

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 24 March 2016

**Question by Brian MacDowall to
Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport**

Can the Cabinet Member say whether the luminosity of the new LEDs is adjustable? The amount and quality of light emitting from the new lamps seems very poor, which makes it a road safety issue.

From a driver's point of view, the light only becomes really visible just before approaching the lamp; drivers need to make decisions well in advance. This is straining drivers' eyesight and placing excessive pressure on drivers to avoid an accident by leaving the roadside steeped in darkness.

This is very concerning especially as KCC is spending £40 million of taxpayers money converting the county's stock to LEDs.

Answer

Mr MacDowall might be interested to know that those lamps in the county or elsewhere in this country already converted to LED have not, as far as I am aware, caused the comment suggested in this question.

Yes the luminosity of the new LED's is adjustable through the Central Management System. As required under the LED street light project, the lighting in every road is being designed in line with British standards. This includes road speeds, traffic flows and the environment. This may include standards set at peak times which then can be relaxed when roads are less busy. This ensures that the authority provides efficient lighting for its residents across its highway network.

It is expected that the Authority will save £5.2m per annum. This includes a 65% saving in like for like energy/carbon consumption and a reduction in maintenance visits due to the longevity of the LED lanterns.

I would be happy to discuss Mr MacDowall's concerns outside this meeting.

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**Question by Colin Caller to
Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development**

The Chancellor of the Exchequer recently announced that the contribution from Public Funds towards the Ebbsfleet Garden City is to be increased to over £300 million.

This development will have a significant impact on the adjacent communities within the Boroughs of Dartford and Gravesham. The disruption will be particularly significant during the construction phases. It is important that the existing communities views are taken into account and that they are able to look forward to sharing in the benefits from any additional facilities or services this injection of Public Money will bring. There is no doubt that the residents will look to their local elected representatives to do what they can to protect their interests and ensure Public Money is spent for the benefit of all residents.

As Kent County Council's appointed representative on the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, would Mr Dance please advise members what mechanism or process is in place to enable him to keep members on all sides of this Council informed of progress on this development and for him to take on-board members comments on matters that are coming before the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation for decision.

Answer

Colin. Thank you for this question. I am happy to provide clarification.

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC) is a statutory body that reports to the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government. As such it is the EDC that determines the level of public engagement it undertakes on matters that are brought before its own Board for consideration. Papers that are considered by the EDC Board are published on the EDC's website.

The commitment of over £300m funding by Government to the EDC was made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Autumn Statement and announcement on the Spending Review on 25th November 2015. This was followed on the same day by a joint press release from the Department for Communities & Local Government and HM Treasury confirming the level of funding as £310m.

The level of funding for the EDC has, therefore, been known for some time and has been reported to the EDC Board. As the County Council's representative on the EDC Board I have defended the County Council's interests and where appropriate provided feedback to Cabinet colleagues. In terms of informing wider County Council membership I would suggest that the most appropriate mechanism would be through

the relevant Cabinet Committees and I have no problem with this approach as and when needed or requested.

If there are any particular issues that you wish to raise regarding the development of the Ebbsfleet Garden City may I suggest that in the first place you raise these directly with the EDC. If you are unsatisfied with the response they provide then please let me know.

Finally I should add that you are also quite at liberty to contact John Cubitt who represents Gravesham Council on the EDC Board and Jeremy Kite who represents Dartford Council on that same Board.

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**Question by Bryan Sweetland to
Paul Carter, Leader of the County Council**

While it is accepted that KCC strongly support the building of a the lower Thames crossing to the east of Gravesham, I remain extremely concerned about the total devastation this new infrastructure will have on the Kent countryside, North Kent village life and the thousands of 'hard working families' whose properties will now be blighted for many years. Will the Leader please advise me what I should say to my constituents, who are asking me if the increase in Nitrous Oxide levels and increased pollution will harm their children's and grandchildren's health.

Answer

Whilst KCC supports option C our response to the HE consultation also sets out concerns as to several issues arising from the proposed Crossing, including the impact on the local area, the need to accelerate compensation schemes for property owners affected, and the need for measures to mitigate negative impacts of the proposals on air quality, noise and visual intrusion. We will also be asking for more detailed air quality modelling to be completed, and monitoring during construction and operation.

KCC's response to HE's consultation includes a considerable number of conditions that they must satisfy to protect, as far as is possible, the residents of the area affected by their proposals.

I would refer Mr Sweetland to the paper discussed at Cabinet on Monday of this week and the discussion that he witnessed at that meeting.

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**Question by Rob Bird to
Graham Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health**

Many thousands of children attend primary and secondary schools within the built up areas of Maidstone, a borough known to have very high levels of air pollution.

The recent joint report from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and Royal College of Physicians (*) stated that "Each year in the UK, around 40,000 deaths are attributable to exposure to outdoor air pollution which plays a role in many of the major health challenges of our day". The report recommended that "Air pollution monitoring by central and local government must track exposure to harmful pollutants in major urban areas and near schools" and that local authorities should "Act to protect the public health when air pollution levels are high."

I am concerned about the adequacy of the work being undertaken to monitor and combat the air pollution in Maidstone and the rest of Kent and would ask the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health what steps will he take to ensure that the county authorities and the districts become more pro-active in tackling air pollution?

Answer

Members will be aware that District councils have the statutory responsibility to monitor certain air pollutants, declare air quality management areas (AQMAs) and develop action plans, and I would urge Members to raise specific concerns with their relevant District council, contact details of relevant officers can be found on the website www.kentair.org.uk .

Kent County Council (through colleagues in GET and SCHWB Directorates) and the Kent District councils do work together on air quality, through the Kent and Medway Air Quality Partnership (K&MAQP.) The partnership website (www.kentair.org.uk) provides an air quality forecast, and further information.

A subgroup of the partnership focusses on health, and this group has examined the 14 recommendations made in the joint report highlighted by Mr Bird.

The group is currently working to support the development of low emission strategies across Kent, whilst raising awareness of the need to take mitigating actions. The group will help to promote and implement the Kent Active Travel Strategy, (the development of which has been discussed by Cabinet Committees) once it is finalised and approved.

Maidstone Borough Council specifically, is developing a Low Emission Strategy, which will consider a range of themes, across MBC's areas of activity, and look at

ways of reducing emissions. I would suggest raising your issue with MBC for further information.

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

Having attended a recent police Conference on the sexual exploitation of our most vulnerable children and given the increasing publicity surrounding high profile sexual exploitation cases across the country, could the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services please advise how we protect our looked after children from being exploited in this way, especially given the fact that their vulnerability means they are targeted by these despicable offenders?

Answer

Thank you for the question. Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and how it is tackled is rightly a source of public concern; and for the Council as a Corporate Parent, protecting young people in care from exploitation is one of our key responsibilities and one that we take very seriously.

Over a number of years up to and including the recent launch of Operation Willow, we have prioritised CSE as a key activity, working with partners to prevent child sexual exploitation, offer protection to victims and disrupt abuse networks and prosecute abusers.

Understanding the prevalence and scale of CSE in Kent, and particularly how it may affect children in care, is supported through the analysis of intelligence undertaken by the County CSE Team based at Police Headquarters in Maidstone. This in turn enables the team to identify patterns, networks and vulnerable young people or groups of young people for support and intervention.

The Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) has set up a Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel (MASE) which is the strategic forum for sharing intelligence about CSE vulnerabilities within Kent with the child protection network locally.

Operation Willow, as mentioned previously, is a joint public awareness campaign with the Police and other partners and the most recent visible response to CSE. A national awareness day about CSE took place on 18 March 2016 and Kent's multi-agency CSE Team organised events around the county to support this.

We have almost 100 trained CSE Champions within our wider workforce who are cascading the learning about CSE and how together we protect young people from exploitation.

Educating young people about CSE is critical to the successful protection of vulnerable children. To support the work already being undertaken within schools to

raise awareness, a CSE education pack is being evaluated, which can be made available to all schools.

Finally, an important part of our strategy against the targeting of young people in our care by potential abusers is having foster carers who are acutely aware of the CSE risks, and by providing them with specialist training we enhance that key protective element in young people's lives.

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**Question by Nick Bond to
Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport**

I am very concerned at the amount of lorries parked up in lay-bys in Kent where the complete lay-by including entrance is taken up, denying other road users the use of the lay-by.

Will the Cabinet Member please advise what measure he has put in place to end this abuse.”

Answer

The use of lay-bys for overnight lorry parking is a real problem in Kent, which is why KCC is urging government to ensure that HGV overnight parking is included in the proposal by Highways England for a Lorry Area as a solution for operation stack. I have also submitted a written representation to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee Inquiry on Operation Stack to make the case for the provision of overnight lorry parking within the proposed Lorry Area and for a network of lorry parks across the country to meet the demand for HGV parking.

To accurately assess the demand KCC will be conducting a countywide survey of the number of HGVs parked in unsuitable locations. Increasing overnight parking capacity and introducing a countywide enforcement regime will bring about a real difference to affected communities and free up these lay-bys. To facilitate a Kent wide ban extra legislation will be required so I am actively pressing the Department for Transport to consider the unique nature of Kent to support the provision of these extra powers.

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**Question by Hod Birkby to
Paul Carter, Leader of the County Council**

How much money has KCC spent setting up and running the Gateways in the County, to date?

Answer

Our spend on Gateways cannot easily be distinguished as many Gateways have been combined with libraries and other Kent County Council facilities. For example, the total capital spending on Ashford Gateway Plus since 2005/06 has been £8.2million which included a complete re-provision of the library and other facilities as well as the Gateway facility. Of this, in excess of £2million was externally funded via a growth fund grant from DCLG. The capital spending on the remaining 10 gateways which still includes Kent County Council facility enhancements has been in the order of £6million over the last 9 years. Revenue spend on Gateways over this period has averaged £1.5million a year.

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**Question by Gordon Cowan to
Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services**

“At a recent meeting of the Commissioning Advisory Board (CAB), Members were presented with a report on the future of the Libraries, Registration and Archives service.

I and other Members from other political groups were shocked to hear about a potential diminution of resources in the Members’ Information Point yet no Members of this Council have so far been consulted on the proposals. In fact I was amazed to hear that the Chairman of the Board, Mr Hotson, didn’t know about the proposals either and expressed his disappointment about the lack of consultation to the Cabinet Member, Mr Hill.

I am staggered that the Cabinet Member for Community Services has failed to consult Members of this Council about such a potentially significant change to a key Members’ service, especially one that is so heavily used by backbench and Opposition Members and can I ask him to explain what the current position is?”

Answer

The Library, Registration and Archive Service has a challenging savings target to meet in the MTFP, having already achieved very significant savings over the last four years. This redesign is one of a number of initiatives being taken to make savings and generate income, with every aspect of the service being scrutinised to see where efficiencies can be made while maintaining a high quality service to all our customers.

I know that the service provided by the Information Point is highly valued by Members and I have taken on board the comments made at the Commissioning Advisory Board. I therefore intend to look again at this area of work to see how we can best provide the services which Members need. I will bring any proposals to the Selection and Member Services Committee before implementation.

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**Question by Roger Truelove to
Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services**

On 19th February a group of Swale Borough Councillors were informed by their officers that "Community Learning and Skills (CLS), with KCC, are in the process of negotiating a move from their current College Road centre (Sittingbourne Adult Education Centre) to a new location in the London Road Trading Estate." It said any move was likely to take place in June or July.

The following week the local press reported that KCC had denied that there was any such plan.

Local Councillors have asked for a meeting, which CLS have agreed to, but only if KCC are present. There has been no meeting, but there has been an acknowledgement that the negotiations for a move are being considered.

What is going on?

Answer

As part of the plan for improvements to the Community Learning and Skills Service with the aim of delivering adult and community learning from a wider range of accessible locations around the County, there has been a review of existing arrangements including the current properties used by the Service.

The aim is to reduce costs, in line with reduced funding for the Service from central government and to improve the accessibility and participation in adult learning across all districts in Kent. The property review identified the Sittingbourne Adult Education site in College Road as an expensive location with less good accessibility for learners. The London Road Trading estate location was found to offer more opportunities. This option is still being considered.

The Community Learning and Skills Service will be consulting on any changes to the Sittingbourne location and any vacation of the College Road site would mean that KCC would find alternative use or be able to dispose of the property.

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**Question by Brian Clark to
Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport**

The progressing of Member Highway Grant projects can be lengthy as well as costly and I am aware that officers even after repeated phone calls are often left waiting months to receive an update from our chosen supplier. Once updates have been received the question remains is the project value for money, with an example being that one of my projects was estimated to cost close to twice the price quoted by another KCC approved independent contractor. Therefore, will the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport explain how he plans to make improvements to encourage Members to continue to fund highways projects for the benefit of Kent's residents?"

Answer

I understand that Members have concerns about the Highways Grant so I have asked for options looking at changes. The key principles of the proposed changes to highway scheme delivered through the Combined Member Grant are to improve:

- Purpose
- Performance
- Communication

We propose that District Managers become the key contact for members considering funding a highway improvement. Part of the remit for the District Managers under this new proposal will be to consider the most efficient and cost effective way of delivering projects which, may well include looking to other providers, ordering the items directly or looking at whether local groups might be able to deliver a project more efficiently and they will advise County Member accordingly.

I appreciate that some schemes may seem expensive when they include bespoke materials but routine works such as lining, surfacing and signing works can still offer best value for money through our term contractor and the District Manager will be experienced in delivering these projects and can offer good advice to get the best outcome for County Members funding.

I hope that combined with a move to a more programmed way of working, this may also offer efficiencies in terms of cost as schemes will not be delivered in a reactive way. Good forward planning for schemes can ultimately identify ways to save costs as they could be programmed with other scheme road closures or can cut costs in terms of additional night works and weekend working. This will also give County Members greater surety both of delivery dates and at cost. A paper on proposed changes will be considered by Environment and Transport Cabinet committee in May.

