

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 11 December 2014

Question 1

**Question by Mike Eddy to
David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

At the Dover Joint Transportation Board of 11 September 2014 members were informed that the sewerage system of Deal and Sholden was at capacity. In view of the number of houses being planned and built in the area, what representations has the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport made to Ofwat and the privatised water companies to increase the sewerage capacity in and around Deal, and has this council advised the local planning authority of the situation?

Answer

Water Companies prepare five-year asset management plans that are agreed with OfWat, which set out the infrastructure investment they will undertake over that period and the charges they can make to their customers to fund it. Southern Water should review local growth projections when developing its five-year investment plan. The next five-year investment period will commence next April, so Southern Water should be appraised of the projected growth in Deal and planning accordingly. KCC has recently set up regular liaison meetings with main Kent water companies. At the last meeting the issue of sewer flooding in East Kent, including Deal, was raised and it was agreed that a representative from the wastewater side of the Southern Water business will attend future meetings to discuss their plans.

Southern Water is a statutory consultee for any development that proposes to connect to the public sewer. If an increase in capacity is required there is an opportunity for the sewerage undertaker to negotiate with the developer an appropriate S106 agreement at the application stage. However, it should be noted that new development has an automatic right to connect to the public sewer, which the water companies cannot refuse.

Any new development is required by the NPPF to maintain the existing discharge of surface water from the site and is encouraged to reduce it. We understand that Dover District Council is aware of the wastewater capacity in Deal and are proposing to adopt the sustainable drainage measures for proposed development in Deal.

Question 2

Question by Roger Latchford to Paul Carter, Leader of the Council

Manston Airport:

What steps has KCC taken to demonstrate support for the motion passed with unanimous support on the 17th July , and what resources has it or is it willing to give to support Thanet District Council and partners pursuing a CPO?

Answer

Thank you Roger for providing me with the opportunity to update members on Manston.

If Members cast their minds back they will recall this Council unanimously agreed the following motion on 17th July:

“That Kent County Council supports the actions taken so far by Thanet District Council to retain Manston as a regional airport. We recognise the value that a regional airport brings to East Kent and are disappointed at its closure. Kent County Council will explore with Thanet District Council ways in which it can support proposals to retain Manston as an airport.”

As I made clear during the debate, Kent County Council would consider how best it could support any compulsory purchase order by Thanet District Council subject to a viable business case being presented by a commercial partner.

Thanet District Council’s Cabinet received legal advice on 31st July which concurred with this stance that in order to demonstrate the case for a CPO is “*compelling*”, “*the Council should identify a CPO indemnity partner capable of delivering a 20 year business plan*” for the site.

Eager to support any sensible proposition, Kent County Council has been in contact with Thanet District Council to request copies of any expressions of interests received from any prospective indemnity partners so we could determine how best to support any viable business plan.

Thanet District Council has made us aware of only one company that made a substantive proposal. Naturally we have requested copies of this party’s business plan, but due to a confidentiality agreement between Thanet District Council and this company, Thanet is prevented from disclosing the information provided by the company to Kent County Council.

I had already asked RiverOak - which I believe is the company that has been in discussions with Thanet District Council - if I could see their business case and they have refused to share it with me.

Thanet District Council's Cabinet will tonight receive a report that the company that has approached them *"does not demonstrate that it has the appropriate financial status or has committed investors to:*

- 1) enable it - if required - to acquire the site by private treaty prior to a CPO process being commenced*
- 2) fund the preparation of a robust case for CPO acquisition*
- 3) meet the expected compensation costs, and*
- 4) to develop the airport and operate it viably in the long-term"*

In the absence of a viable proposition from a possible airport operator, KCC has worked with the new owners of Manston who are promising a very exciting redevelopment of Manston – including 4,000 new jobs and £1 billion new investment in Thanet.

Question 3

Question by Zita Wiltshire to Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services

Thanet has again seen rising complaints regarding Children's Homes and private foster carers who draw disruptive children from other local authorities into Thanet. This includes enhanced payments to foster carers, undermining the ethos of care, and replacing it with business incentive.

How does KCC control such activity, considering the blight on resident lives and the impacts on education, hospitals and other services, whose own public service ethos unwillingly subsidises this activity?

Answer

Thank you for the question. As Members will know, both the previous Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services and I have proactively campaigned for other Local Authorities to not place their children in care in Thanet, and other districts in Kent, due to the strain on resources including education, police and CAMHS.

For these reasons the Council's own policy is to not place non-Thanet children in care in Thanet. However the Council is unable to prevent the independent sector recruiting in Kent, or other Local Authorities placing in Kent when that placement meets the needs of the individual, and the placement does not impact on the resources available for our children in care.

I would like to point out that not all children placed in Thanet or elsewhere in Kent will be disruptive. These are children who have often not had the best start in life.

Financial incentives for the recruitment of foster carers are becoming a national issue and the Council has raised its concerns with the Fostering Networks National Steering Group, with this item being tabled for discussion at the next meeting.

Additionally, in part due to the campaign this council has carried out, this year has seen amendments come into force to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (the "Care Planning Regulations"), and a new amendment to Regulation 31 of the Children's Homes Regulations. These amendments should see an impact in the reduction of other Local Authority children in care placed in Kent. I am happy to provide further details of the amendments outside of this meeting.

Question 4

Question by Martin Vye to Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

Given the outstanding A level results achieved by students at both Simon Langton Grammar Schools, Girls' and Boys', in Canterbury, and their ongoing success at university, will the Cabinet Member for Economic Development say what he plans to do to attract high tech physics-based companies to East Kent, to build on and develop this undoubted local strength?

Answer

All of us in the County should be very proud of the extraordinary success of the Simon Langton Grammar Schools enabling young people to work on authentic science research at the school, with many of them continuing with science and engineering at University. I particularly welcome their success in encouraging more girls to engage with science and engineering at school and continuing at University. We are working with the Head Teacher and his staff to promote the Langton Star Centre to become the basis of a National Centre for Science Research in Schools whose aim would be to extend national research collaborations for students and train and support the science training profession to embrace this model. This would link with the activity of Locate in Kent to bring together a science-based cluster of innovative companies in Kent.

Question 5

Question by Martin Whybrow to Gary Cooke, Cabinet Member for Corporate & Democratic Services

Why do the summary records for members' attendance at meetings no longer appear on the KCC website? Was this an oversight, in which case when will they be put back? Was it a deliberate decision, in which case, what were the reasons for this loss of transparency for residents, why were members not informed of the change, and should the matter not have gone through the Selection and Member Services Committee for approval?

Answer

The information on the Council's website relating to Members' attendance at formal Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings is produced via a reporting facility on the Council's Committee Management System known as modern.gov. The statistics are generated automatically when the minutes of the various meetings are uploaded to the system, which confirms the names of those Members who were present as expected and those who for whatever reason were absent and had to send a substitute. It is a statistical snapshot about just one of the many responsibilities that elected Members perform in terms of representing the communities they serve and gives no information about the genuine reasons why individual Members cannot attend all of the meetings they are invited to.

Following representations from a number of Members, I formed the view that these statistics, whilst accurate, could lead to an entirely misleading impression being given about how hard Members work for their communities, which goes way beyond attending formal meetings. I consulted the Head of Democratic Services, who confirmed that there is no requirement to publish these summary statistics of meeting attendance in addition to publishing the minutes themselves, which is a legal requirement and I, therefore, took the decision to remove them from the website. The statistics remain available for any Member or member of the public who may wish to see them. In fact, officers have recently responded to a Freedom of Information request about the attendance at formal meetings by Members of the UKIP group on KCC.

As far as I am aware, the Selection and Member Services Committee was not asked to sanction the purchase or deployment of the modern.gov system some 7 years ago or agree to the use of the automatic meeting attendance function, which is just one part of that system's functionality. This, together with the fact that it is not a requirement to publish these statistical summaries led me to conclude that the Committee did not need to be asked to approve this measure.

However, I have asked for a report to be prepared for the Selection and Member Services Committee to consider early in the New Year, which will look at innovative and creative ways each individual Member can demonstrate to the communities they

serve the total contribution that they make to the Council on their behalf and I look forward to that discussion with colleagues from all political parties.

Question 6

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

Energy bills can be a significant expense for our schools. In recent years a number of schools across the country have arranged for solar energy companies to install panels on their premises. Thus the schools have significantly reduced their electricity bills and significantly reduced their carbon footprint for zero capital outlay, a true win win.

Accordingly, would the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform advise how many KCC controlled schools have installed equipment for generating renewable energy, what the value of the savings has been and what encouragement and advice KCC is providing to those schools that haven't?

Answer

The Authority is aware of 29 Kent schools (both maintained and non-maintained) that have solar panels. This is not a definitive list, but is informed by Officer knowledge as well as data from LASER.

We are able to estimate the electricity savings for 16 of these 29 schools, and the collective figure is £13,436.70. We have no data on any schools receiving the government's feed in tariff payments.

KCC do not currently provide finance for, or actively promote the various finance offers from, the private sector to install solar panels in schools, due to a number of risks identified, but officers do provide information and advice to schools that request it. KCC does provide support to schools directed at energy efficiency projects, as these type of projects still provide more significant energy savings than solar panels. We also offer interest free invest-to-save financing and just recently we held a successful campaign to promote the benefits of this finance scheme and also LED lighting in partnership with the schools finance team. As a result we have 40 school enquiries, these schools will receive a free survey and quote for LED lighting or any other energy saving project they are keen to explore. Unfortunately, this finance is not available for solar panels, as to qualify projects must pay back within 7 years or less.

Question 7

Question by Brian Clark to Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services

With the backdrop of the Child Sex Scandal in Rotherham and the release of Ofsted's report "The sexual exploitation of children: it couldn't happen here could it", Debbie Jones, Ofsted's National Director for Social Care, said it "cannot be acceptable that local authorities and partners are still failing to grasp and deal with abuse effectively". She stated, "We are calling on all local authorities and their partners to ensure that they have a comprehensive multi-agency strategy and action plan in place to tackle child sexual exploitation,"

In light of these comments and recent events, can the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services say what steps is KCC taking to ensure it is not an authority considered to be failing to face up to its responsibilities in preventing child sexual exploitation.

Answer

Thank you for your question and I would like to assure Members that this authority takes child sexual exploitation very seriously. As Members may know, following the well documented exploitation of children in Rochdale and elsewhere, Ofsted undertook a Child Sexual Exploitation thematic inspection which included Kent. Although not an assessed inspection, this has confirmed both our areas of good practice and those that make sense to strengthen further.

Ofsted described the recent major multi-agency operation in Kent as a highly impressive child focussed piece of work, that was well resourced and with strong cross agency information sharing. The quality of the Kent and Medway multi-agency Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy was also recognised.

However I, the officers and our partners are not complacent. We are continuing to raise standards by ensuring return interviews for children who go missing are of consistently high quality and that trends are carefully analysed across agencies. The Kent Children's Safeguarding Board has also raised the priority of dealing with Child Sexual Exploitation. Additionally the multi-agency training on exploitation is now mandatory for all our staff who work directly with children and young people.

Question 8

Question by Andrew Bowles to Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

"Could I first congratulate the Cabinet Member and his department for progress so far in enabling our residents to access high speed Broadband. I am sure he is able to access more up to date figures than I but the latest figures I possess for October 2014 show high speed fibre Broadband is available to in excess of 610,00 homes in Kent.

Much of my division is scheduled to go live during the current phase, October 2014 to October 2015. My concern is the small number of communities, many in my division, who are outside the areas where coverage is currently scheduled. There are communities along the North Downs such as Throwley and Stalisfield that have no clear information as to what level of service upgrade they may expect or when. May I add that I know this also applies to some communities in the Borough of Maidstone.

Can the Cabinet Member update the County Council on the matters raised in my question?"

Answer

KCC has made significant progress in delivering the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) Phase 1 project across the County, since it began in March 2013, and the project remains on track.

The project is bringing superfast broadband to over 120,000 properties by the end of 2015 in areas that will not benefit from commercial upgrade programmes. The project also aims to ensure that all properties in the intervention area have access to a standard broadband service of at least 2 mbps. Further details on the project and the deployment plan – including a 7 digit postcode checker and an interactive map are publically available on www.kent.gov.uk/broadband.

Over 60,000 homes and businesses have so far benefited from the Kent and Medway BDUK Phase 1 Project who would otherwise have been left with no or slow broadband. We are currently procuring a Phase 2 project. This is part of BDUK's national superfast extension programme which is seeking to ensure that at least 95% of properties across the UK can access superfast broadband. At a local level, our overriding intention is to get as much superfast and fibre-based broadband to as many premises as possible in Kent.

We are also working with BDUK as a pilot location for their 'Innovation Market Testing' Scheme. This initiative involves 8 small-scale field trials across the UK of new technological approaches for delivering superfast broadband services in 'final 5% areas' – of which the Swale-based pilot specifically targeting communities on the North Downs is one. We understand that the findings of this work will be used by BDUK to inform the

development of a new national BDUK Phase 3 Programme to bring faster broadband to communities that will not benefit from Phase 1 or Phase 2 project work.

I have noted what Mr Bowles has said about the communities he mentioned in his question. It should be stressed that delivering to 'final 5%' locations is challenging. However, KCC remains committed to working with local partners and BDUK to realise our longstanding ambition of wanting all rural communities to have access to superfast broadband services.