

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 14 February 2013

Question by Mike Harrison to
Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities

My question is directed to Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Communities and it concerns KCC's wonderful White Horse Wood. It is now some time since the late Lord Sandy Bruce Lockhart instigated the purchase of a plot of land at the top of Detling Hill to lay out a brand new area of indigenous trees to create a new woodland. Can Mr Hill give a progress report and up date as to the present state of this new wood?

Answer

The new woodland is doing well under the management of the KCC Country Parks service. Working with the Forestry Commission, tree-guards have now been removed as the trees continue to thrive. The management of the woodland will continue for many years with a thinning process taking place over the next 10 years to ensure the strongest trees have the best opportunity to flourish. There is every expectation that this approach will ensure a well established woodland into the long term future."

White Horse Woods is one of 16 sites managed by KCC Country Parks service, which overall, generates a total of 1.6 million visits annually. The great appreciation of the public to KCC's commitment to this service is evidenced by comments, letters and discussions with staff of the parks across the County. Kent Country Parks service continues to offer very good value for money to residents and visitors and is doing all it can to reduce its reliance on KCC funding in these challenging economic times.

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Question by George Koowaree to
Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste inform the Council of the management and delivery of the Kent roundabout sponsorship programme by way of completing the following table and providing detail of how the income generated has been spent?

Answer

The table provided by Mr Koowaree has a number of horizontal and vertical columns which make it virtually impossible for me to read out in the Chamber. However it has been duly completed as Mr Koowaree has requested, and hard copies will be available in the normal way on the table outside.

The annual income generated by Commercial Services from the roundabout sponsorship programme is returned to KCC as part of the annual dividend paid back to the authority's bottom line, and this income is not ring fenced. I am therefore unable to provide detail on how this income is spent once returned from Commercial Services.

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011- 12	2012 - current
The number of roundabout sponsorships available	71	56	63	82	92
How many sponsorships have been 'sold' annually	53	42	43	51	63
Income generated for KCC	£26,841	£64,254	£74,213	£53,780	£42,000 (6 months) **Full year estimate - £70,000**
Costs incurred	£21,848	£36,764	£42,369	£24,477	£19,429 **This relates to the first 6 months only**

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Question by Martin Vye to
Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services

"Will the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services inform the Council of the total value of grants made by her department to the voluntary and community sector in the year 2011/12*; and the total value of Specialist Children's Services work she is planning to commission from the voluntary and community sector for 2013/14?"

* year '2011/12', as there has been changeover from grants to commissioning during the current financial year 2012/13."

Answer

As Mr Vye notes, the basis that the council supports the voluntary and community sector is changing. This is because we are moving away from providing grants to organisations and towards commissioning services. This not only provides more opportunity for a range of organisations to bid to provide services and greater transparency on what were are spending the money on but, crucially, allows the council to more closely specify and monitor what is being delivered. This will achieve both better outcomes for the people who use these services and better value for council tax payers.

To answer Mr Vye's question, in 11/12, Specialist Children's Services gave grants totalling £718k and commissioned services worth £16.7m from the community and voluntary sector, a total of £17.4m. In 13/14, the division predicts it will give grants totalling £616k and commission services worth £20.1m, a total of £20.7m.

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Question by Rob Bird to

John Simmonds, Cabinet Member for Finance and Business Support

I am sure all Members would agree that the prompt payment of outstanding invoices is crucial for the survival of many businesses, particularly small Kent companies.

Would the Cabinet Member for Finance and Business Support confirm that Kent County Council pays all suppliers on time by settling all undisputed invoices within a maximum of 30 days*, that KCC will sign up to the Prompt Payment Code** following the lead of many local authorities who have signed up to the Code, including a quarter of Kent (District/City & Borough) Councils – Shepway, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells Councils, as well as our neighbours at East Sussex and Surrey County Councils, and that he will insist that all KCC contractors sign up to the Code and themselves encourage adoption of the code through their own supply chains; thus ensuring the certainty of cash flow which is critical for many firms but especially for small businesses based in Kent?

* Local Authorities are expected to settle undisputed invoices within 30 days. This will be reinforced by the European Directive on combating late payment in commercial transactions which will shortly be enacted.

** The [Prompt Payment Code](#) is a voluntary agreement to promote good payment practices. Signatories to the Code are expected to:

- pay suppliers on time and in line with the agreed terms,
- to have clear processes in place for reimbursing suppliers,
- to manage and resolve disputes as quickly as possible and
- to encourage their customers and suppliers to sign up to the Code.

Michael Fallon, Sevenoaks MP and Business and Enterprise Minister, wrote to companies last November asking them to sign up to the Prompt Payment Code.

Answer

I believe we have moved much further forward than the original prompt payments' code envisaged. In 2009, we launched our "Back Kent Businesses Campaign" and moved forward our standard payment terms to 20 days and this is still the case.

This was a major commitment for an organisation which handles up to 300,000 invoices in a year, more than 1,200 per working day. We have invested considerably in technology with the introduction of electronic invoicing using a central point for receipt and scanning of invoices and consistent with the restructuring of our procurement

operation, the introduction of I procurement as we go out to tender for our requirements.

The Corporate Director of Finance and Procurement recently spent several days looking at how we deal with invoices and there is still room for improvement which we believe E invoicing and I procurement will largely solve in ensuring the smooth transition of invoices from directorates to finance. Also our suppliers need to ensure they quote the correct reference/or indeed sometimes any reference which is essential in an organisation our size.

January's figures indicate 93% of invoices were paid within 30 days and 83% within 20 days so we know that progress can still be made as a result of our increasingly automated processes. We are also looking through our procurement processes to see how we can require our major suppliers to subscribe to a commitment to paying smaller companies in the supply chain more quickly.

Kent is a county of small businesses and with quick payment and a variety of other initiatives we have shown our commitment to this highly important sector of business. Not only have we met the requirements of the code, we have exceeded it.

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Question by Leslie Christie to
Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities

Of the £3m Big Society Fund how much has been made available for loans and grants to the Kent Community Foundation? How much was available to them during this current year 2012/2013 and how much has been spent, shown separately for Loans and Grants, during this year, 2012/2013?

Answer

To date, KCC has made one donation of £1million to the Kent Community Foundation for the Kent Big Society Fund. This payment was made in the last quarter of 2011-2012 in order to finance the Fund during 2012-2013. A further £1million is due to be paid by the end of this financial year subject to conditions being met in line with the funding agreement.

The total spend to date against the Fund is £170,000.

£139,000 has been paid as loans and £31,000 has been paid as grants.

Kent Community Foundation expect to submit proposals in March for between £200,000 and £250,000 and for 2013/14 there are enquiries still in the pipeline valuing £750,000 which could potentially progress to successful loans. The Foundation anticipates receiving new applications at the same sort of level at least during 2013/14 which could result in £750,000 to £1 million of loans.

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Question by Ian Chittenden to
Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste

A programme to remove 3,000 street lights in Kent due to start 7 January 2013 was postponed in part due to a motion by the Lib Dems in December 2012 which resulted in a halt to the proposed removal until meaningful discussions could be held. The Medium Term Plan 2013/15 on p.87 states '*Street Light Energy saving through the Part Night approach or removal – This would be achieved through selective turning off streetlights between midnight and 5 am*'

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste confirm that it is still his intention that up to 5000 streetlights will be removed by 2015, if so, that all streetlight removals will only proceed following a 12month disconnection trial which clearly proves safety will not be compromised, and that he will endorse either the Local Member or the District Joint Transport Board recommendations that designated streetlights should be retained and not turned off?

Answer

My decision was informed by the Environment, Highways and Waste Policy and Overview Scrutiny Committee Member recommendations (agreed by all POSC members including the Liberal Democrat spokesman) held on 22 November 2011. That committee agreed that part night lighting should be introduced in Kent and up to 5000 of the 118,000 street columns should be removed. This will result in a reduction in CO2 emissions by approximately 5,000 tonnes, reduce light pollution and save Kent County Council tax payers just under £1m a year from reduced electricity costs.

As I have said on many occasions, Kent Highways engineers will only proceed with the proposals after discussions with Kent Police and District/Parish Council representatives at the relevant Joint Transportation Boards. Part night lighting or column switch off/removal will not be implemented where it is proved that road or community safety could be compromised. I can confirm that under these proposals, no street columns will be removed for at least twelve months.