

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 23 May 2024

Question by Ms Susan Carey to Mr Neil Baker
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

Question

Most modern cars display the speed limit on their dashboard and also alert motorists to roadworks and alert them to fixed speed cameras. As the technology clearly exists to provide such information it should also be possible for motorists to be alerted that they are approaching a school. Could the Cabinet Member approach the satnav providers to see if they would consider adding this information to their systems so that motorists are prompted to pay special attention to the special traffic risks near schools?

Answer

I concur with Miss Carey's observations that in-car technologies are constantly evolving and welcome her idea as a way to inform motorists of an upcoming school when drivers are following in-vehicle satnavs. I will instruct officers to make the request to the main satnav providers although as commercial companies the decision is ultimately theirs, as to what information their systems and service display or alerts drivers to.

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**Question by Mike Sole to Rob Thomas,
Cabinet Member for Environment**

In the last year Southern Water released raw sewerage into waterways for 317,285 hours, a 116% rise on the previous year. Southern Water have told this council of their plans to reduce storm overflow discharges by 80% by 2030. However rather than moving towards this target, their performance continues to worsen, leaving our rivers and coasts polluted with filth.

Would the Cabinet Member please explain what this council is doing in relation to the water companies that operate in Kent to tackle these problems? In answering, can the Cabinet Member comment on whether they think that Southern Water will meet their targets?

Answer

We have noted the raw sewage discharges from Southern Water's sewers in 2023 and the increase from 2022. 2023 was a much wetter year than 2022, which is likely to be a reason for this increase, though clearly raw sewage discharges like this need to become the exception rather than the rule, as they appear to be at present, and we hope Southern Water will make tangible progress on reductions in the near future. Also, the 2025-30 Southern Water business plans are due to be finalised by OFWAT next month.

KCC is keen to support Southern Water to reduce these discharges. Southern Water have been a regular attendee at the Kent Flood and Water Management Committee, chaired by Tony Hills, where they have given updates on their progress in delivering against their targets to reduce these discharges. One of the root causes of these discharges is surface water runoff entering foul and combined sewers, which can lead to the sewers being overwhelmed in heavy rainfall. KCC is working with Southern Water on a pilot programme to reduce highway runoff from the foul and combined sewer where it is practical, which is funded by Southern Water. If these pilots are successful, we expect they will lead to a larger, Southern Water funded programme of similar schemes across the county. Southern Water are also investigating reducing runoff from other sources, including roofs and disconnecting surface water sewers.

We hope these measures will be successful and will continue to work with and ask questions of Southern Water. The member is welcome to attend the Flood and Water Management Committee, where Southern Water regularly gives updates on this project and progress towards delivering their target. KCC is not in a position to comment on whether Southern Water will achieve this target.

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**Question by Barry Lewis to Rory Love,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

How many school children receive subsidised transport from KCC and how many children receive their Personal Transport Budget in Kent? Subsequently, how do these figures break down percentage-wise across Kent?

Answer

Kent currently has 1,164 pupils enrolled within the Personal Transport Budget (PTB) scheme to fulfil its statutory duty to provide transport to their place of learning. This accounts for 15.9% of the overall cohort of 7,308 pupils with special educational needs entitled to transport assistance. This cohort breaks down in the following way across Kent:

| Area | No. of students | % |
|-----------------------|------------------------|----------|
| Ashford | 99 | 8.5 |
| Canterbury | 142 | 12.2 |
| Dartford | 100 | 8.6 |
| Dover | 54 | 4.6 |
| Folkestone and Hythe | 68 | 5.8 |
| Gravesend | 77 | 6.6 |
| Maidstone | 114 | 9.8 |
| Sevenoaks | 97 | 8.3 |
| Swale | 159 | 13.7 |
| Thanet | 95 | 8.2 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 109 | 9.4 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 50 | 4.3 |
| | | |
| Totals | 1164 | 100 |

The total cohort making use of a Kent County Council subsidised scheme is 27,500, of which 20,400 have purchased a Kent Travel Saver Pass and 7,100 have the Kent 16+ Travel Saver Pass. Current recording does not enable these figures to be broken down by district.

To see the full picture of transport assistance provided by this Council, these figures should be taken in conjunction with the reply I gave Mr Lewis at the March Council meeting, when I reported that the number of children receiving fully council taxpayer-funded transport (both SEN and non-SEN, including PTBs) is estimated at an average of 14,180. In some cases this will involve the issuing of a Kent Travel Saver Pass.

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**Question by Richard Streatfeild to Neil Baker,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

While walking through Sevenoaks the other day I found a resident taking a photo of a pothole that was more than ankle deep. It had punctured two of her tyres, Thankfully that canyon has now been filled in but there are many more that have appeared. Are we winning the pothole blitz?

Answer

Achieving a completely pothole-free status is a challenging goal due to various factors such as weather conditions, traffic volume, and the natural wear and tear of road surfaces.

KCC is putting significant investment into potholes. Following a nine-year peak in pothole reports, we received an additional £8.6 million in government funding for the 2024 Pothole Blitz programme. This initiative is part of a long-term commitment, with the Government confirming future funding allocations for the next nine years to support similar scale programmes.

The Pothole Blitz Programme is concentrating on medium to large-scale resurfacing to provide permanent, first-time fixes and is additional to our planned maintenance programme.

KCC has engaged three dedicated contractors to ensure quality work with minimal disruption to the public. The roads selected for the project, categorized under individual districts, are detailed on the KCC website under the Pothole Blitz section.

Understanding the inconvenience caused by untreated potholes, KCC is focusing on local sites identified for repair that had not yet been addressed through other workstreams. So far, the project has resulted in 72,500.63 meters of patching work, filling 2,821 potholes, and conducting preventive works on additional sites.

While it may not be possible to completely eliminate potholes, the measures we are taking will lead to a substantial improvement in road quality and a reduction in the number of potholes over time.

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**Question by Antony Hook to Cllr Rory Love OBE,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skill**

Primary Schools are often a beating heart of a local neighbourhood. In Faversham, there is no primary school east of St Mary's in the town centre. As the town has expanded in recent years on all four sides, the absence of an eastern school has meant more families having to make longer journeys, making traffic busier for everyone and more children missing out on the benefits of being able to walk to school. Will the Cabinet Member, in a concise, to the point answer, tell the Council whether KCC will join me in supporting the creation of a primary school in eastern Faversham, and clarify whether this is dependent on whether or not the Duchy of Cornwall housing development also goes ahead?

Answer

Work has been taking place to assess current and future school place demand in the Faversham area through the annual formal review of the Kent Commissioning Plan. The current provision is meeting demand, but we are aware of potential housing developments in the area in the future. Proposals have been worked up for the expansion of St Mary of Charity CE Primary School to provide additional capacity closer to the emerging housing at Love Lane.

KCC's responses to Local Plans and individual planning applications always seek to ensure provision of primary school infrastructure that can be accessed sustainably. Apart from Love Lane, the majority of the development planned through Swale Borough Council's Local Plan is located to the west of the town, where provision is able to meet demand and do so sustainably.

The Duchy of Cornwall application includes the provision of a 3FE primary school based on the predicted future demand for places. KCC will certainly be working with the applicant to facilitate delivery of this infrastructure at the necessary point of need, should the application receive the relevant consents. Members will be aware that any new infrastructure provision requires key decisions, and such decisions would need to be supported by an appropriate business case.

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**Question by Ian Chittenden to Roger Gough,
Leader of Kent County Council**

The Leader may have noticed that at recent County Council meetings some Cabinet Members have given rambling answers to questions that have taken up in some cases five or six minutes to deliver, which is as long as Group Leaders get to reply on all topics to the Leaders Report.

Does the Leader agree that these answers have the appearance of filibustering to run down the clock and prevent more questions and supplementary questions being asked?

Answer

I don't accept the somewhat mischievous premise of the final part of Mr Chittenden's question, which is both unfair on Cabinet Members and does not acknowledge that Questions come from Members of all parties.

I do, however, agree that the question of length of answers, and of the balance between giving a comprehensive and a concise reply, has long proved difficult to get right. That was most clearly demonstrated at our most recent County Council, when an experiment in speeding the process up by the questioner simply stating the number of their question rather than reading it out, was unsuccessful.

After that meeting, and reflecting on my own experience both as a Cabinet Member and Leader, I decided that we needed a new approach. I have since issued a directive that no answer should be more than 300 words long; if it was considered beneficial to include additional information, this could be provided in supplementary written information. That is the approach that has been applied today and I hope that Mr Chittenden agrees, as do all Members, that this has been beneficial.

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Question by Chris Passmore to Mr Neil Baker
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

Can the Cabinet Member explain what work is done to monitor and track how children travel to school (in terms of walking, cycling, public transport or car) and can the Cabinet Member comment on what steps are being taken to increase the number of children walking or cycling to school?

Answer

Kent County Council maintains a comprehensive system for recording applicants for the Kent Travel Saver and the 16+ Travelcard, which includes details such as home address, school attended, and card type. This data is crucial for ensuring adequate capacity on the local bus network for students at the start of each school year.

The council also uses “Jambusters,” an online travel plan management system, to help schools create, store, and maintain School Travel Plans. These plans are essential for recording travel survey data, understanding the school’s environment, and setting targets for improving active and sustainable travel.

While participation in School Travel Plans is voluntary and not all schools may provide data, Kent County Council encourages schools to engage with the program and update their travel surveys annually.

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**Question by Jenni Hawkins to Sue Chandler,
Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

Many Youth Services who provided the Duke of Edinburgh scheme in Kent are currently struggling to replace lost funding since KCC ended its contracts with them for commissioned youth work. The news that KCC will no longer be supporting the Duke of Edinburgh Award in schools has come as another heavy blow to youth provision in Kent.

Could the Cabinet Member please explain how they expect young people to access the scheme and clarify what, if anything, KCC will be doing to support the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme in future?

Answer

Kent County Council (KCC) are committed to fulfilling existing obligations to support delivery of the Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Award. This includes honouring charters with SEND schools until they expire on 31 August 2024, and completing expeditions under other agreements that end 31 October 2024.

Until 31 August, SEND schools have access to a KCC DofE Field Officer to support them as detailed in the 'Charter.' This will assist those schools and their children, over the summer term and until the 31 August, to complete sectional activities; undertake expeditions; record evidence; input approvals on the e-DofE portal, and to receive Certificates of Achievement and/or full DofE Awards.

Some schools and partners, who operate as DofE 'Centres,' have staff undertaking the Lowland Expedition Leader course which is led by KCC's DofE Expedition Team. Until the end of October 2024, these partners will continue to be able to access support including an opportunity to complete their assessment to achieve their Leadership status, at the end of September. Candidates will be contacted directly by KCC's DofE team with details of that event.

Some SEND schools and partners are considering becoming licensed to deliver the awards themselves. The national DofE have asked those interested parties to contact Danielle Barron, Operations Manager – DofE England Danielle.Barron@DofE.org

Centres that do not wish to license themselves and have participants who are considering continuing with their programmes after 31st August, should direct their participants to alternative delivery partners such as Scouts, Cadets, Girl Guides. The KCC Field Officers are proactively supporting partners, including sharing those delivery options, and can be contacted directly or via dofe@kent.gov.uk.

The national DofE website provides a national map and contact details of all licensed organisations, DofE centres, and licensed Adventure Activity Providers (AAPs). <https://www.dofe.org/centres-map/>.

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**Question by Mark Hood to Rob Thomas,
Cabinet Member for Environment**

One of my residents has been in touch regarding the pledge being made by many councils across the UK regarding Mission Zero Coalition and UK100 who are calling on them to rise above party politics and support an evidence-based conversation on the issue by resisting the urge to drag climate policies into culture wars and use misinformation as a tool for division". My resident wants to know why Kent County Council is not included. Kent County Council is not a member of the UK100 which is committed to do everything within our power and influence to rapidly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and work with our residents and businesses to bring our wider communities' emissions in line with Net Zero as soon as possible"

Is there a reason we are not a member of UK100?

Answer

Kent County Council is aware of UK100's ambitions to enhance collaboration and knowledge exchange among its members to support their Net Zero targets and we are observing the outcomes of its initiatives, considering the adoption of any best practices developed. However, the council prefers a holistic approach to its own Net Zero journey, prioritising biodiversity and adaptation targets, which are not addressed in UK100's current ambitions. Consequently, Kent County Council has decided not to pledge support to UK100, choosing instead to allocate its resources to projects and activities that align with its own Net Zero goals within its existing strong partnerships.

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**Question by Mel Dawkins to Rob Thomas,
Cabinet Member for Environment**

As a climate emergency was declared in 2019 and following a recent cross party Member group meeting, can the Cabinet Member for Environment reassure the Council that the Cabinet and their respective deputies will be taking part in carbon literacy training as soon as possible?

Answer

In response to "Framing Kent's Future" policy and the environmental commitments outlined within it, Kent County Council has reviewed and enhanced its environmental training for all staff and elected members. The induction training has been improved to ensure a higher baseline of knowledge and awareness. Selected officers have been trained to provide carbon literacy training aimed at raising awareness of carbon costs and impacts of daily activities, as well as fostering the motivation to reduce emissions personally, communally, and organisationally. This carbon literacy training is being rolled out in stages to all staff and members of Kent County Council, with opportunities for anyone interested to participate.