programme of schemes that utilises good asset management principles and responds to local feedback.

Bond Road is a concrete road with an asphalt overlay and has a number of old utility trenches that are deteriorating. The road is in the 2012/13 surface treatment programme and will receive a micro asphalt treatment, which will seal and restore the surface texture of the road and protect it from deterioration. Although, this scheme achieved a low ranking using the inspection condition data, it was elevated to a higher priority as a result of community feedback and to satisfy identified local needs.

Osborne Road is also a concrete road with an asphalt overlay but given its condition data, it has been ranked as a lower priority and has not been prioritised for treatment. The community and local needs have also been assessed but it has not been promoted for elevation in the priority ranking. Osborne Road, although not aesthetically pleasing, is considered to be in a safe and satisfactory condition.

Officers will provide Mr Koowaree with the data he has requested.

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Thursday 17 May 2012

Question by Trudy Dean to

John Simmonds, Cabinet Member for Finance & Procurement

In view of the transfer to KCC employment of former Health Service employees whose pension schemes would not include investments in tobacco; will the Cabinet Member for Finance & Procurement reconsider KCC's previous stance on the withdrawal of Superannuation Fund investment in tobacco firms?

Answer

I reply to Mrs Dean as a lifetime non-smoker. As she will know as a Council we give full support to encouraging, particularly the young, not to smoke, or if they do, to stop doing so. In this way we support the Government's health objectives.

To the best of my knowledge the NHS Pension Scheme, like all the public sector pension schemes except the Local Government Pension Scheme, is not a funded scheme, it has no investments and the Government funds the pension liabilities out of general tax revenue. This same Tax revenue is highly dependent upon the quite rightly penal rates of tax imposed by the Government on cigarette sales. Does that position make Government any less opposed to smoking than we are, no it doesn't, it just reflects that large organisations in times of enormous financial restraints have to deal with economic reality.

And it is this economic reality which is at the core of the position of the Superannuation Fund Committee, whose sole concern is the well being of the pensioners for whom it is responsible. Unfortunately the reality is that the Tobacco sector in the UK has been by far the best performing sector in the FTSE over the last 20 years, not by a small amount but by a huge amount. The higher returns generated by these tobacco companies are paying for the cost of pensions and to sell them would lead directly to higher employer contribution rates, which means for all of the 300 employing bodies in the scheme that either cuts in services would have to be made to make good the loss, or an increase in council tax.

It is interesting to note, that the areas of investment which have produced the best returns since 1986, in order are tobacco, mining, oil and gas and beverages. In all these sectors there are lobbyists for their control, either for health or environmental reasons. Once you start the process of elimination of investment opportunities, where do you stop?

Nevertheless, we will continue to remain aware of the sensitivities of this issue, and the conflicting responsibilities we have.