

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday, 9 February 2012**

**Question by Mike Harrison to**

**Graham Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

*"Further to Mr Gibbens very full answer to a similar question in December 2011 may I ask him to update we the Members on the present situation with both Care and Nursing Homes here in the county of Kent after the recent demise of the Southern Cross Group?"*

*Are we (KCC) taking up all of the many new spaces which are appearing and becoming available across the county through private enterprise? Also can he give us some idea as to the breakdown of Care as against Nursing beds there are in this ever increasing private sector. All of which leads to the final part of my question, has the loss of our (KCC) homes added to an increase burden to the residents of Kent with increased charges at these privately run homes?"*

*I am convinced that Mr Gibbens will as always have the residents of Kent close to his heart and to that end will he assure us all that every care will be taken to ensure the continued good care attention is taken of our ageing population?"*

**Response**

The situation regarding homes previously owned by Southern Cross Healthcare reached a satisfactory conclusion in late 2011, with any fears regarding potential closures or increased costs for people in Kent not materialising.

KCC funded placements in Southern Cross homes accounted for 8% of our total nursing home placements at the time of transition. Kent has a large and diverse social care market. We are able to provide choice to individuals in terms of care homes and are not reliant on a few large national care home companies.

In direct response to Mr Harrison's concerns:

- Kent has more registered care homes for older people than any other Local Authority in the South East with 229 Older Peoples Care Homes (without Nursing) and 93 Older Peoples Care Homes (with Nursing).
- The top ten largest providers of residential and nursing care in Kent account for approximately 30% of the places KCC purchases across a diverse market of over 650 care homes in the county (includes Learning Disability, Mental Health & Older People).
- Seven new Older People's homes have opened within KCC's boundaries over the past 2 years, chiefly with a Care Home (with Nursing) registration. All but one have applied for a contract with KCC.

- A comparison of the number of registered beds within these seven new establishments (379) against the number of KCC funded placements within these establishments (50) shows that KCC is only purchasing 13% of these newly available beds.
- Six KCC homes were closed as part of the modernisation of Older Persons provision and this was successfully completed by January 2012. All individuals were reassessed and found new services that meet their needs in locations that they wanted. The service users and their families received support in finding alternative services and continue to pay the same amount that they previously had. KCC has seen no evidence that private sector homes have increased their prices as a result of the closure of the KCC run homes.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 9 February 2012**

**Question by Steve Manion to**

**Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste**

Every since the inception of the Member Highway Fund a huge amount of 'Good Things' have taken place in and about the County in connection to both major and minor works on the counties Footways & Highways.

Many, many small works have been funded by local members and in other cases members have pooled their resources and carried major tasks including local bus services. Maybe just maybe most of which would not have been done had we not had the MHF to call upon.

Taking all of this into account my question to Mr Sweetland and his excellent officer team why oh why does it take so long for monies to transfer from request to completion? Much of the good will generated from funding these projects is lost when it takes so long to action them.

**Response**

Chairman, I would like to thank Mr Manion for raising this question as I know that his concerns are shared by several other Members.

For the majority of Members I believe the MHF has worked well and enabled them to prioritise highways work in their Divisions or have work carried out which would not normally be scheduled.

Since the inception of the scheme, Highways officers have dealt with 1,155 MHF applications from Members. Some Members have had over 30 schemes or projects designed and costed in that time and up until the start of this year some members had not used the MHF at all.

In the majority of cases the Fund has been very successful and welcomed by local communities.

For example, 34 major traffic calming and management schemes have been constructed and over £400,000 has been spent making changes to speed limits, which require substantially longer design and consultation periods.

There are currently over 700 live schemes being progressed, with every engineer dealing with an average of over 70 MHF schemes each.

Members will know that there is no "rollover" of funds from this financial year to next year. This is to ensure that monies allocated in previous years are spent. Because of this, £3.4 million of applications have been processed by officers in the last 6 months.

Chairman, a full summary report on the Member Highway Fund is currently being prepared and with agreement of the POSC Chairman, it will be presented to EHW POSC on the 14th March. At that meeting I will seek advice from POSC Members (including Mr Manion) on what changes need to be made to the scheme to ensure that it runs efficiently for every Member and continues to deliver on its objectives and provide value for money solutions to 'local' Highways related needs.

Chairman, I'm sure Members will be pleased, that later this morning, I will confirm that the MHF will be continuing and £2.1M will be allocated to the fund in 2012/13.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 9 February 2012**

**Question by Ian Chittenden to**

**Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer & Communities**

The proposed cuts to the youth budget could have a serious effect on young people, families and other citizens. Prior to the commissioning process starting with these reduced funds, Locality Boards in their various formats are being asked to meet and make a decision by the end of March on the way forward for their local Youth Service.

In keeping with the spirit of Open Government and KCC's own Customer Service Strategy statements *'that we are looking at the way we treat our customers ... put them first when we design our services ... to increase confidence in what we do'*\*, will the Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities:-

- a) tell the Council how many Locality Boards have terms of reference and have met more than once, in public, with public access to the agenda, the meeting and minutes;
- b) ensure these critical meetings of the Locality Boards where the future of the Youth Service will be discussed will be open to the public, promoted & advertised in advance and webcast so individuals who are unable to attend can see or review the debate? and
- c) say what arrangements are to be made for those Boroughs where no Locality Board meeting these requirements of openness and transparency exist?

\* Customer Service Theme One: Understanding Our Customer Statement in Full: *'We're looking at the way we treat our customers, so that we put them first when we design our services. Our purpose is to increase satisfaction with our services and confidence in what we do'*.

**Answer**

- a) To date nine Locality Boards have met. All Locality Boards are required to have Terms of Reference and those which have met have either adopted or have draft Terms of Reference. At present Locality Boards are informal advisory bodies able to discuss matters of mutual interest concerning the District and KCC - as such there is no formal requirement for them to meet in public nor to provide public access to the minutes, agendas etc. However, two Locality Boards (Gravesham and Swale) do make their minutes and agenda available on the District websites.
- b) Locality Boards are not open to the public, and no arrangements are in place for their work to be webcast.

- c) A number of Districts/Boroughs are still working to establish Locality Boards in partnership with KCC. In these cases, the intention is to establish ad hoc Member groups [comprising District and KCC membership] to enable discussions to take place on specific issues.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 9 February 2012**

**Question by Martin Vye to**

**Alex King, Cabinet Member for Democracy and Partnerships**

*'Greater transparency and openness, making the decision making process more inclusive, robust and accessible' and 'greater accountability of decision makers' are two of the nine key objectives of our new hybrid model of governance\*.*

Will the Cabinet Member for Democracy and Partnerships agree that modern technology makes it possible to actively engage Kent's citizens to participate to an unprecedented degree in both our pre-scrutiny and our evaluation of policies that affect their services; and will he request officers to explore, including costings and timescales, ways in which electronic public engagement could be achieved at all Cabinet Committees and present their report to the next County Council on 29 March for discussion, approval and endorsement, to make Kent a leader in democratic engagement?

\* The key objectives of the new hybrid model of governance <http://bit.ly/wweah7>

**Response**

The increasing use of social media and online forums gives new opportunities. Webcasting many meetings puts KCC in the forefront of innovative practice in this area. When the new governance arrangements come into force we will evaluate what works best for public understanding and participation.

Our community engagement team will also be piloting social media networks at a more local level during 2012, with the aim of giving a platform for local people to tell us what matters to them and what local priorities should be. This will be in support of the joint district/county locality boards currently being set up across Kent.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 9 February 2012**

**Question by Carole Waters to**

**Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste**

Kent is very fortunate to have the recognised brand 'The Garden of England'. Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that we should emblazon this on our highways signage throughout Kent?

**Response**

I certainly agree that Kent is very fortunate to be known as the 'The Garden of England' and we should promote this unique identity.

I have explored the legality of Mrs Walters' suggestion and can advise that, whilst the regulations do not permit this type of branding on advanced directional road signs, we can include the words "Welcome to Kent - the Garden of England" on all new and replacement boundary signs, in support of the Kent economy and promotion of the County.

However Chairman, I would like to gauge the views of Members on this suggestion and if there is general agreement, I shall instruct officers accordingly.



**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 9 February 2012**

**Question by Trudy Dean to**

**Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer & Communities**

Will the portfolio holder for Customer & Communities please state:

- a) how much the County Council has spent in both capital and revenue on the creation and the ongoing running costs to the 31 March 2012 for the Gateway centres;
- b) what evidence exists that the Gateway programme has reduced the costs of the County Council either by closing other outlets, or reducing transactional costs; and
- c) if there is any evidence, since we started the programme of building Gateways, that the number of people accessing our services (via the Gateways) has increased and if so by how many numerically and in percentage terms?

**Answer**

In the 5 years since this programme began, Gateway has achieved national recognition and is regarded as an exemplar of public sector customer service.

- a) Capital, Revenue and ongoing costs
  - i) The total capital spend between April 2008 to March 2012 on the Gateway programme is **£4.6m**. This figure is net of capital contributions made by external partners.
  - ii) The total Gateway revenue expenditure between April 2008 and March 2012 is **£5.8m** which covers the costs of the small strategic management team, 9 live projects (front-line staff and shared premises), two Gateway mobiles and the Customer Insight programme.
  - iii) The ongoing running costs of the current network - **£2.2million** pa (as above).
- b) In relation to reduced costs by closing outlets or reducing transactional costs  
....
  - i) To date service consolidation with the Gateway programme has led to the closure of the Park Mall Gateway; of Associate House; and of the Day Opportunity Centre in Ashford. These have capital receipts and reduced lease costs attached to them. In Sheerness with the opening of the Sheerness Gateway the Skills Plus Centre and the Library are now surplus

to requirements. It is worth noting too that the Gateway network is central to the FSC personalisation agenda providing Health and Occupational Therapy assessments at reduced transactional costs. Transactional costs and all costs are being examined closely in the context of the new Customer Service Strategy and the Make Buy Sell review of the Gateway operation.

The Gateway Programme, along with Contact Centre are the first services to be the subject of formal 'Make Buy Sell Reviews'. The review will consider all options for the Gateway Programme including medium and long term improvements and will focus on value for money in conjunction with the scope of service and its partnership arrangements. It will clarify income and expenditure for the Gateway Programme and will consider the evidence on overall and transaction costs.

The review on the Gateways Programme will be reporting early in the new financial year.

- c) The Gateway programme has grown incrementally and is now nearing completion.

The following figures set out the comparative activity data for all customers served. It relates to the opening of new Gateway's and reflects the impact of the recession and breadth and relevance of accessible services.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Gateway locations</b>	<b>Number of Customer Transactions</b>	<b>Growth as a percentage on previous year</b>
<b>2009</b>	7	183,527	
<b>2010</b>	8	409,356	123.0%
<b>2011</b>	9	687,840	68.0%
<b>2012</b>	10	Estimate 1,200,000	74.5%

The number of customer transactions had grown from 183,000 in 2009 to 687,000 last year an increase of 504,000 or 375%.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday, 9 February 2012**

**Question by George Koowaree to**

**Graham Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

*"Along with increasing the Blue Badge issue fee from £2.00 to £10.00 KCC has restricted payment to 'payable by cheque only'\* - there is no longer provision for applicants to pay by any other payment methods (i.e. postal order, debit card etc.); will the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health inform this council:*

- a) *if he was aware that KCC had imposed this restrictive payment practice on some of our most vulnerable residents and is not enabling access to a range of cost effective payment methods for all and*
- b) *how disadvantaged individuals who qualify for a badge but do not have a cheque book (i.e. those with a basic bank account\*) are meant to pay for their blue badge?"*

\* Extract from blue badge application form <http://bit.ly/zKaD1V>

<p><b>Badge issue fee: £10. Payable by cheque only. Cheques need to be made payable to Kent County Council. This includes on-line applications.</b> Payment will only be taken if your application for a Blue Badge is successful. You will only be issued with a Blue Badge once your payment has been received.</p>
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\* With a basic bank account you do not get a cheque book, source: The Money Advice Service - Basic Bank Accounts Guide <http://bit.ly/AE93Fo>

**Response**

The National Blue Badge permit scheme has been subject to a wide range of reforms within the last year in order to increase scrutiny of application, security of badges, reduce fraud and help Local Authority schemes become self funding. The most recent changes occurred on 1 January 2012 seeing an increase in badge costs from £2 to £10. With such a successful scheme, subject to strict assessment criteria, it will be inevitable that some applications will not be successful.

The reason we withdrew accepting Postal Orders was due to the change in policy which came in from 1 January 2012 which means payment is only taken if an application is accepted. Returning a cheque is straightforward, as the applicant can destroy the cheque and no funds will be taken from their account. With Postal orders, fees are not refunded and the Post Office requires the original receipt to obtain a refund.

As a result of feedback from several applicants, and discussions with the Blue Badge Team, the process was amended on 31 January 2012 so that Postal Orders can be

accepted. All of the team that handle Blue Badge enquiries were made aware of this change late on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Our application form and frequently asked questions are currently being updated on [kent.gov](http://kent.gov).

We are asking anyone that chooses to pay by Postal Order, to ask the Post Office when they are purchasing their postal order, how to get a refund if necessary. If their application is declined, their postal order will be returned to them.

We are currently looking into card payments options through the national online blue badge system. Once this has been developed and the Blue Badge Team has agreed a way forward, our website and application form will be updated as appropriate.

We are currently working with the Customer Relationship Team to plot The Customers Journey on Blue Badge Applications and will ensure we follow national guidelines in this regard. We will of course continue to ensure cost effective and efficient payment methods are explored and offer choice to Service Users.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**9 February 2012**

**Question by Tim Prater to**

**Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways & Waste**

Given the Government announcement of charging foreign lorry drivers to drive on our roads, and the long term stated aim by this Council of seeing such a scheme pay for a long term solution to Operation Stack, what reassurance has been received that Kent will see additional funding from this scheme to resolve Operation Stack and remove this long term burden on businesses, hauliers and residents?

**Response**

We greatly welcome the Government's recent announcement that they are to consult over the proposal to charge foreign heavy goods vehicles using UK roads, (in fact they are planning to charge all lorries but UK lorries will be able to claim a refund through reduced road tax).

This is something which KCC has called for over many years. And as we made clear in our Growth without Gridlock transport strategy, we will seek a proportion of the revenue generated from this proposal to fund improvements and ensure greater resilience in Kent's strategic road infrastructure, including a long-term solution to Operation Stack, which as local Members will know, causes massive economic disruption to the county every time it is brought into use.

The Government forecast that from 2015/16, the scheme will generate net revenue of around £23M.

A significant percentage of the cost of the KCC solution to the problems caused by Operation Stack could be achieved from the revenue expected from the first year's charging of foreign lorries.

I have heard the Road's Minister recently assert that none of this money will be going to KCC. But the fact remains that 87% of all international road haulage that arrives in the UK, arrives via the Dover Strait and with the planned port development at both Dover and Calais and this figure will increase further.

Foreign lorries do not contribute a penny to the Treasury coffers, leaving the taxpayer (in particular Kent's council tax payers) to foot the bill for the external costs they cause. To compound the situation, foreign trucks fill up with diesel bought outside the UK, where fuel duty is far lower, so not only do they avoid contributing to the UK economy at the pumps, they also put UK hauliers at a massive commercial disadvantage. Clearly, ensuring that foreign lorries pay to use our roads is the right thing to do, after all many UK hauliers spend thousands every year on using roads in Europe via different road user charging schemes.

Therefore at our next meeting with Mike Penning the Road's Minister, which is scheduled in three weeks time, we will be submitting a robust case calling for Kent's share of these new revenues to mitigate the adverse impact that foreign lorries have on Kent's roads, Kent's residents and Kent's businesses.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 9 February 2012**

**Question by Dan Daley to**

**Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services**

*"Following the inspections by OFSTED during 2010, 2,600 children were identified as being without an allocated social worker. Will the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services please say:*

- a) *how many days or weeks since referral each of these children had to wait for a social worker to be allocated; and*
- b) *how many days or weeks since referral each child waited for an initial assessment to be made by the allocated worker?"*

**Answer**

I would like to thank Mr Daley for his question and I'm sure he shares my commitment to improving Children's Services. Many Members have increased their knowledge of Children's Services through membership of the Children's Services Improvement Panel, the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Shadow a Social Worker Scheme, corporate parenting training and Council meetings and briefings. It is vital that we all take our role as corporate parents seriously to ensure that Kent never again receives a poor OFSTED judgement for safeguarding the most vulnerable children in the county.

To provide the level of detail requested by Mr Daley about allocation timescales would necessitate extensive analysis and this has not been possible within the timescales set by democratic services. However, I can provide assurances that the concerns regarding unallocated cases is something that I have taken very seriously, having had this issue brought to my attention as a result of the review undertaken by Malcolm Newsam who was appointed at the Leader's direction as the Interim Corporate Director for Specialist Children's Services.

By February 2011, Mr Newsam had identified significant concerns about unallocated and un-assessed cases and about the backlog of work in the system and that some of these had been unallocated or un-assessed for many months. Action was taken immediately to address these concerns including ensuring that all looked after children and all those with a child protection plan were immediately allocated. Managers were also required to take action to ensure cases were assessed and allocated and to support this, additional resource was recruited by commissioning a peripatetic team to come into Kent to clear the backlog of un-assessed and unallocated work.

This work was effective in achieving the allocation and assessment of children's cases. By 8 May 2011, there were a total of 338 unallocated cases, 71 of which had

been unallocated for over 28 days. The backlog of the 2668 un-allocated cases had therefore been allocated by this time.

Members will also recall that since July 2011 the number of unallocated cases has consistently been fewer than 200, showing that in addition to having successfully addressed the concerns regarding unallocated case work, Children's Services are now allocating all new cases in a timely manner. The most recent unallocated case reporting supports this, with 61 cases unallocated as at the 29 January 2012, of which only 6 were unallocated for over 28 days.

In respect of timescales for carrying out initial assessments on unallocated cases, of the 2668 cases reviewed, 2021 cases had previously had an initial assessment, 1252 of these within 7 days of referral and 771 in more than 7 days. Subsequently, these cases had been held in a Team Leaders name pending allocation. A further 357 cases were referrals which had required the provision of information and advice only and therefore did not require allocation.

The final 259 unallocated cases in the cohort were more recent referrals that had not been assessed at the time the review was carried out and were waiting for the assessment to progress. Of these, 50 subsequently had an initial assessment within 7 days of the referral, 179 had an initial assessment more than 7 days after the referral and, for a variety of reasons such as subsequently being found to be requests for information or advice, 30 did not require an assessment to take place and led to no further action.



**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 9 February 2012**

**Question by Malcolm Robertson to**

**Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities**

*“Delivering the Customer Service Strategy will only be successful if we build trust and credibility for it among KCC staff, our customers and our partners ..... The success of the Customer Service Strategy depends on it being communicated to ensure that staff, customers and partners know about it, feel consulted about it and support it” (Customer Service Strategy, p.23).* Will the Cabinet Member for Customer & Communities inform this council how customers, Members, staff and our partners were consulted and fully participated in the drafting of the Customer Service Strategy and specifically their consideration of:

- a) the principles\* listed on page 2. of the strategy, and
- b) the five themes:
  1. Understanding our customers, p.7-8
  2. Connecting with our customers – effectively and efficiently, p. 9-13
  3. Empowering our staff to meet customer expectations, p. 14-16
  4. Providing excellent quality and value to customers through better designed service delivery, p. 17-20
  5. Improving customer experience working with our public service partners, p. 21-22

\*The Principles:

**We will treat all our customers:**

- with dignity and respect, keeping our promises, exceeding expectations wherever possible
- in a way that empowers them to take control and make informed choices
- fairly, offering transparent and easy to understand processes
- equally, providing a consistent customer experience regardless of how they choose to contact us

**We will continuously improve our services by:**

- understanding who uses our services
- using customer insight, consultation and customer experience surveys
- understanding the customer journey
- providing easy access to a wide range of services
- working with partners to join up services in a way that makes sense to our customers
- providing greater efficiency by sharing accommodation with our partners

**We will behave as one council by:**

- managing information and knowledge to remove duplication
- matching customer need with the appropriate response
- delivering value to the customer
- training our staff to a consistently high standard of customer service
- resolving customer queries at the first point of contact
- promoting channel migration to the most effective channel

## **Response**

The Customer Service Strategy has been developed in conjunction with customers, Members, staff and our partners and this is what we have done so far:

We have used the work we have already done in the Gateways, Contact Centre and Libraries as the main building blocks for the Customer Service Strategy. This will be an ongoing process as we build on information received through customer insight and customer journeys – this is information direct from our customers which will be used to continuously improve services for people in Kent.

We have established a Customer Relationship Team and they have already consulted with a wide range of people, including voluntary organisations and those representing minority groups.

Members have been involved with the Strategy and in January agreed it was ready to be shared more widely. As part of the ongoing process we will be taking the emerging strategy to the new Cabinet Committees during the next few months.

We have involved the full senior management team in KCC. The principles and themes of the new Customer Service Strategy came from the Challenger Group when we looked at their own experience of customer service and how it could be improved.

Consultation with staff is ongoing but we have already taken into account comments made by front line Library, Gateway and Contact Centre staff.

The Customer Relationship Team is talking to our partners and has already taken on board comments from the Police, Probation Service, District Councils and Public Health.

As part of normal KCC process an equality impact assessment has been carried out and is being used to inform current thinking behind the strategy.

The Strategy was launched to staff and members on 12 January 2012 using KNet and a series of road shows (28) will be taking place throughout the county during the next few months. The workshops will be based on a 'market place' concept to make sure we engage with and involve front line people.