

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 25 May 2017

**Question by Martin Whybrow to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation & Waste**

In light of central government seeking to pass the buck on air quality, plus ever less monitoring by district and borough councils, what are KCC's plans for taking the lead in improving air quality and thereby reducing the number of premature deaths and hospital admissions across the county?

Answer

KCC has no statutory duty to take action with regards to improving air quality. County councils do have obligations to proactively engage with District Councils once an air quality issue has been identified on the production of an Air Quality Action Plan, as laid out in the Government's Local Air Quality Management Policy Guidance – PG16. However, air pollution is the largest environmental risk to the public's health contributing to cardiovascular disease, lung cancer and respiratory illness. Poor air quality affects everyone and has long term impacts on all, and immediate effects on the vulnerable, with a disproportionate impact on the young, old, sick and poor.

Consequently improving Air Quality has been identified as a key challenge within the Kent Environment Strategy which is coordinated by KCC. KCC will be responding to the Government's Air Quality Action Plan consultation. KCC's approach, working with partners is twofold:

1. To improve data and evidence base for action, making links with health data and raising awareness and understanding

Currently, Districts have a number of monitoring stations around Kent but not a comprehensive picture across all of Kent. KCC, including Public Health is currently working with the Kent and Medway Air Quality Partnership to:

- review data available;
- identify gaps and potential improvements needed in order to develop targeted action in areas worst affected and for the most vulnerable residents; and
- make stronger links to health data
- make data more accessible and understandable
- raise the profile of air quality issues with key decision makers in Kent and Medway, identifying where partners can work together to develop joint communications and initiatives.

2. To develop targeted action in partnership with public sector partners, business and communities

As with a number of environmental challenges and opportunities, responsibility for delivery of mitigation initiatives is spread across a number of sectors and organisations.

KCC-is working to develop a joint Kent and Medway wide approach through the production of a Low Emission Strategy, linking local Air Quality Action Plans and Strategies. This is in the early stages of development though initial feedback from partners has been supportive of this approach.

KCC has held an internal workshop, Chaired by Andrew Scott-Clark, Director of Public Health, to review and strengthen current activity being undertaken across KCC specific services and by KCC as a business.

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**Question by Rob Bird to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation & Waste**

The signage for the Maidstone Bridge Gyratory works state that completion will be by Early 2017. This has not happened. Work is still going on and delays are still taking place. The area is still littered with temporary signage, bollards and other contractor's detritus. It's a mess.

Does the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste agree that this is totally unacceptable for the County Town and will he undertake to get the works completed and the area tidied up as a matter of urgency?"

Answer

Thank you for your question in relation to the Maidstone Bridges Gyratory scheme. This was a difficult project in a very confined space. As you know, the north bound lanes have been operational since the 1st December 2016 and the benefits are already being realised. Jackson Civil Engineering has continued to work hard to complete the remainder of the public realm project.

Works on the main scheme are now complete, minor defects that were identified have been rectified, the majority of which has been undertaken during the night to minimise delays. Associated signage has been removed and site clearance carried out.

Validation of the gyratory traffic signals was undertaken in the week of the 24th April 2017. Driving habits and 'normal' traffic conditions have been assessed to ensure the signals reach their full potential. The junction will continue to be monitored with small adjustments being made where necessary

The additional section of paving fronting Allianz being carried out at Maidstone Borough Councils request, will continue to be monitored for general tidiness and will be completed in July 2017.

It must also be noted that there are ongoing works to the Tow Path that are not part of the Gyratory scheme. Off peak lane closures are required for this work to be undertaken safely which will be completed in late August 2017.

The contractor has worked effectively and efficiently to minimise delays caused by these works and should be congratulated. The overall benefits and quality of workmanship is a credit to whole project team.

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**Question by Susan Carey to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation & Waste**

Would the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste please provide an update on Highways England's plans for a lorry holding area in my division?"

Answer

Kent County Council, working with Shepway District Council, continue to urged the Department for Transport and Highways England to work 'at pace' to deliver a solution to Operation Stack.

In answer to the question, I understand that Highways England has suspended all work until the outcome of the Judicial Review into the lawfulness of the decision of the Secretary of State for a new lorry area to be created near Stanford to ease issues caused by Operation Stack is resolved.

The hearing was scheduled for 27 June however the Department for Transport has advised that the Judicial Review has been adjourned at the request of the Department and the claimant. The Department's reasoning for the adjournment request is to allow the new administration following the General Election to have time to take a view and the 27 June hearing date left very little practical time for the Government to do this.

I am not aware that a revised hearing date has been set yet but the Department has advised that it will not be before October.

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**Question by Trudy Dean to Paul Carter,
Leader of the County Council**

Following the elections on 4th May, the Leader of the Council was quoted as saying “We need a strong opposition. ... and we hope they provide the right checks and balance and scrutiny of the big decisions we make and support this county council which has a very proud history to continue to go in the right direction.”

Will the Leader please say why, with an overall majority of 53 over all other parties, his public statement supporting the need for strong Scrutiny and the recommendation of the former Independent Remuneration Committee, he has not agreed for the Leader of the Opposition to chair the Scrutiny Committee and will he now give consideration, at least to the appointment of the Leader of the Opposition to the Vice Chairmanship of that Committee?

Answer

My reasons are quite clear; our council’s constitution goes to great lengths to make sensible provision for both pre and post-scrutiny of decisions. Cabinet Committees provide the opportunity for all parties to discuss, debate and scrutinise in advance of the Executive Decision making process. Mrs Dean and her successor have been made aware of the Conservative Group’s generosity in providing additional places for the official Opposition party on both the council’s Scrutiny Committee as well as on other Cabinet Committees which is over and above the official proportionality allocation.

It is also our intention to continue with the Commissioning Advisory Board which allows for generous time for all-party discussions on emerging significant commissioning decisions well in advance of the final decision making processes. It will continue to make generous provision for opposition party representation.

The Scrutiny arrangements for this council have stood us in good stead over the years and I have no intention of changing them, other than by giving the opposition groups greater representation than the statutory proportionality allocation would have delivered.

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**Question by Dan Daley to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation & Waste**

In December last, my colleague brought to your attention once again the serious problems associated with the flooding in the pedestrian subways in Maidstone, close to the bridge.

These floodings had become a regular feature and caused much disruption to pedestrian traffic.

In your reply at that time you said, and I quote “we are confident that all works can be completed within the financial year”.

Since December, including the whole of the winter period, and one of the most arid seasons in the UK for many years, with little or no rainfall for weeks on end, the subway has again, within the last month, been flooded to a depth which made it impassable.

This situation, it would appear, has **not** been finally satisfactorily dealt with therefore could the Cabinet Member please now give an update which can be more reliable as to reality?

Answer

The Drainage works that were planned for last financial year were placed on hold due to the Maidstone Gyrotory Scheme. I can confirm that funding is in place to address flooding issues and to upgrade the subways. The works are due to start in September and will take 6 weeks to complete.

The works will include installing larger gullies, Texture Blasting the subway floor, placing visibility strips on the steps, replacing all of the handrails, repainting of the parapet railings, cleaning the walls, retiling the subway with granite tiles and painting of the ceiling. Pedestrians will be able to use the subways during the majority of the works. Any closures will be kept to a minimum and overnight to reduce disruption to pedestrians.

The pumps are serviced annually and the next service is planned in for July 2017. If any issues arise then we will carry out any required maintenance at the same time as the upgrade works. Following last years' service there are no outstanding issues.

Maidstone Borough Council cleans the subways and tow paths on a regular basis.

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**Question by Antony Hook to Matthew Balfour,
Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation & Waste**

The proposed scheme for 20mph speed limits on many streets in Faversham, which received unanimous support of Faversham Town Council and Swale Borough Council's Joint Transportation Board was due to have a report from KCC at the March JTB.

Given the importance of the scheme to the residents of Faversham can I seek assurance that the Council shall provide a positive response by the next JTB in June?

Answer

Kent County Council is fully aware of the importance of this scheme to the residents of Faversham. I can confirm that, as requested, officers will be assessing the schemes in terms of both technical appropriateness and safety and will provide a response to the Swale Joint Transportation Board in June. Funding will of course be an issue and this will need to be explored further.

