

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Miss S J Carey to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste tell us whether EDF has signed the Service Level Agreement for street lighting which has been ready for signature since November 2008? If not, what is he doing to ensure they do or has he found another way to improve the level of service Kent receives from EDF?

Answer

The Service Level Agreement EDF/KHS was signed by EDF on the 12th November 2008 and by KHS on the 19th December 2008, after further study.

KHS is seeking improvements in the performance of EDF through more than just enforcing the SLA through the regulator Ofgem. Continuous joint working is underway to find other improvements, not only in the performance of EDF itself but also in what KHS can do in delivering some of what once was part of the EDF workload.

KHS is now employing directly two EDF jointing gangs, to carry out work to a programme set by KHS, with KHS crews on hand to open the highway and fill the excavation after EDF have completed their work. Cost and time savings are paramount in this together with an increased customer satisfaction objective.

Further opportunities are under discussion with EDF at the moment.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Mr R Parker to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

At the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on 21 May 2008, the Northfleet Action Group presented a petition in relation to the Declaration of Land Surplus to Highways Requirements.

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please inform this Council of the action taken to date in response to this petition?

Answer

Mr Chard and Mr Parker met with Mike Austerberry, Director of Property on 4th June 2008 to discuss the petition. At this meeting, Mr Parker, KCC local member, informally was representing Northfleet Action Group. Mr Chard offered to meet on site with Mr Parker and representatives of the Northfleet Action Group at this meeting to look at open space in Northfleet; this offer was never taken up.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Mr R Truelove to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste outline his plans to improve traffic safety on the A249 between Stockbury and Detling Hill?

ANSWER

Designs have been completed for road safety improvements along the A249.

The biggest obstacle that remains before this scheme can move forward for implementation is reaching agreement with the local community on the exact location of a roundabout in the vicinity of the Industrial Estate / Showground. To allow a decision to be made on the location of a roundabout further design work and consultation will be required.

To inform the decision making process the previous Road Safety Study which provided the justification for the scheme is currently being updated to be presented to Members in due course.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Mr T Maddison to the
Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Operations,
Resources and Skills)**

Would the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education - Operations, Resources and Skills please inform this Council, and more importantly, the 16,000 residents of Dartford West Division and in particular the parents of the 900 plus young children aged four and under, why they will not be getting a Sure Start Children's Centre in this locality?

Answer

Children's Centres are being delivered in three rounds.

In round one, the Government gave Kent the target to develop 20 children's centres to serve families living in the areas of greatest need. These centres were located in accordance with the Government's strict deprivation formula and so Dartford benefited from two children's centres, the Oakfield's Children's Centre and Temple Hill Children's Centre.

In rounds two and three, a further 52, and then 30 centres, were and are being developed; four of these lie within the Dartford District. These are The Brent Children's Centre (situated at Dartford East Health Clinic currently), Darenth Children's Centre, Knockhall Children's Centre and Maypole Children's Centre.

As my colleagues will see, Dartford is very well served by children's centres having six in the district, which is much higher than say Tunbridge Wells, which only has two. Although there is no physical building in Tom Maddison's division as the Brent Children's Centre has moved to Dartford East Health Clinic for the time being, a child is at most two miles away from a permanent children's centre and those that can no make that journey are served by satellite provision in the area. Furthermore all children's centres provide outreach services and home visiting, so these children are not neglected.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Mr G Rowe to the
Cabinet Member for Community Services**

To enable Kent's local communities, parish councils and citizens to use the Sustainable Communities Act, will the Cabinet Member for Community Services give an assurance that Kent County Council will resolve to use the Act by submitting proposals by 31st July 2009?

Answer

The Sustainable Communities Act aims to promote the sustainability of local communities, and is based on the principle that local people know best what needs to be done to promote sustainability in their area.

Much of the Act covers areas that Kent County Council already has the powers for, and no resolution is required by the Council in order to use the Act. Depending on the nature of any proposals received by the Council further powers can be sought from central government as and when the circumstances dictate it.

To date no proposals have been received. But if and when a proposal does come forward that is in line with the purposes set out in the Schedule of the Act, if it can demonstrate active local support and is in line with "The Vision for Kent" as our sustainable community strategy, then I can assure you the proposal will get a fair hearing.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question By Mr M J Vye To The
Cabinet Member For Children, Families And Educational Achievement**

Will the Cabinet Member for Children, Families And Educational Achievement give the Council the reasons why Kent's schools carry out the greatest number of exclusions compared, at more than ten times for 50 Kent children, with those in other education authorities in the country; and state how CFE Directorate will help to reduce this number, and ensure provision of education for all children who are excluded?

Answer

I was disappointed at the way this data was presented, as it is not a fair representation. Kent will never be represented favourably where pupil numbers are used as opposed to percentage of pupil population.

Although Kent has had 48 pupils who had 10 or more fixed term exclusions (2007/8) – this must be compared to the size of the Local Authority and the pupil population.

- For Kent this is 0.02% of the pupil population.
- For Barking and Dagenham is 0.13% of the pupil population.
- For Surrey 0.03% of the pupil population.

It is worthy of note that the average number of days of education lost, reduced dramatically from a high of 12.95 days in 2005/6 to 6.31 days in 2006/7.

The other point to which I would draw your attention, is the significant reduction in permanent exclusions from secondary schools since 2005/6. Back then, there were 310 secondary exclusions, in 2007/08 this reduced to 278.

As you are aware, the Local Authority and Kent schools take these matters very seriously and working with head teachers to encourage a zero tolerance approach to disruptive behaviour is, of course, one of the key Local Authority 2010 targets.

In our schools, head teachers are clear about their powers in relation to exclusion and are able to use this where appropriate. They are also clear about their responsibility to all pupils and want to support their pupils to achieve their potential. To do this, they use a range of tools dependent on the circumstances and needs of the particular pupil. They are able to draw on the resources that the Local Authority has devolved to Local Children's Services Partnerships (LCSPs) to ensure the best possible support for pupils.

There are a range of programmes across Kent that are supporting schools, pupils and positively impacting upon exclusion rates. Examples include the Managed Move programme and the Restorative Justice pilot.

In addition, for pupils for whom mainstream school is not successful, Kent has a good range of Alternative Provision as recognised by the recent Joint Area Review. It was specifically noted that Kent has *“a good range of alternative educational provision for school-age young people excluded from school or at risk of becoming disengaged with learning.”*

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Mr D S Daley to the
Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Supporting Independence**

Given that the response in the Draft Performance Improvement Plan ('Building on Success') to the Inspectors' recommendation that KCC needs to promote better trust with district councils was *'We believe this is the way we currently act'* will the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Supporting Independence explain how this fits with the clear picture created in the Kent Regeneration Framework document that the KCC is leader and district councils followers in the areas of planning and housing, which are primarily district functions?

Answer

The draft Regeneration Framework, which was out for initial consultation until 17th April, has been well-received by partner agencies and individuals across the county. In order to ensure that the views of the District and Borough Councils were fully taken into account, part of the consultation involved Kevin Lynes as Cabinet Member and senior officers visiting Leaders and Chief Executives of each authority in turn.

The document was well-received at every one of these meetings, and the subsequent written responses have furthered this sense of cooperation and partnership working.

As the strategic authority, Kent County Council must form a countywide view of regeneration and economic development, which will naturally require a high-level strategic stance. Statutory responsibility for Housing clearly remains with district authorities; however, we are keen to participate in an increasingly collaborative approach, given the complexity of housing markets across Kent and the range of agencies involved across administrative boundaries. We will very much welcome further discussion with district colleagues on how we can progress this. Furthermore, under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, currently before parliament, will impose a statutory duty upon upper tier authorities to produce a local economic assessment of their area which will need to consider housing markets in their broader economic context. We will of course be involving District colleagues in this activity.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Mr G Koowaree to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Given the ongoing and very real threat of flooding to the residents of Kent will the Cabinet Member for Environment and regeneration proceed to appoint a Flood Risk Officer , at a senior level, to coordinate and drive forward the actions required of KCC to provide the best possible safeguarding against flood risk and impact; and give his support to the formation of a standing committee of members, as recommended by the Pitt Report to ensure effective scrutiny of KCC's performance in this vital area?

Answer

A standing committee of members will be formed to scrutinise the work taken to manage flood risk in Kent and responses to flood incidents. The need for such a committee has also been recognised by the Council's Flood Risk Select Committee, who made such a recommendation when they reconvened late last year. This standing committee will not only review the County Council's work but also that of our partners, as a collaborative approach to managing and dealing with this risk is imperative. The standing committee will be formed once the County Council elections are concluded.

As for the appointment of a Flood Risk Officer, David Cloake from Emergency Planning is working with members of Environment, Highways, Waste & Planning to develop the job specification and take it through the appropriate channels required for the creation of a new post

In the meantime, members of staff from Environment, Highways, Waste & Planning and Emergency Planning are working together to ensure flood risk management is appropriately dealt with and that the County Council is suitably engaged in the development of the Flood and Water Bill which will no doubt shape our future role in this area of work.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Mr I Chittenden to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste**

Casualty figures issued for Kent for 2007 showed that Maidstone had a higher number of deaths and injuries on our roads than any other area in Kent. An investigation into the Maidstone District Casualty numbers and progress against National 2010 Casualty Targets showed that the reduction of people killed or seriously injured in 2007 in the Maidstone District was 15% over a ten year period against an average in Kent of 40% against Government targets. A short term series of actions were proposed to influence groups in Maidstone identified as being at a greater risk, but these initiatives ended at the end of March.

Will the Cabinet member for Environment Highways and Waste please confirm when further initiatives will be announced specifically targeted to reduce deaths and injuries on Maidstone's roads, and when a longer term plan will be put in place to ensure deaths and injuries on Maidstone's roads are in the longer term reduced in line with other areas in Kent.

ANSWER

As you know we have achieved considerable success in reducing casualties across Kent. However, we are not complacent and I share your concern regarding the comparatively high number of casualties recorded in Maidstone.

During 2008 the KHS Road Safety team and Maidstone Borough Council Officers strengthened their links to devise and deliver several joint initiatives that drew in other partners where appropriate. I am pleased to note that we have seen casualty reductions in the Borough particularly in road crash deaths. Whilst I believe that we have much more to do I am satisfied that this partnership working has contributed to recent improvements.

The KHS Road Safety team deliver a diverse range of activities across the whole of Kent, however, they will continue to work with their Maidstone colleagues to develop opportunities for further improvements locally. I am advised that a programme of work similar to that delivered last year is planned for 2009, subject to the necessary support from Maidstone and other partners. In addition to these public engagement activities, officers from KHS Transportation and Development will be working to identify opportunities for infrastructural improvements in the Maidstone Borough. These will be brought to the attention of members through the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board.

Regarding longer term plans. The Road Safety team are currently reviewing the scope for further casualty reductions, at both countywide and local levels. I will ensure that officers at Maidstone Borough are included in their consideration before any reports are presented to the KCC highways Advisory Board.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

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

What steps is the County Council taking to procure environmentally friendly vehicles for use within its fleet?

Answer

We specify the highest level of compliance for our commercial fleet and continue, where economic to do so, to replace vehicles with those creating lower emissions on a shorter cycle.

We have expressed an interest with Honda to pilot their Hydrogen-cell powered FCX Clarity in the UK. Honda is planning 200 of these for the Japanese/US market over the next three years, and we know that they are seeking type approval in the EU.

We have suggested to them that we would be prepared to take a significant number of vehicles into the KCC lease car fleet. As part of such a project it would also be necessary to procure appropriate hydrogen supplies. It is our conviction that hydrogen fuelled vehicles have significant advantages in a rural county like Kent over electrically powered cars with limited range and the need for extended periods to recharge their batteries.

In the meantime we are continuing to lower the average CO2 emissions from our car fleet and continue to evaluate hybrid fuel vehicles.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

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

Part of the planning application for the Poly/Community Medical Centre situated at Wraik Hill, Whitstable was that there would be in place a series of Travel Plans and to the best of my knowledge these are not yet in place.

Therefore my question is: Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please give an update on the present situation with regard to these Travel Plans and would it be possible to incorporate both the nearby developments of Abbey and Mariners View as neither of these very new complexes have any form of public transport?

ANSWER

A travel plan was recently submitted by the developer to the Local Planning Authority, which did not address all of the aims and objectives identified at the planning stage, mainly in respect of Public Transport links to the site. Therefore we have recommended to the Local Planning Authority that the developer continues to explore this avenue.

The redirection of the Triangle Bus Route on Clapham Hill is considered a non starter due to the impact that this would have to the journey times for the majority of bus users. Canterbury City Council has suggested that there may be scope for a separate revenue supported service to/from the Medical Centre to link with Seasalter and Tesco. However, this could hinge on or at least in part on Primary Care Trust funding, and would not be realised overnight.

The planning condition does state that before the "commencement of the development" that a travel plan should be approved by the Local Planning Authority which quite clearly has not happened in this case.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Mr A D Crowther to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

May I invite the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste to kindly use the influence of his Office to persuade the Highways Agency and any other relevant Authorities that it is necessary and important that the County Town's Acute Hospital with A&E facilities should be adequately sign posted from the appropriate exits on the M20 Motorway, in the same way as is the William Harvey Hospital, Ashford.

Many 'First timers' especially from a long distance, like Sheppey and Swale, and of course the Channel Ports and Tunnel, may not know which exit to take, particularly as exits 5 and 6 are separated from the rest of the Motorway (on both sides.): miss the correct exit and you have a considerable increase in journey time and distance, apart from likely getting lost.

Both the Chief Executive of Maidstone Hospital and a spokesperson for the Highways Agency (Chatham), agree it is desirable and WANTED, but after several years of requesting, that's as far as I've got. You, Mr. Ferrin, I'm sure will have much greater influence. I look forward to seeing the red signs.

Answer

The process for requesting new signs on those roads which are our responsibility has altered and requests are now made directly to Signs, Lines and Barrier team. However, KHS does not have any influence regarding signing on HA's road network. KHS can approach the HA and make a request. The HA have their own policy and justification regarding signing on their network. Should the HA agree to signing Maidstone Hospital from the M20 they are likely to insist on designing the signs themselves and expect KHS to pay for this design work and any amendments/new signs needed. Signs on the motorway network are very expensive as they are usually gantry signs which are very large. KHS would sign to Maidstone hospital from all directions within a certain distance to ensure destination signing consistency. If the HA were not minded to permit signing on their roads, KHS could sign as soon as practicable on our network from leaving the motorway/trunk network to the required destination

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

30 April 2009

**Question by Mrs T Dean to the
Cabinet Member for Regeneration**

Given the potentially damaging effect on the beauty and diversity of Kent's rural landscape and its value for tourism and recreation, will the Cabinet Member for Regeneration agree to submit comments to the current Application for 1,500 acres of polytunnels currently with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, and to work with Kent Planning Officers to produce Kent wide Supplementary Planning Guidance on the use of polytunnels including proper location, screening, waste disposal, protection for wildlife, water resources and biodiversity and in particular address the issue of permanent polytunnels for table top growbag cultivation which are effectively industrial development in the countryside?

Answer

There are current substantial proposals for successional (permanent) and rotational agricultural polytunnels on land in the vicinity of West Peckham, Mereworth and Kings Hill in Tonbridge and Malling. Although applying to a much greater land area in total the terms of this application provide for the use of up to 175 hectares (approximately 420 acres) of land for polytunnel use in any one calendar year.

Although the County Council has not been consulted directly by the Borough Council on these proposals, the County Council is nonetheless considering them, given their scale and extent, taking account of relevant Structure Plan policies that remain applicable, the impact of the proposals on landscape character and protection of the countryside and any measures proposed for mitigating their visual impact on the landscape and local communities in their vicinity .

The County Council is fully aware of local concerns regarding these proposals including those raised by West Peckham Parish Council in correspondence with KCC

Where planning permission for the development of polytunnels is required the full panoply of relevant strategic and local development plan policies are in play including those relating to protection of landscape and countryside character, sustenance of the rural and agricultural economy ,any implications for water resources and land drainage and other relevant matters.

Kent districts are the local planning authorities responsible for both local policy and decisions on individual applications for such proposals. Given the growing incidence of polytunnel development in the Kent countryside the Cabinet Member has asked officers to discuss the issue with Districts to assess whether further guidance would be appropriate. Under current planning arrangements any supplementary guidance would need to be adopted by each District Council although it might be prepared collaboratively where it would be apply on a wide area basis.