

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 11 July 2019

**Question by Barry Lewis to Clair Bell,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that there is a correlation between poor public health and high unemployment?

Answer

Being in good work is better for your health than being out of work. 'Good work' is defined as having a safe and secure job with good working hours and conditions, supportive management and opportunities for training and development.

There is clear evidence that good work improves health and wellbeing across people's lives and protects against social exclusion. Conversely, unemployment is bad for health and wellbeing, as it is associated with an increased risk of early death and long-term ill health, including cardiovascular disease, poor mental health

Indeed, Sir Michael Marmot's strategic review of Health Inequalities, Fair Society Healthy Lives demonstrates the link but identifies the issue is more complex than a straightforward correlation. For example, insecure and poor-quality employment can be associated with increased risks of poor physical and mental health.

For many individuals, in particular those with long-term conditions such as mental health problems, musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions and disabilities, health issues can be a barrier to gaining and retaining employment.

Combined costs in the United Kingdom from worklessness and sickness absence amount to around £100 billion annually, so there is also a strong economic case for action. Addressing and removing health-related barriers requires collaborative work between partners from across the private, public and third sectors at both national and local level.

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**Question by Karen Constantine to Paul Carter,
Leader of the County Council and Cabinet Member for
Traded Services & Health Reform**

Child poverty is unchecked and growing in parts of Kent. Will the leader explain what targets KCC has put in place to mitigate the impact?

Answer

Most children and young people in Kent enjoy a happy and fulfilled childhood, with services supporting children that are making a positive difference to the lives of children in need and their families. For example, Kent's Early Years settings are currently judged by Ofsted at 98.2% good or Outstanding and continues to ensure that all children achieve a Good Level of Development and are school ready. Aligned to this, our Troubled Families Programme is nationally recognised as turning around a significantly greater proportion of our families compared to most local authorities (LAs) in the country. Our strong performance helped us to secure Earned Autonomy last April one of only 14 LAs to be granted this freedom. As part of ensuring young people in Kent have the most relevant skills, we are developing the Enterprise and Productivity Strategy to identify and build on priorities and actions linked to the Post-16 and Skills agenda.

However, there are some children and families experiencing disadvantage for a range of reasons and who may need an extra level of support. In Kent, as at February 2019, 51,365 children (16.1%) are living in poverty. This is just below the England average of 17.0%. Thanet and Swale account for more than a quarter (26.6%) of the children living in low income families in Kent.

KCC recognises that alleviating the worst effects of child poverty is tackled most effectively when actions are co-ordinated across a range of partners providing local services and undertaking initiatives together. Everyone must play a part in mitigating the impact of poverty - central Government / KCC / our Health partners / Charities / Schools / local communities and individual families must all work together.

I am therefore pleased to report that the 0-25 Health and Wellbeing Board will be considering an inter-agency draft Plan: 'Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Children in Kent' at a forthcoming meeting which will contain a comprehensive range of indicators and measures.

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**Question by Martin Whybrow to Eric Hotson,
Cabinet Member for Corporate and Democratic Services**

How has KCC property services/Gen2 and its main contractor, Amey, allowed the grade 2 listed Folkestone library building to fall into such a state of disrepair that it is forced to close every time there is a heavy period of rain and with resultant damage to the interior of the building, from top floor to basement and loss of services for residents? What steps are being taken to permanently rectify the situation and what are the timescales for this

Answer

Thank you for your question. Folkestone Library has unfortunately suffered from a leaking roof for some time. Our Facilities Management provider has been undertaking repairs which initially appeared to solve the problem. However, the recent heavy rains led to further water leaks from the roof causing internal damage to the fabric of the building.

The site has been prioritised for permanent repair as part of the council's modernisation of assets programme and intrusive surveys are underway to ensure the proposed scheme addresses all of the issues. You will appreciate that the Grade 2 listed status of the building and the shared infrastructure with the adjacent church are complicating factors that will need be addressed as part of the design work; however our heritage contractors are on standby to undertake the required works. In the meantime, further patch repairs have been undertaken and the ground floor of the library reopened to the public on 26 June following a closure of 14 days on health and safety grounds.

While the library was closed, the service offered extended opening hours at nearby Wood Avenue and Cheriton libraries. Birth and death registrations were moved to Hythe for the closure period and notice of marriage appointments moved to Wellington House, Canterbury so that alternatives were offered for all parts of the service.

Please be assured that KCC and its contractors are working to carry out the repairs as quickly as possible to enable full service to resume at the library at the earliest opportunity. The ground floor library is now open again as normal. While the first floor local studies and information space remains closed, we are in the process of bringing some of the most used parts of this collection downstairs for customers to use.

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**Question by Mr Chittenden to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste.**

I'd firstly like to thank the Cabinet Member for his response at the last County Council meeting regarding glyphosate-based weed killers. However, I still have significant concerns about the way this chemical is being used within Kent, particularly on roads and footpaths where it is being allowed to run-off into the water system. Indeed, the official product guidance for Roundup ProActive which is used by KCC states, '*keep out of drains, sewers, ditches and water ways.*' Other manufacturers of similar glyphosate-based weed killers refer to their product as hazardous waste and recommend even more stringent controls.

The number of successful lawsuits relating to glyphosate is ever-increasing and past experiences from asbestos and DDT have demonstrated that legislators are often far too slow to react when faced with conflicting commercial interests. KCC as a local authority has a responsibility to guard against damage to our eco-systems and to mitigate health risks to its residents wherever possible. I therefore put it to the Cabinet Member, will he urgently reconsider the council's position on glyphosate usage?

Answer

Thank you, Mr Chittenden. As stated in my previous response, in the UK, glyphosate is approved by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for use on hard surfaces and amenity areas and we follow the guidelines of the HSE when treating weeds.

Glyphosate Biactive is specified within the current highway contracts and is used to spot treat weeds within these hard surfaces. The contract specifies that the product should not be applied during rain or in a manner that will cause it to reach the water system.

Glyphosate is the most cost effective and efficient way of controlling weeds within KCC's highways, estates and green spaces. To remove it would increase the cost of preserving the integrity of our assets and meeting statutory requirements significantly.

However, I fully understand residents' concerns over glyphosates use and I have therefore asked our highways team to take a further look at the feasibility of alternative technologies and report back to me with their findings.

As a County Council we will of course also continue to focus on minimising Glyphosate use where we can in line with current best practice guidelines.

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**Question by Andrew Bowles to Roger Gough,
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education**

Due to my regular involvement in transport appeals, I have had an insight to the changing environment across Kent regarding home to school transport. Please can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education confirm when the policy will be looked at to explore opportunities to embed recent learning into the policy for the forthcoming year's appeals

Answer

There has been no change in Transport legislation for a number of years. Kent's current transport policy serves the county well, complements the many discretionary transport schemes and has remained unchanged since 2011. I am however mindful that despite policy remaining consistent, improvements in technology and GIS mapping software have meant that far more accurate and automated distancing is now in use and in some instances this has led to schools which were once identified as the nearest appropriate for transport purposes no longer being the case.

This has given particular rise for concern in relation to schools which are outside of the county boundary, but our policy, which reflects legislation must not disregard a school because it is located on the other side of an administrative boundary. Every effort is made in our published transport information to highlight to those families living close to the county border that their nearest school may be outside of Kent. It is the case that many Kent children have attended their nearest out of county schools, such as Oxted and Sackville in East Sussex for a number of years. However more recently, Rye College has proven to be the nearest appropriate school for some communities in the South of the county, as indeed have some Medway schools for a small proportion of Kent children to the North. With these positive developments in technology, occasions have arisen in recent years where we have felt parents had a reasonable expectation at the time of making school choices that transport would be available to what they understood to be their nearest school for transport purposes. However, these cases have been widely publicised and we expect a consistent application of the policy going forward without exception.

Our Home to School Transport Guidance is available to parents online and is updated regularly. We will continue to examine the experience of parents and of the Appeals Panel in reviewing the policy, and I would suggest that Mr Bowles, as Chairman of the Panel, meets with Mr Bagshaw and me at the earliest opportunity to discuss this.

The GIS enabled software which now also links to the school admission database is far superior to the previous system and officers continue to push to develop the functionality of these systems further so that in the future there can be the possibility of the nearest school for transport purposes being identified at the time of making a school application.

The timescales for producing such a public facing transport system is in the hands of our software developers but we will continue to make a case for this to be a focus of their activity ahead of other projects they may consider a priority.

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**Question by Rob Bird to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste**

Following the news that Manston Airport is to be imminently sold to a group which plans to reopen it as an airport, could the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste please clarify what implications this will have on the contingency arrangements for the site to be used as a lorry park in the event of a no-deal Brexit?

Answer

The Department for Transport has given assurances to KCC there will no implications. Our understanding is that as a condition of the sale there are contractual obligations placed upon the new owners to lease back for a nominal consideration the site to the existing owners to carry out their contractual obligations with the Department for Transport (DfT).

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**Question by Paul Bartlett to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste**

Ashford has been given the green light from the DoT to charge additional fines to UK and foreign lorries who park illegally on Ashford's street. Does the Portfolio holder agree this approach to fine both overseas and UK lorries should be applied by the Police to all speeding and tailgating lorries on the M20 section restricted from stack? It is disgraceful that foreign lorry drivers can ignore moving traffic laws at will and is not in the spirit of a level playing field with Europe.

Answer

Thank you, Mr Bartlett. Yes, I agree. Kent County Council is fully aware of the concerns regarding the safety of people using the M20 contraflow between junctions 9 & 8 on the M20. These concerns are heightened due to a number of foreign vehicles ignoring the 50mph temporary speed limit. I agree that there should be a system in place whereby foreign drivers breaking the speed limit are fined and therefore not able to go on ignoring the speed limit which we have raised with both the Police, the Transport Minister and Highways England.

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**Question by Séan Holden to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste**

There were nearly 5,000 road closures in Kent in 2018 -19. One for every single mile of our roads. Everyone feels there are far more than ever. They are right. Our Highways Department confirms an increase of 21% to 4,755 this year over last year and a massive 44% on three years ago.

These closures hugely disrupt communities. They can destroy businesses with drastic loss of footfall as they did in Cranbrook in 2014. Mr Hill and I have been dealing with a proposed 11 week closure of Rye Road, in our divisions, with 18 mile diversions, blocking off the whole summer-season, visitor economy from the A21 to the sea.

Are these increases due to a policy change to suit contractors because it's easier and cheaper for them to close a road rather than keep it partly open and plan closures on days only when they are absolutely necessary?

Answer

There has been no policy change in the way Temporary Road Closures are managed and I want to assure members that closures are avoided if at all possible.

There has been an increase in economic activity in Kent, including housing development, which requires utility companies to upgrade or, in some cases replace their pipes, cables and other assets to maintain to industry or safety standards. For historical reasons, many of these utilities lie under our roads and footways.

KCC's own investment to improve internet speeds and repair roads, as part of the pothole blitz, for example, can also require closures, and I accept this adds to the frustration of residents, businesses and visitors.

KCC works with utilities to minimise the effects of all closures on communities, and in the example cited by Mr Holden, officers were able to negotiate a reduction in the length of the proposed closure from 11 weeks to five weeks. I am pleased to report this has been further reduced by SGN and the road should be reopened tomorrow (Friday 12 July) to the real benefit of local people and local businesses during the busiest time for tourism and farming in the area.

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**Question by Dan Daley to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste**

After a major sinkhole less than a mile away on the adjoining Tonbridge Road caused closures for a period of 5 months last year. Many residents are becoming increasingly concerned that more sinkholes could yet appear in the area. Could the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste confirm whether KCC has access to Lidar technology, or other similar means of identifying potential geological weaknesses and faults on its roads? If so, is this being proactively used to try and detect possible sinkholes before they emerge?

Answer

The Highways department is aware of LIDAR technology and reviews this and other technologies to see whether they can provide benefit to highways management in the county.

Whilst LIDAR provides some benefits in understanding topography, because sinkholes usually appear extremely quickly, sometimes within hours, there is no guarantee they would be identified any quicker by a LIDAR survey.

The Highways department has operational procedures in place that enable teams to mobilise quickly to respond to any highway collapse or defect. This approach is cost-effective in terms of both efficiency and effective service delivery.

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**Question by Ida Linfield to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste**

I know that the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste will be as deeply concerned as I was on reading the statistics from by Brake, the independent road safety charity. Kent has the worst record for child casualties in the entire country with 681 children hurt on roads in Kent and Medway last year - including one near fatal accident involving a 10-year-old child in my division. That is nearly 300 more than the next authority. This represents a rise of 21% over two years. During the same period, KCC's own statistics show that the estimated rise in the total population of Kent & Medway was a mere 1.9%.

I'm sure that the Cabinet Member is also aware that according to data from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Kent has the sixth lowest expenditure per capita on Highways and Transport out of all county council authorities in England which must obviously impact the safety of our roads.

I'm also sure that the Cabinet Member must already be involved in remedying this shameful safety record. So, can he please tell us what are KCC's new plans in light of the Brake report; what extra finance has now been identified and when will the actual work start to make Kent's roads safe again?

Answer

I share your concern for any recorded injuries on the roads of Kent. Clearly any injury to a road user, be they child or adult, is a tragic event.

The BRAKE data covers fatal, serious and slight child injuries across all roads in the Kent and Medway Council areas including those managed by Highways England.

Of the 681 injuries reported the figure for Kent excluding Medway was 554. Of these, there were no fatal incidents, and 54 were reported as serious, which is defined as requiring hospital treatment.

The 2018 data we hold which has not yet been validated, shows a 12% reduction in child casualties (under 16s) compared to 2017.

I agree with the member that we must continue to aim to reduce the number of young people involved in traffic accidents on Kent's roads. We will continue to work closely with the Casualty Reduction Team, Kent Fire and Rescue and Police to make Kent's roads safer.

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**Question by Dr Lauren Sullivan to Mike Whiting,
Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste**

For some time KCC has used a 'intervene only after an accident approach' to Highway Safety and relies on accident statistics rather than local knowledge or the more preferable preventative approach to accidents potentially saving life's in advance of a fatality or injury. With this preventative approach in mind and indeed even relying on the current out of date and disgraceful criteria currently in place from this Administration, when will my local residents see more safety measures on roads such as London Road by The Hill in my division?

Given the recent tragic deaths along London Road, when will KCC intervene and install speed cameras and 20 mph zones outside the two primary schools in this stretch of road to prevent future injuries?

Answer

Thank you for question Dr. Sullivan. I am truly sorry to hear about these tragic deaths and I extend my condolences to families and friends of those involved.

In common with every Local Highway Authority in the country, the County Council uses an evidence-based approach to prioritise finite resources for road safety engineering schemes. This allocates the budget for improvements to the network based on factual evidence rather than risk. This approach is not unique to this Administration or any of its' predecessors – it is universal practice throughout England.

However, like Dr Sullivan, I would like to understand how best we can better manage risk in an affordable and sustainable way. I am pleased, therefore, to be able to inform Dr Sullivan that Kent is the first Highway Authority in the country to begin risk-rating our major road network so that we are better placed to bid for more funding from the Government to make our highways safer. This work has been recognised in the House of Lords and the House of Commons and by the Department for Transport, and will be presented in due course at the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee

I would be pleased to meet with Dr Sullivan and officers to discuss how this approach might apply in her division and the specifics surrounding the situation in The Hill.