

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

10 December 2009

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

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please be kind enough to seek an explanation as to why there is a gap in traffic enforcement between Districts and Kent Police?

My question to Mr Chard is: "If through his good offices to seek out if it would be possible for the Canterbury CEO's (City Enforcement Officers) to undertake the enforcement of minor penalty traffic tickets such as parking in and on restricted areas such as Double Yellow Lines. Minor offences such as this are at this time under the jurisdiction of Kent Police. However the Police say they have insufficient manpower to enforce these minor infringements whereas the City Enforcement Officers are on the spot and can and are willing to undertake this duty. May I therefore ask that some debate is undertaken between KCC, CCC and Kent Police to see if it would be possible for this change to take place?"

Answer

Canterbury City Council, have a very proactive parking enforcement unit, and look at new ways of working more efficiently. They focus on town and city centres where there is a concentration of obstructive parking and congestion.

In Whitstable, they have been patrolling the High Street more often to ease the congestion in the area for public transport to run reliable services, however this takes manpower away from other duties in the area.

Since the introduction of the Traffic Management Act 2004, a number of parking offences have been passed to the district parking services for enforcement or in other cases both the district parking services and the police share the responsibility.

Although it is the districts responsibility to enforce double yellow lines, they do not have the man power to do all of them every day. We can gain the agreement and support of both services, however the day to day operations remains with local districts to organise.

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**Question by Mr W Richardson to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste**

After the Government's decision to leave Dungeness out of the proposed new sites for a new power station, will Kent County Council support the people of Romney Marsh in getting this decision reversed?

Answer

In January 2008 the Government's White Paper on Nuclear Power confirmed that new nuclear power stations should have a role to play in the country's future energy mix alongside other low carbon sources.

Eleven sites were nominated including Dungeness, all nominations involve locations where existing nuclear power stations are located.

Government's preliminary conclusion is that all of the nominated sites, with the exception of Dungeness, are potentially suitable for new nuclear power stations.

Government is not satisfied that a new nuclear power station could be built at Dungeness without causing an adverse effect on the integrity of a European site.

I support the local community who are concerned for the 500 people who would be employed at the site and the some 4000 who would be employed in the construction phase.

KCC will examine closely the basis of the Government's objection to Dungeness and intends to submit a full response to the White Paper's proposals.

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**Question by Mrs T Dean to the
Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education**

Will the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education please explain why 28.5% of children in the year 6 cohort entered grammar schools in Kent in September 2009 in comparison with county norm of 25%?

Answer

My figures show that a fraction over 25% of Kent children in selective areas entered Kent grammar schools in Year 6 in September 2009. This is in line with our agreed admissions policy.

The threshold for the test taken in September 2008 was 20.86% of the Year 6 cohort in selective areas. The next stage in the process was the Head Teacher assessment. Panels of head teachers look closely at the cases of children who – though they do not have qualifying scores - may nevertheless be best placed in a grammar school. The Local Authority does not limit the discretion of these panels and, in September 2008 – the first year when testing was brought forward from January – a higher number of referrals went to the panels and more assessments than usual were revised, bringing the proportion of the cohort in selective areas assessed suitable for grammar school to 26.19%.

Then the oversubscription criteria of grammar schools determine which of the eligible applicants are offered places. Access to an Independent Appeal Panel is a statutory right if parents are not offered the school they want for their child. This is a right in respect of all schools, not just selective ones, and 4 out of 5 of our most oversubscribed schools on first preference are not selective! Independent Appeal Panels may use their legal power to require the schools to admit additional pupils if they feel strongly that the benefit to the individual child outweighs the possible disadvantage to the school.

From this answer Mrs Dean will see that, despite two stages of independent appeal, we manage to keep very close to the 25%.

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**Question by Mr M Robertson to the
Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste**

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste please advise the County Council if he will take the opportunity offered by next year's break clause of the contract between Kent Highways Services and Jacobs to fully investigate all options on how to deliver Highways Services in future to a high standard and the lowest cost to KCC?

Answer

Yes. I am currently looking at the future of the contractual arrangements the County Council has with all its main highways supply chain partners - not just Jacobs. Decisions on what arrangements are best for the County Council will be made next year.

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**Question by Mr I Chittenden to the
Leader of the Council**

Will the Leader of the Council please advise the County Council when this Council will have the opportunity to debate the review of Kent TV and vote on the continuation of the internet TV channel? Will he also advise the Council what was the process for selecting CapGemini to carry out the evaluation of KentTV's first two years?

Answer

The Corporate Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee debated the review of Kent TV on November 13th where CapGemini were present to answer questions. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group was part of that debate.

CapGemini have expertise in this area, as demonstrated by Nigel Waterston, the Commercial Director who undertook the review and presented at the Corporate Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The cost of the review was below the level that would require a formal tender process.

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**Question by Mr T Prater to the
Cabinet Member for Corporate Support Services
and Performance Management**

Will the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support Services and Performance Management please advise over the last five years how many people and what value has this Council offered an exit package to avoid the possibility of an unfair dismissal claim? If the individual settlements are confidential can the Leader provide the total sum spent in this way.

Answer

As Mr Prater notes in his question, it is not possible to refer to individual cases in my response as these are covered by confidentiality agreements. The question asks about the number of settlements made to “avoid the possibility of an unfair dismissal claim”. I have included in my response all Compromise Agreements reached by the County Council, as these legislate against unfair dismissal claims being made in all cases. As noted in the Compromise agreement protocols which have been discussed at Personnel Committee recently, “a compromise agreement represents an alternative route for both an employer and employee to going through a formal staff procedure that is, or may expected to be, particularly problematic”. Entering into a compromise agreement does not imply that the authority has failed in its responsibilities or processes and so the total of compromise agreements entered into does not represent actions taken “to avoid the possibility of an unfair dismissal claim.” There have been 54 compromise agreements over the last 5 years with a total cost of payments made through the payroll over those 5 years of £1,703,037. This represents a small number of cases when put in the context of the total non schools workforce of circa 14,000. It represents an average cost of just over £31,500, which compares with all-in annual costs per employee per year of £34,000. The compromise agreement protocols, which are already being followed, lay down clear guidelines on the process to be applied before any payment can be made in these cases. This includes referring all cases of significant value to the Audit Commission. Mr Prater will be aware that the protocols around this inevitably sensitive issue are due to be discussed again at the next Personnel Committee in January, and I very much look forward to our being able to examine it further.

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**Question by Mr G Koowaree to the
Leader of the Council**

Will the Leader of the Council please inform the County Council when will the process of appointing a new Chief Executive commence?

Answer

A good deal of preparatory work has already been done to define the role and person specification. An advertisement will appear early in the New Year at which time a full executive search process will also commence. It is intended to hold the final Personnel Committee interviews at the end of February.

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

There is a report that SEEDA is withdrawing its funding for Cultural purposes in Kent.

In view of the fact that this County has such an enormous output in Heritage and Cultural terms with its many attractions, museums, orchestras, choirs, music schools, art galleries (even before Turner) and important national and international collections which need to be maintained and fostered, would the Cabinet Member for Communities please tell me what action he has taken or is to take to plead the need for continuing SEEDA Cultural Grant support?

Answer

The South East Economic Development Agency (SEEDA) has confirmed that they will in future assist a smaller number of culture related projects. This is as a result of a rationalisation of functions in response to an 18.5% reduction in their resources over the next two years. The change of policy is region-wide and not specific to Kent.

KCC were not consulted on this change. However, we have responded by looking for new ways of working with SEEDA to maintain the relationship and I can confirm that all existing commitments will be honoured. In particular, the capital funding committed to the New Marlowe Theatre and Turner Contemporary is not under threat.