

Question No. 1

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

19 February 2009

Question by Mr R J Parry to the Cabinet Member for Public Health

Based on his reading and evaluation of the “State of Healthcare” report published by The Healthcare Commission, on the 8th December 2008 and the reported observation of the Commission’s Chairman, Sir Ian Kennedy, that:- “We are a long way from an NHS which systematically and hungrily examines its performance, reinforces safe practice, gets in and learns from things that go wrong and does things differently and more safely as a consequence”.

Would the Cabinet Member for Public Health identify what is being done in Kent’s Health Economy to ensure that the Health Service records accurately all problems and errors and will he provide a status report on how Kent’s Health service has become, or is close to becoming, systematic and hungry in examining its performance and learning from all errors and as a consequence operates both more effectively and also in greater safety to the benefit of all patients.

Additionally would the Cabinet Member also explain how the disparate elements of Kent’s Health Economy shares their gathered and or accumulated information across the County and more importantly devises and implements common practices and procedures across the County, and perhaps also the South East and eventually the rest of the Country, which prevents and precludes any future such incidents.

ANSWER

Kent County Council is particularly well placed in assisting the national health organisations within Kent to examine and learn from their customer experiences.

Since Kent Health Watch was launched in October 2008 it has taken nearly 300 calls from people wanting information, making suggestions on better ways of working and commenting on services received. Kent Health Watch operates fully staffed 24/7 including ALL Bank Holidays complementing the Health Services own working hours arrangements.

Staff answering these calls have the time, patience and expertise to draw out from the callers what their issues are and help people get the information they need and signpost them to the relevant part of the NHS. Feedback has been extremely positive and it is clear the service has been of enormous benefit. One caller has said “I had been trying to sort this out for 5 weeks and after calling KHW it was resolved by the next day!”

Call details are recorded on a database and used to identify trends and for sharing with our partners. This is invaluable in making sure that we and the Health Service deal with all issues identified.

Moving on, our Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets monthly to scrutinise matters relating to Health and Social Care in Kent. It has the power to call into Scrutiny any matters it feels are important to Kent residents and would benefit from public examination. The PCTs are fully engaged in helping to set the HOSC agenda and they also attend and answer questions put to them. It is through this Committee we can be reassured (or not) that health matters are being properly managed

In December 2008 I launched Kent LINks – an independent network of local people and community groups working together to influence and improve Kent's Health and Social Care services. We are beginning to test and evaluate the connection between Kent Health Watch and LINks to establish how the two services can complement each other.

As a result of Kent Health Watch and in anticipation of new complaints regulations, both Social Services and the two PCTs continue to review their complaint processes. This has further sharpened up complaint handling and will increase people's confidence that complaints are being taken seriously and that lessons are being learnt.

Finally, there are a number of other ways feedback is gathered, shared and acted upon to improve health services in Kent. To mention three - Kent's Citizen Panel has asked questions on various aspects of the NHS service, the Department of Health oversee a number of statutory surveys asking for patient experience and the PCTs routinely share their information across the NHS and with partner agencies including Kent County Council

KCC Staff monitor the results of all the procedures I have mentioned and report back any issues that need further examination or action

Colleagues will be well aware that I desperately want the Health Service in Kent to be the best in the country. KCC can and will help the NHS achieve their goals of becoming organisations that score Excellent for their services by taking a full role in public engagement and sharing outcomes with our Health Colleagues

Question No. 2

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

19 February 2009

Question by Mr M Northey to the Deputy Leader

Would the Deputy Leader please inform me how many of the Parish Councils of Kent have set up a website with KCC and what is being done to encourage all Parish Councils to enjoy the benefits of this?

Answer

The use of common infrastructure for e-communication is becoming critical as communication technologies respond to individual and community aspirations. This will be an increasingly important part of the drive towards localism.

There are 316 Parish Councils in Kent and as of January 2009 Parish Council take-up of the KCC offering is as follows:

- 187 Parish Councils have KCC-hosted web-sites, and KCC provided e-mail addresses for Chairmen and Clerks
- 71 Parish Councils use the KCC service to link through to their own web-sites, and use KCC provided e-mail addresses for Chairmen and Clerks
- 58 Parish Councils have so far declined to take up the offer.

We continue to be in touch with the 58 Parish Councils - most recently just before Christmas - and 8 are actively considering joining the scheme.

To ensure that we retain those Parish Councils already signed up KCC continues to invest in improvements to the service often as a direct response to a Parish Council requesting additional facilities that we can then make available to all. In 2008 the enhancements that we provided included the addition of Google Maps and the purchase of the BrowseAloud product to make all PC web-sites more accessible to the visually impaired.

Question No. 3

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

19 February 2009

**Question by Mr D Smyth to the
Cabinet Member for Finance**

According to an unnamed spokesperson (Kent on Sunday 7 December 2008) Kent County Council “will be passing on the lower rate (of VAT) where appropriate”. Would the Cabinet Member for Finance inform the Council of the instances where KCC charges VAT on its services and where it would be appropriate to charge a level of tax that is not required by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs?

Answer

Like all VAT registered organisations KCC is obliged to charge VAT at the national rates (it cannot pick and choose when or what to charge). There is no question of KCC not complying with national tax requirements.

Question No. 4

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

19 February 2009

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

Would the Leader of this Council comment on reports in the *Times* that the Conservatives nationally wish to address the issue of “*super-inflation of chief executive pay*”, which Eric Pickles has called a symptom of the “*Premiership manager syndrome*”, by merging clusters of councils to provide better value for money, thereby disposing of many chief executive posts and forcing the remainder to run larger ‘economic areas’ or take on additional functions such as running primary care trusts?

Answer

Kent is the largest local authority in the country, employing some 45,000 people. It is also, as the audit commission states, one of the most efficient and successful.

Therefore Kent County Council is well placed to share its expertise with other public sector organisations and indeed, in the light of Kent’s excellent reputation and track record, already helps and supports a number of councils both within and outside Kent.

For example our extremely successful arrangement with Swindon Council, sharing the experience and knowledge of our chief executive and senior management team. We are also helping and supporting our districts in delivering efficiencies through joint working in line with the Kent Commitment signed by all 12 members.

Of course we are open to extend our expertise with other councils and public bodies in the future.

Question No. 5

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

19 February 2009

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

Some 18 months ago at a JTB meeting at Canterbury, and at a briefing meeting at KHS at Ashford, I asked and was told that a new Enforcement Team would be up and running within the next 3 to 4 months.

It is now almost 2 years since the JTB meeting and 6 months since the meeting at Ashford and still no Enforcement Teams on our highways. My question, therefore, is: "Where are these Enforcement Officers and when are they likely to appear in person in our districts?" Canterbury City Council have offered to take over the Enforcement of things such as A frames and illegal street furniture such as tables and chairs on public highways/footways. This, as far as I am aware, has not been taken up by KCC.

To repeat my question when (and a date would be appreciated) will these Enforcement Teams come onto our streets?

Answer

The recent re-organisation of Kent Highway Services identified the need for an enforcement team, this was placed within the structure for the first time and became effective from 1st April 2008.

The team consists of four permanently appointed personnel, one Team Leader, one Prosecution Officer and two Enforcement Officers and they were appointed in August 2008. In addition, we also have a law graduate who has joined the team for a 6-12 month placement. The role of this graduate is to develop quality self-help reference material and guidance in order that Highway Inspectors can progress issues as they come across them.

As the enforcement team is small, the primary role is not to take over the first line enforcement, but to handle major issues and work with all the KHS teams on their day to day handling of more minor enforcement issues - particularly those within Community Operations and Roadworks.

This new team is now offering support and leading a consistent approach to enforcement across the county. Highway Inspectors in particular are benefiting from this assistance, now that Enforcement Officers are spending time working closely with them to resolve the issues that need to be addressed. The team has also made contact with external bodies including local councils and Police, to involve them in issues as they occur and to appreciate their experiences in the area.

The offer for Canterbury City Council to take on the enforcement of A boards and licenced tables and chairs, has most certainly been taken on board and is a very real possibility. The team is directly in contact with Canterbury's City Council licencing manager, Jim Ratchford and there have been discussions around issuing traders licences and who holds jurisdiction in council terms. This has been referred to our legal department for guidance. Ultimately lines of communication are open and we share the same goal.

Question No 6

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

19 February 2009

Question by Mrs T Dean to the Cabinet for Environment, Highways and Waste

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste give an assurance to the Governors of More Park Roman Catholic Primary School, West Malling that compensation will be paid to meet the costs of the flooding on 10 February 2009, which resulted from blocked and broken KCC highway gulleys combined with the refusal of Kent Highways Services to drain rain water from the school site.

Answer

KCC does not fully insure More Park Roman Catholic Primary School. Under the general arrangements around insurance for Voluntary Aided schools, the cover we provide for Catholic Voluntary Aided schools is limited to such things as sports pavilions (100%), the first £2k of damage to property and 100% contents. We have in the past approached Southwark Diocesan Board to try and provide more comprehensive cover but without any success. I believe that Southwark Diocesan Board is simply following national guidelines in this matter.

If property has been damaged and the cost of repairs does not exceed £2k then we may be able to deal with this under KCC's insurance arrangements. If the school wishes to make a claim for compensation against KCC, then we will consider the circumstances in line with our legal liability and insurance terms and conditions. Since compensation is not automatic, I cannot give any assurance that a claim will be met, as it will be necessary to investigate the circumstances.

Not notwithstanding this, on 10th February, when the school was flooded, Kent Highway Services staff were redirected to More Park to assist the Headteacher, Mrs Smith, in cleaning drains on the school property and generally helping school staff in the clean up operation.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

19 February 2009

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

Given the extraordinary winter of sharp frosts, snow and heavy rain, resulting in the disintegration of Kent's road surfaces, for example in the Wincheap area of Canterbury, will the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste inform the council if he will find the resources to repeat last April's intensive blitz on potholes?

Answer

Kent Highway Services have already been proactive in its approach to the cold winter. In early January, following a significant spell of cold weather, £500,000 was made available to provide an additional 15 crews to target frost damage.

A total of 56 crews are now currently working across the County on surface related repairs.

The damage from the most recent spell of snow and rain is being identified and processed. Should this require further resources, they will be made available.

Question No. 8

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

19 February 2009

**Question by Mr D S Daley to the
Cabinet Member for Community Services**

Mark Wallinger was recently announced winner of the Ebbsfleet Landmark Competition and the £2m horse sculpture is already half-funded by three private companies. Would the Cabinet Member for Community Services inform the Council how much, if any, of the £1m shortfall KCC plans to donate?

Answer

Kent County Council has not been approached by, and has had no discussions with, any of the partners involved in the investment for Mark Wallinger's White Horse sculpture.

Given the comments from the Ebbsfleet Landmark Project Board, it is also highly unlikely that they will be seeking public funds for this project in the future.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

19 February 2009

**Question by Mr G Koowaree to the
Cabinet Member for Operations, Resources and Skills**

Will the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Educational Achievement inform the Council how much is in the budget for the Children Centre for South Willesborough, what services that will deliver and explain why the decision has been taken to vary the plans which were passed by the Planning Committee in 2007 - 2008.

Answer

The Swan Centre is a joint venture between Ashford Borough Council and KCC. The centre will be extended to provide community facilities including a Sports Youth Club and a SureStart Children's Centre. The total cost of the Swan Centre extension exceeds £1m of which £200,000 is Children's Centre SureStart Capital Funding.

Children's centre services will be delivered directly from the Swan Centre or through additional 'satellite' provision within the catchment area for that centre.

Parents will be involved in determining what services are provided and will be asked regularly for feedback on these. On-going arrangements will be in place to ensure parents/carers have a voice e.g. parents' forums.

Parents will have access to information and advice on services for 0-5 year olds. Early education, integrated with childcare, will be available at a nominated local nursery, linked to the centre. It is anticipated that the following services will run directly from the Swan Centre.

- Family support and outreach to parents, e.g. visits to all children within two months of birth, parenting support and advice;
- Child and family health services, e.g. ante-natal advice, information on breast feeding, speech & language therapy;
- Crèche services
- Parent and toddler sessions;
- Links with Jobcentre Plus to encourage and support parents/carers who wish to consider training and employment.

Planning approval was sought for a stand alone centre on the site of East Stour School in Ashford. After significant discussion, the governing body of that school decided that they could no longer support the initiative. They voiced concerns about the impact of the centre on the overall site, and how it would operate and deliver its services. Parking was seen as potentially problematic. The local Children's Planning Consortia proposed the Swan Centre as an alternative site.

Question No. 10

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday 19 February 2009

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

Would the cabinet member for Environment Highways & Waste tell me whether he has received any representations from the Government about the sums spent by Kent County Council on Highway Maintenance in Kent?

Answer

So far as I am aware the only comments we have received from the Government on road maintenance are those contained in a letter from the Government Office for the South East (GOSE), dated 4 February this year the content of which I find astonishing in part.

Amongst other things this letter says, in part, and I quote:
“One area of concern is the shift of emphasis to maintenance at the expense of integrated transport delivery.”

This is in spite of the fact that passenger growth in bus operations in Kent has been no less than 20% over the same period – something which the bus operators themselves recognise by their decisions to bring the largest number of new buses into operation on Kent routes this year that anyone can remember.

GOSE’s letter then goes on to say, and I quote:
“Over the past two years you have overspent by £7.98 million on maintenance.”
Frankly I find the use of these words astonishing, and I do wonder if there is a single person in Kent who would agree with them.