

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 15 May 2014

**Question by Roger Latchford to
Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education & Health Reform**

Is the Cabinet Member satisfied that the current accommodation at St Nicholas Primary School at St Nicholas-at-Wade in Thanet is fit for purpose and can accommodate the current level of pupils in its classrooms and meet the new school meals requirement?

Answer

I have visited St Nicholas at Wade Primary School myself to look at the accommodation and discuss the present situation with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors. The school has had a number of problems that have been dealt with, such as requiring replacement lighting in a number of classrooms and addressing water quality and we are working closely with the school to agree an action plan to address other maintenance and replacement issues over a period of time. The condition of their mobile accommodation accommodating two classes is poor and quotes have been sought to address replacement of the roof and to deal with heating and ventilation. It may be that it would be more cost effective to replace the mobiles with modular accommodation but all options will be fully discussed with the school before decisions are made.

The Government has recently announced a second phase of the Priority Schools Building programme and we will be considering which schools to put forward. I believe that St. Nicholas at Wade primary School would be a high priority but again, we would want to discuss the implications of this with the school as even if we put them forward and they were successful, it could be several years before their accommodation could be addressed through this programme.

The school does have sufficient space to accommodate its current level of pupils and its school meals are provided by St Crispin's Infant School in Westgate who are able to provide the increased number of meals that will be required by St Nicholas in order to meet the demand arising from the Universal Free Infant School Meals requirement in September. Discussions have taken place with their catering provider and new equipment will be funded to ensure that the school servery can cope with the additional meals.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 15 May 2013

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

Given that the President of the Family Division of the High Court has said that local authority lawyers need to get involved advising and assisting their social work clients earlier than is often the case, can the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services give the Council a firm assurance that the present system of billing by Legal Services is not rationing legal advice to Specialist Children's Services to the point where the expeditious progress of cases through the courts, relating for example to taking children into care or making Adoption Orders, could be compromised?

Answer

I can assure Mr Vye, and the Council, that the present system of billing by Kent Legal Services does not ration legal advice to Specialist Children's Services (SCS), either in relation to the expeditious progress of cases through the courts, or at all.

The charging model allows SCS to carefully monitor and manage their use of legal services and does not act as a barrier to SCS accessing legal advice and representation in a timely and appropriate way according to the requirements of any particular matter. The charging model allows Kent Legal Services (KLS) to make available to SCS the appropriate level of legal expertise, at the appropriate time, and to do so in a highly cost effective way. For example, over the last two years the average length of care proceedings conducted by KLS on behalf of SCS has reduced from 60 weeks to 35 weeks.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 15 May 2014

**Question by Mike Baldock to
David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport**

The Swale Joint Transport Board several years ago backed public calls for a safe pedestrian crossing over the Key Street roundabout in Sittingbourne. What steps have KCC taken to raise this issue and seek to secure funding for any potential crossing?

Answer

The Swale Joint Transportation Board considered a petition for “a safer crossing facility” at the Key Street roundabout at its meeting on 14 December 2009. The officer’s report concluded that there had been no recorded personal injury crashes involving pedestrians in the three years prior to 30 June 2009, and on this basis the Cabinet Member had written to Bobbing Parish Council to state that due to the low crash record “it is highly unlikely that this scheme would score highly enough in the assessment process to be eligible for funding...” The minutes of the meeting record that the report was noted by the Board, and that some Members agreed to explore the matter further outside of the meeting.

Kent County Council continues to prioritise its spending on reducing road casualties, and the crash record of the roundabout has been kept under review. Indeed in the subsequent period since 2009, a pattern of crashes was identified on the southern approach to the roundabout from the A249 off-slip. These incidents involved vehicles exiting the off-slip striking cyclists on the A2 heading from Sittingbourne towards Rainham, and measures have been put in place to address this in the form of additional warning signs. However, the situation with the pedestrian crash record is unchanged. As such, this roundabout still continues to have a good safety record with regards to no pedestrian casualty crashes and therefore has not met the intervention criteria for considering a new pedestrian crossing and funding will therefore be continued to targeted at locations with poorer crash records.

The Swale district is planned to have further development in the future, and this junction will play an important part in facilitating economic regeneration. My officers have already flagged up with Swale Borough Council the need to consider the performance of this junction, both for pedestrians and drivers, when considering new major developments coming forward in the area.

In the meantime, County Members continue to have the discretion to allocate their Combined Member Fund towards projects that are deemed to be locally important, where it is not possible to allocate the mainstream highway safety budget towards improvements.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 15 May 2014

**Question by David Baker to
David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport**

“There is great concern in my division about the street lights being switched off in “The Parade” and “Coast Road”, Greatstone and Littlestone, particularly bearing in mind that it is the designated escape route should there ever be a catastrophe at the Dungeness nuclear power station and the road is also frequently used by emergency services vehicles. Dymchurch Parish Council has also expressed serious concerns about turning off the street lights along the A259 as, according to the Parish Council, there have been a number of accidents since these lights were turned off.

My question to the Cabinet Member is what, if any, plans are in place for reviewing this decision and reinstating the street lights along these roads?”

Answer

The recent changes to lighting on the A259 at Greatstone and Littlestone are part of our trial switch-off of surplus lights. This is one of a number of measures we are taking to reduce our energy consumption and carbon emissions to deliver savings to support frontline services. These lights would not have been installed if they were being designed today; they were introduced at a time when energy prices were very low but are very expensive to maintain now. The inclusion of this site in the programme was approved by the Shepway Joint Transportation Board on 18 March 2013.

We have liaised closely with Kent Police regarding crime and accidents, then carried out a risk assessment and a safety audit of each site which considered local conditions and factors. We followed this up by undertaking certain mitigation works prior to switching the lights off to enhance safety.

Areas around emergency (blue light) services' sites where there is significant movement of emergency vehicles have been excluded from the programme.

The trial switch-off of surplus lights is for a period of twelve months. We will review the lighting requirements if any increase in crime or accidents can be reasonably attributed to absence of street lighting. We are aware of anecdotal reports of a number of accidents and will consider whether the absence of lighting was a factor when details are passed to us by Kent Police, in the normal way, after they have completed their investigations.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 15 May 2014

**Question by Chris Hoare to
Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education & Health Reform**

In May 2012, Mr Gough wrote to Conduit Workforce, an organisation set up to support local people seeking employment in the construction industry, confirming that in relation to construction work at the Skinners Kent Academy, the contractor had a contractual requirement to take on 4 apprentices and in addition that there would be some 60 days of work experience throughout the duration of the project, plus work shadowing and mentoring opportunities, employment and taster sessions for the unemployed and a number of trade awareness sessions per month for the duration of the project.

Was this part of the contract upheld?

Answer

These commitments were part of the contractor's added value proposals submitted as part of the tender and these were part of the Contractors Proposals which form a schedule to the Building Contract. As part of the Skinners Kent Academy build works, the Building Contractor has confirmed that they have delivered the following:

- Four apprenticeships in bricklaying, carpentry & joinery, painting & decorating and plastering.
- Seven work experience students from various local Schools for a total of 35 days. The contractor had offered 60 days but these were not taken up.
- One community regeneration project which was completed with a local centre for the disabled
- School assemblies took place during the construction phase to raise awareness of construction works and Health and Safety on site
- The contractor also made contact with K-College and Job Centre Plus and offered trade awareness and mentoring and shadowing opportunities, however these were not taken up.

It is most unfortunate that despite these opportunities being available the uptake was lower than expected. Nonetheless, significant benefits in terms of apprenticeships, work experience and other opportunities were provided.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 27 March 2014

**Question by Brian MacDowall to
Paul Carter, Leader of the Council**

“After years of productive joint cooperation between local and county councillors, the latter have had their membership of Canterbury's area member panels removed/rescinded.

As this has come about from discussions between Paul Carter, KCC leader and the leader of Canterbury City Council, can the KCC leader explain the rationale behind the decision?”

Answer

An approach was received from Canterbury City Council late last year explaining that discussions at Canterbury Local Panels had focussed almost exclusively on District, rather than County-based issues. To ensure County Council Members' time was put to best use, Canterbury City proposed a new approach whereby meetings of both City and County Councillors were convened to deal with specific issues in a less formal way as they arose.

This was agreed on my proviso that the Local Panel agenda and minutes continue to be circulated to the County Councillors well in advance of the Panel meetings, so if the County Councillors wished to input, they could still do so.

There is extensive partnership working between the County Council and the twelve district and borough councils. To name but a few examples of the collaborative meetings operating at a district level, there are:

- Children's Operational Groups
- Troubled Families Project Boards
- Local Health and Wellbeing Boards (CCG)
- Joint Transportation Boards
- Community Safety Partnerships
- Youth Advisory Groups

It is essential that Members are well informed and briefed on the County Council and partnership work carried out in divisions. To this end, I intend to set up full briefings for all County Council Members in their local area twice a year that will cover updates on partnership work (particularly health and social care, growth, environment and transport activity, the 0-25 agenda and the support for the 25+ age group). The District Leader and Chief Executive will be invited and are welcome to attend.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 15 May 2014

**Question by Rob Bird to
Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education & Health Reform**

For far too long, the grammar school admissions system has been skewed by the ability of relatively well-off parents to pay for tutoring for their children. There is clear evidence that this has made it very difficult for children from deprived backgrounds to get a grammar school education. Thus we welcome the recent announcement that a number of grammar schools across the country are to give priority admissions to pupils entitled to free school meals.

We understand that several, but not all, of the grammar schools in Kent have signed up to this new initiative. This means there is a risk of a post code lottery for grammar school admissions developing in the County. Would the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform therefore please advise what steps he is taking to ensure that all grammar schools in Kent give priority places to children from deprived backgrounds?

Answer

This is an important matter and I am glad to have the opportunity to speak about it. The County Council is currently the admission authority for four of Kent's grammar schools, three for girls and one for boys*, and at present none of them makes a distinction in their admission arrangements between suitably qualified applicants who receive or do not receive Free School Meals. All the Council's grammar schools, however, have "Health and Special Access Reasons" as the third oversubscription criteria, giving priority to children whose own or whose parents' / guardians' *"physical or mental health or social need means there is a demonstrable and significant need for their child to attend a particular school."*

As so many of the County's grammar schools are their own admission authority, the Council is not in a position to ensure that all grammar schools in Kent give priority places to children from deprived backgrounds, but many – though not all - of the other grammar schools and academies make use of the "Health and Special Access" criterion in their list. One Kent grammar school which is its own Admission Authority, Queen Elizabeth's School in Faversham, has published admission arrangements for 2015 which place receipt of FSM as the third oversubscription criterion, above children of staff and above medical, health, social and special access reasons.

A grammar school can only admit children who have been assessed suitable. We are committed to raising the academic achievement and expectations of all children in receipt of FSM. Recent research indicates that the number of children in receipt of FSM who took the Kent test rose between the academic years 2010-11 and 2013-14 from 578 to 1319, and the number who were assessed suitable for grammar school rose from 118 to 272 in the same period.

Following the suggestion that well-off parents were gaining an unfair advantage in Kent's tests through private tutoring, the Council has also refreshed the format of the test for 2014 in an effort to make the content less predictable.

Giving preference to pupils with FSM is just one way to enhance the chances of children from less advantaged backgrounds to get to grammar school, but we are committed to examine the full range of measures and to work with grammar schools on the issue.

** the schools are Dover Grammar Girls, Simon Langton Girls, Maidstone Grammar Girls and Tunbridge Wells Grammar Boys. Each of these single-sex schools is paired with a grammar school which determines its own admission arrangements.*

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 15 May 2014

**Question by Brian Clark to
David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport**

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport comment on the failure to set up an integrated transport strategy for Maidstone and explain KCC's strategy to reach consensus with MBC on transport policy.

Answer

KCC has worked closely with Maidstone Borough Council in recent years to devise a practical transport strategy to support the Local Plan. This has included the secondment of a KCC transport officer to the Borough and financial support to transport modelling. However an agreed transport strategy requires certainty on the scale and distribution of the employment and residential land uses promoted by the Borough Council as the Planning Authority, and the acceptance of that scale and distribution by the County Council as the upper tier provider of highway, educational and other necessary supporting infrastructure. This dialogue is ongoing, and the outcome of the Borough Council's recent consultation on its draft Local Plan proposals is awaited.

The County Council remains committed in its duty to work in partnership with the Borough and, in respect specifically of transport strategy we will be bringing forward ideas and proposals to the August meeting of Maidstone Joint Transportation Board.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 15 May 2014

**Question by George Koowaree to
David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport**

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport give an explanation as to why the Drover roundabout in Ashford has been left to turn into a meadow, is it to make the cow sculptures feel at home?

Mr Chairman it is a disgrace that first impression for people coming into Ashford is to see this eyesore.

Answer

The new Drovers Roundabout and M20 J9 scheme opened in 2011. I agree with Mr Koowaree that the Drovers Roundabout is an important gateway to Ashford and particularly with the historic 'Drover and his cows' feature. I will arrange for the island grass to be cut and the highways service will continue to work with the Borough Council to ensure that the required level of routine maintenance is undertaken.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 15 May 2014

**Question by Gordon Cowan to
Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education & Health Reform**

On 21 November 2012, the Education Cabinet Committee made recommendations to close the Walmer Science College and amalgamate it with the Castle Community College.

It was subsequently agreed by the Cabinet Member that Castle Community College is to be rebuilt under the Government's Priority School Build Programme, which will enable the rebuild of the school to accommodate 1300 students: large enough to accommodate the students of both schools, currently and in the future.

Could the Cabinet Member inform the Council what the timescale is for the school re-building process but more importantly what action he is taking to ensure the necessary improvement in attainment, following the existing school being placed in special measures and the recent appalling GCSE results?

Answer

Castle Community College is a Converter Academy following conversion from being a Local Authority maintained school in October 2010.

As a Converter Academy, Castle Community College has had more freedom than other state schools over their finances, curriculum, length of terms and school days and pay and conditions for teachers. In addition, the Trust is responsible for school improvement and buys in support services from a range of external providers.

Castle Community College, since conversion to Academy has chosen not to seek its school improvement services from Kent County Council.

Castle Community College had already successfully been allocated funding as part of the Priority Schools Building Programme. This is a central government programme and building works are being procured centrally by the Education Funding Agency on behalf of the Department for Education. It is understood that the project is in early feasibility stages and that a building contractor has yet to be appointed. Based on the indicative timetables provided by the Education Funding Agency it is anticipated that the newly rebuilt school will be completed by April 2017.

Following an Ofsted Inspection in March swift action has been taken to address weaknesses in leadership. These actions have been discussed with the local authority. The Headteacher has left the Academy and the Chair of Governors has resigned. The Trust has appointed the 'Schools Company', an independent educational consultancy, to provide school improvement services and the leadership required to improve the school and ensure it is removed from Special Measures. An interim Headteacher has been appointed by the Trust from 'Schools Company'. Kent

County Council School Improvement Advisers have already met with the interim Headteacher who will work closely with Kent County Council to secure the necessary improvements. We are committed to supporting the school to move forward to secure the best outcomes for the Kent students attending Castle Community College.