

**COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Thursday 27 March 2014**

**Question by Martin Whybrow to  
Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development**

Has KCC, as reported in the local media, contributed any funds to the planned Remembrance Arch in Folkestone? If so, how much was the amount, at what Committee was it approved, and can Members be provided with the Minutes relating to the decision?

**Answer**

Thank you Mr Whybrow for asking this question. Before I provide the answer let me just explain to everybody here today the significance of this Memorial.

Kent played a critical role in both World Wars as the frontline County. It is fitting therefore that we support commemorations across the County and in particular the Memorial Arch in Folkestone, promoted by the Step Short charity. This Arch will, most certainly, be at the forefront of the nation's programme of commemorations on 4 August this year.

It will provide a lasting legacy to the many that left these shores from Folkestone and paid the ultimate sacrifice as it replaces the original, long since lost, Arch in Folkestone. It will be a new attraction and destination for everyone as an important and innovative learning tool for our children and a valuable tourism asset for Folkestone and Kent generally.

The visitor economy in Kent is worth £64m per annum and it supports around 64,000 jobs. The Memorial Arch will add to the overall offer for visitors to Folkestone and East Kent and, along with other historical monuments and attractions, it will help businesses locally to serve visitors who are keen to visit, learn and remember.

The cost of designing and building the Arch is in the region of £0.56m and KCC has committed £150,000 to the project. This was approved by the Director of Economic Development under delegated authority as it supports the visitor economy specifically and regeneration generally as defined in Bold Steps and the Economic Development Business Plan. Other contributors include Shepway District Council, the Roger De Haan Charitable Trust, Folkestone Town Council along with a range of other businesses and private and charitable parties. Lend Lease, are project managing the build and installation programme as their contribution to the overall initiative. Finally, there is a further cohort of people, especially those at Step Short, who have made significant, longer term contributions of their time, skills and passion to realise this once in a lifetime opportunity to ensure that Kent marks one of the very important roles it played in the First World War.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 27 March 2014**

**Question by Rob Bird to Paul Carter, Leader of the Council**

With reference to Maidstone Borough Council's Local Plan would the Leader please say:

- a) What the Borough Council need to do to make the new housing targets in their proposed Local Plan achievable and sustainable?
- b) What the implications would be if the housing targets are unrealistic and which Kent County Council is unable to support?
- c) What action is open to Kent County Council in the absence of an agreed Local Plan and Integrated Transport Strategy to ensure Kent's county town does not suffer from 20 years of planning decisions imposed by the Secretary of State?

**Answer**

Detailed consideration must be given to the extent of growth that the Maidstone area can sensibly accommodate. Everybody accepts there is a national housing shortage and we must allocate further space for economic growth. However, common sense must be applied in arriving at sensible housing numbers.

- a) To my mind, the Borough Council should reduce the quantum of housing proposed in their Local Plan down to circa 14,500/15,000 homes and choose locations with appropriate existing infrastructure to support growth, such as localities with good rail and road links and sufficient school accommodation.

For the sake of existing Kent residents, we should preserve the character of existing urban communities and villages, allowing residents to have a sense of pride in 'place'.

- b) If the housing targets are unrealistic and cannot be supported in infrastructure terms, Kent County Council may have no opportunity but to object to the Local Plan and launch a significant challenge at a public inquiry.
- c) In answer to Mr Bird's final question, there is no alternative but to get a sensible local plan adopted, which is achievable, deliverable, and sustainable. I will continue to focus my time and efforts in achieving this objective to benefit present and future Maidstone residents.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 27 March 2014**

**Question by Dan Daley to Paul Carter, Leader of the Council**

This winter we have witnessed the devastating impact of flooding across the county. This has had far-reaching economic, social and environmental consequences. With our climate appearing to become increasingly turbulent, there is an increasingly pressing need for better flood defence and mitigation to help vulnerable communities, including those neighbourhoods which have been exposed to localised flooding.

The Leader's commitment to find the partnership funding to match Government backing for new flood defence and mitigation works is warmly welcomed. It is nonetheless understood that, in order to attract Central Government funding, the proposed schemes will need to satisfy the Treasury's investment criteria. Will the Leader confirm that KCC will ensure that a comprehensive audit of all the recently flooded areas will be undertaken which takes into account all the financial, social and environmental impacts?

**Answer**

Having witnessed first-hand the devastating effect of the floods on local residents and business owners of Yalding over the Christmas break, I am committed to the investment in flood defences to prevent such extensive water damage reoccurring in the future, and the associated risk to loss of life.

I was therefore delighted to hear Danny Alexander say "there is plenty of money there to build new flood defence schemes" on his visit to Yalding in February and his commitment to "make sure there is no Treasury barrier".

My letter to him outlined Kent County Council's commitment to find 50% of the implementation costs of increasing the capacity at the Leigh Barrier, and creating a Lower Beult storage area, provided we have Central Government's commitment to pay the other half.

I am awaiting Danny Alexander's reply. I accept that, in order to attract Central Government funding, the proposed schemes will need to satisfy the Treasury's investment criteria, and we will commission the necessary work, including the appropriate audits, when we have arrived at a conclusion, working with the Environment Agency and other interested parties, as to what holds the best solution to mitigate the substantial risk of future flooding.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 27 March 2014**

**Question by Gordon Cowan to**

**Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education & Health Reform**

On the 25 February, 2014 Kent County Council announced the closure of the Chaucer School in Canterbury following days of speculation over its future, and despite the secondary school which was placed into special measures a year ago, having had a further monitoring inspection by Ofsted in November last year, which found that the school was "making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures". It is believed the school had a budget deficit of nearly £1million and that the school had to reduce its staffing levels because of the deficit, which then led to the closure of the school. It is not clear when the Cabinet Member knew that the school was in deficit or what he did to work with the school to reduce their deficit. It is also not clear when parents were notified of KCC's decision to close the school or whether the site will remain for educational purposes in the future. I wonder how many other schools in Kent have deficits and what the Cabinet Member is doing about those.

Can I therefore ask the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform for a detailed explanation of what he did and is doing in relation to these important matters?

**Answer**

The budget for Chaucer (excluding Post 16 provision) was £3.7m in 2013/14, falling to £2.7m in 2014/15 due to a reduction in pupil numbers. Had closure not been considered we would be presented with an untenable position from 2015/16 onwards as the school would be attracting a budget of less than £1m. It is not possible to run a secondary school with this level of funding and without action there would be an immediate detrimental impact on the quality of education provided for the pupils.

Current forecasts show that the school will end this financial year (2013/14) with a deficit of over £0.3m (revenue and capital combined) growing to £0.6m in 2014/15 and rising yet further to over £2m by 2015/16. Coupled with a falling roll this is not a financially viable position for any school.

When the 2012/13 accounts were closed in April 2013 the school ended the year with a deficit of £237k. As a result officers met with Governors, the DfE and Oasis Academy Trust (the prospective academy sponsors at the time) on 17 April 2013 to look at the financial position. Further detailed discussions ensued which left the authority with serious concerns over budget management and in May 2013 we issued a formal Notice of Concern requiring the school to take certain specific actions to bring the budget under greater control. Regular monitoring revealed that the school was not complying with the formal Notice and in November 2013 we formally

removed delegated powers from the Governing Body and seconded two members of staff from KCC Finance to work in the school.

It should be noted that in January 2013 the newly appointed Acting Principal of Chaucer did take action to try and balance the budget through a significant reduction in staffing. This management action in advance of the proposed move to academy status would have brought the budget back under control based on pupil numbers forecasted at that time. What could not have been anticipated when those savings measures were implemented was the scale of the continuing fall in roll which has now resulted in an untenable financial position.

National changes to school funding implemented in April 2013 have resulted in over 90% of school funding being derived from pupil numbers, compared to 71% in 2011/13. The significant decline in pupil numbers at Chaucer has therefore resulted in a corresponding decline in its revenue funding. Sadly it is now apparent that no amount of management action can mitigate the rapid and continuing loss in pupil numbers.

In following the statutory consultation process the Local Authority wrote to parents on 25th February 2014 to explain the proposals that were being brought forward. The Admissions team ensured a firm offer of an alternative school was provided to all parents with children in years 7, 8 and 9 on the announcement of the proposed closure and KCC continues to liaise with parents on securing places at alternative schools in the Canterbury area.

The Chaucer school site will remain operational until August 2015. It will then revert to the Local Authority's ownership and will be held for educational purposes within KCC's Property portfolio. Further analysis of future need will be undertaken to inform whether any part of the site can be disposed of or made available for alternative use. The LA is confident that future pupil number projections will not require another secondary school in Canterbury in the near future, and any small growth will be catered for by expanding provision in other local schools.

Changes to the national formula funding of schools, including the increase in the percentage of funding which is allocated to schools on the basis of pupil numbers, means that more schools are affected financially, and in a short space of time, where there is a reduction in pupil numbers. We are now working with a much more diverse and volatile system where individual schools can choose to expand. Consequently we currently have 17 schools and PRUs, with delegated budgets, which are forecast to end 2013/14 in deficit. Staff from the Schools Financial Services and School Improvement teams are working closely with them to agree a recovery plan over a period of usually no more than 3 years to recover their financial position whilst doing all we can to protect standards and the quality of education provided. These recovery plans are monitored on a monthly basis.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 27 March 2014**

**Question by Brian Clark to  
Gary Cooke, Cabinet Member for Corporate & Democratic Services**

KCC has recently undertaken a project to adapt a school to meet the special needs of a local pupil. A key part of the project was an item of furniture costing approximately £1000 which the school specified and provided KCC with a suitable supplier. The supply chain started with KCC engaging a preferred supplier who passed it on to a property company, who in turn passed it on to yet another property company, who ordered the wrong item, which brought about lengthy delays and frustration. Would the cabinet member agree that this is a costly way to do business?

**Answer**

I have been informed of the situation at South Borough and confirm that property have been working closely with you and all other stakeholders to ensure completion of this project.

The procurement of the work was through a framework in place for capital works via the Scape Framework with Kiers, who subsequently sub contracted to Spencer Francis - which meant significant reduction in procurement time. This is a common approach with building works and depending on the requirements of the project, the supply of specialist equipment may or may not form part of the build contract.

Although the building aspects of the project were delivered on time the problems experienced were mainly the delivery of the specialist bed, initially from an unclear specification of what was required. In this particular instance it was most unfortunate that the contractor made an error. Whilst we apologise for the delays that this has caused, I can confirm that the contractor has taken responsibility for its error and it is understood that the appropriate bed has now been supplied. Fortunately, this appears to be an isolated issue.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

**Thursday 27 March 2014**

**Question by Ian Chittenden to  
David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment**

The “Kent Traffic Counts Program”, cancelled in 2011, was set up by KCC to independently collect data to assist officers to make transport planning decisions, monitor effects of traffic and their patterns. Today this is monitored by developer reports with officers having little independent data to scrutinise their validity.

For example, serious questions have been raised about figures and the effect on the local road system reported by developers for a 220 home scheme in Boughton Lane, Maidstone.

We are now facing intense upward pressure on home building targets with 19,600 new homes under consideration for the county town alone. What action is KCC taking to check that developer information proves accurate?

**Answer**

KCC has the ability to ask our independent transport consultants to check and validate developer's datasets. This decision is made based on the type and nature of the likely traffic issues in the area due to proposed development. Asking independent consultants to review the datasets requires financial resources from KCC, so this practice is not followed for all situations. Otherwise, KCC has the expertise and local traffic knowledge to sense check the datasets and assumptions made by the developer in their traffic assessment report. As part of sense checking, KCC also requires from the developer the raw datasets and a data collection report. The data collection report should show whether the data has been collected by a competent survey company, when the data was collected, what were the weather and traffic (incidents) conditions at that time.