

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 September 2025

**Question by John Moreland to Linden Kemkaran,
Leader of the Council**

At our first Full Council on 22 May 2025, in the context of the village of Ashurst in my Division, I asked about funding and support for rural bus services and I raised concerns that rural communities were being abandoned. The Leader assured me "... I have a member of my team looking specifically at rural bus services because I do agree that they are absolutely vital to our rural communities".

Imagine my surprise when the Right Honourable Member for Clacton, somebody who has no standing in Kent or in its local governance, said on 8 July 2025 that conveying children with special educational needs and disability to school is a "parental responsibility". I wonder if this is the same attitude held toward parents in rural communities who are having to choose between working or taking their children to school because the previous KCC administration cut subsidies for bus transport? Since 22 May I've heard nothing further about the Leader's purported team member who was looking at rural bus services.

Shall I presume from this silence and from the comments made on 8 July that the Leader's boss sitting in Clacton has overruled any Executive plans on rural bus services and our rural Kent communities are, in fact, to be abandoned?

Answer

I thank my friend for the question, as I said before, rural buses are vitally important for the county and as such, important for KCC.

In order to protect these, our cabinet and deputy cabinet members for highways and transport, along with the brilliant team they work with, have looked at how our rural bus services can be protected.

As I'm sure you know, the bus services across Kent are mostly privately run, this gives us limited scope to be able to expand upon the services in place, especially, working with the budget that we have inherited.

This commercial model has been compromised in recent years through a combination of rising operator costs and reduced bus usage which makes it particularly challenging in rural areas where services attract lower passenger volumes

KCC has always been committed to supporting the bus network and continues to allocate over £5m p/a in support of the bus network, subsidising the routes that are not commercially viable for the operators.

We continue to support our Kent Karrier Dial-a-Ride services which provide less frequent but vital transport services for our rural communities, and we also work with the voluntary sector supporting them with grants.

We work closely with Kent's Bus Operators to find ways to protect and improve services but our ability to allocate more funding to rural services and the bus network as a whole will be dependent on future funding from Central Government.

Still, we would like to do more and have set out plans to improve the bus network in a range of ways through our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which forms part of our response to Government's National Bus Strategy.

That same BSIP has helped us save and protect 62 bus services that were cancelled by operators as they were no longer sustainable, and we will continue to do so for as long as that funding is there.

The Cabinet members are committed to searching for ways to improve these services and, just as importantly, protect the ones that were already at risk. Our rural communities will not be abandoned, despite the financial hardships we face, we are committed to helping those that need it.

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Question by Jeremy Eustace to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

Many Kent residents and parents have significant concerns about the implications of the Labour Government's decision to remove the VAT exemptions and apply business rates on Private Education. In addition to the challenge this presents to a number of hard working families, it also raises issues of demand management and supply of sufficient school places across the rest of the sector as more families have to move their children to different schools as a result, as well as the potential increases to home to school travel applications and ultimately decisions on placements as a whole.

Can the Cabinet Member for Education please advise whether she is concerned that this will have consequences for the education of children in Kent in the longer term, in the context of KCC's obligations around school place provision, SEND provision and school transport?

Answer

Thank you for raising this issue Jeremy, yet another smash and grab policy!

The Labour Government introduced a change to the VAT status of private schools, removing their exemption and applying the standard 20% VAT rate to education and boarding fees from 1 January 2025.

The Treasury estimates that the VAT policy will generate £1.7 billion annually by 2029–30. According to the Chancellor, all of this revenue will be reinvested into state schools to help recruit and retain teachers, improve facilities, and enhance support for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

However, the TaxPayers' Alliance has challenged these projections. Their analysis, based on a Saltus survey, suggests that if 26% of pupils leave the independent sector, the cost to the Treasury of educating these pupils in state schools could reach £1.1 billion. Under this scenario, 65% of the revenue raised would be offset by additional costs. Using more conservative estimates, they argue the policy could even result in a net loss of £150 million per year.

There is currently no legislation requiring the government to collect detailed data on the movement of pupils from private to state schools as a result of this policy. The Department for Education (DfE) has published figures showing that 11,000 fewer pupils were enrolled in private schools in January 2025 compared to the previous year—a 1.9% drop, which is significantly higher than the government's original estimate of 3,000 pupils transferring to the state sector. Critics, including the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), have described the policy as rushed and argue that the government has not adequately prepared for the potential resourcing needs in state schools.

In Kent, pupils attending independent schools represent approximately 8% of the total school population. This includes boarders and children from outside the county. The number of pupils who may leave the independent sector in Kent is uncertain, as it will depend on individual family circumstances. Some forecasts suggest a 2–5% decrease, which could equate to 380 to 950 pupils potentially seeking places in Kent state schools. However, this assumes all affected families remain in Kent, which is unlikely for boarders.

Kent's 591 state schools currently have capacity for around 270,000 pupils, with approximately 14,000 places unfilled. This is sufficient to absorb the upper-end estimate of pupils leaving the independent sector. However, KCC does not hold data on where these pupils live or their ages, so there may be localised mismatches between demand and available places.

Kent's school system is experienced in managing fluctuations in pupil numbers, such as accommodating Ukrainian refugees or pupils from closed independent schools. KCC will continue to monitor the situation closely. At present, there is no need for additional commissioning, but we remain alert to any emerging pressures, particularly where geographic or age-related mismatches may arise.

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Question by Nick Wibberley to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

There is an ever growing problem regarding available SEN school places in Kent but in my town, Ashford, there is a newly built school called Kings Park School which is a specialist SEN school with capacity for 40 children. They have been inspected by Ofsted, have all of the necessary provisions in place but they are missing an important aspect, children. The school is currently empty, with no indication from KCC of when pupils can enrol there. This is affecting several families within my constituency who are resorting to home schooling for their children.

Could the member for Education & Skills provide an update on Kings Park School and the wider plan for new SEN school places for the coming years?

Answer

Thank you, Nick, for your enquiry regarding SEND provision and how independent private schools, such as Kingshill, fit into the wider educational landscape. I'd like to provide an overview of Kent's current data and how it compares to national figures.

In 2024/25, Kent had:

- 20,635 children and young people aged 0–25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) — a higher proportion than the national average (6.2% in Kent vs. 5.6% in England).
- Fewer EHCP pupils educated in mainstream schools, including Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs), at 36%, compared to 44% nationally.
- More EHCP pupils placed in special schools, including independent schools, at 39%, compared to 30% nationally.
- Fewer children identified as requiring SEN support in mainstream schools, at 12.4%, compared to the England average of 14%.

There is a common assumption that children and young people achieve better outcomes in special schools. While this may be true for some, Kent already has a higher proportion of pupils attending both state-funded and independent special schools, yet pupil outcomes are not better than in other local authorities.

Kent spends over half of its annual SEND funding on special schools and ranks within the top 20 local authorities nationally for the number of special school places per head of population. This includes:

- 25 publicly funded Kent special schools, offering 6,500 places at a cost of over £160 million per year.
- An additional 1,800 children placed in the independent private sector, costing over £80 million annually.

KCC is committed to placing children and young people in the school or setting that best meets their individual needs. Placement decisions are always based on what is best for each child, ensuring they receive the right support in the most appropriate setting.

Wherever possible, we prioritise maintained mainstream or special schools close to the child's home. However, we also commission places in Non-Maintained Independent Special Schools (NMISS) when they are best placed to meet a child's specific needs.

We strongly encourage private schools to join the approved list of NMISS providers, which ensures they meet clear standards in safeguarding, quality of education, legal compliance, and value for money. This list gives us confidence that schools are well-equipped to support children and that public funds are being used responsibly. Typically, NMISS placements cost at least double that of state-funded special school places. Currently, 21 schools on our approved list are based in Kent, with 5 more located outside the county.

Kings Park School, which registered with the Department for Education in March 2025, is one of several independent schools seeking placements from KCC. However, the school is not currently on the approved list. Officers recently held an open event for all NMISS providers—regardless of size or experience—to learn more about working with KCC. While we welcomed broad participation, Kings Park did not attend.

WITHDRAWN

WITHDRAWN

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Question by Luke Evans to David Wimble
Cabinet Member for Environment

Recognising the significant development activity in Kent, including the much opposed construction of the Sea Link on the Minster Marshes which will involve the construction of the 3rd largest substation in the world on one of our most valuable wildlife habitats in the whole country, there are many threats to the County's ecology and biodiversity.

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment please explain to the Council how KCC accommodates or deals with such large scale, unpopular and environmentally damaging infrastructure projects, in terms of trying to preserve Kent's natural habitat?

Answer

Large scale infrastructure projects, such as Sea Link, are determined by the Planning Inspectorate. Classed as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), an applicant submits an application for a development consent order to the Planning Inspectorate. Independent inspectors are appointed to examine the application and make recommendations to the relevant Secretary of State about whether permission for development should be given. The relevant Secretary of State makes the final decision.

Local authorities hosting NSIPs are statutory consultees in the DCO process and have a number of critical roles to play at each stage of the work. Kent County Council engages in all relevant NSIPs, inputting not just on environmental impact matters but also matters regarding highways, flood management, heritage, public rights of way and other considerations. However, all involvement in the process is defined by the authority's position as to whether and how the proposed project complies with policy and legislative requirements and our responses are set within this context.

In respect of Sea Link, the authority has worked closely with the applicant, National Grid, who has responded positively to our suggestions and recommendations regarding highways and transportation, biodiversity, archaeology, public rights of way and flood risk mitigation. We continue discussions with them regarding environmental impacts and other issues we have noted in this ongoing NSIP application.

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Question by Amelia Randall to Paul King,
Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration

I am lucky enough to be representing a division that is both rural and coastal. We have amazing bays and many tourists visit us in the summer.

Can the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration tell the Council whether he is developing a plan that can ensure locals and tourists can better enjoy our coastline out of the summer season, ideally bringing to it a feeling of growth and hope?

Answer

I agree that Kent's coastal and rural areas offer world-class visitor experiences. This is also a view shared by 'Lonely Planet' which placed Kent at number four on their 2022 list of the world's best regions to visit thanks to Kent's Heritage Coast's unique combination of history, heritage and iconic natural landscapes. The King Charles III England Coast Path is a National Trail around the whole of the English coast, including some of Kent's finest countryside and internationally famous coastal scenery. We know from our evidence of spending by visitors to the coast, that it will offer significant opportunities to boost the local economy and benefit our coastal communities.

The visitor economy was hit hard by the pandemic and in coastal areas, businesses have always struggled with seasonality. To tackle this, KCC's Kent Downs Natural Landscape team, working with Visit Kent from 2020-2023, made use of an EU funding grant to develop out of season tourism itineraries. 463 off season activities were identified and promoted including seasonal walks, stargazing and forest bathing. KCC and its partners have invested in assets and programmes over many years to boost visitor numbers to coastal areas all year round such as the Turner Contemporary gallery in Margate. To date, the Turner Gallery has welcomed 4.5m visitors, with 66,000 people staying overnight each year with an average local spend of £200 per person. Some 31% of visitors come to Margate to specifically visit the gallery which continues to drive a 33% increase in visitors travelling to Margate by rail.

Partner websites such as Visit Canterbury includes information about events and activities available all year round including the Autumn half term and Christmas in the coastal towns. We have also made use of the Kent & Medway Business Fund to provide loans to accommodation providers and leisure venues in Ramsgate and hospitality businesses in Whitstable.

The legacy of these activities will continue, and we will ensure that future visitor economy activities commissioned or delivered by KCC take a year-round view of Kent's coastal and rural tourism offer.

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Question by Paul Thomas to Beverley Fordham
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

The Executive should undertake a review of KCC Property that was previously in educational use or properties on Education sites used for other uses or empty is brought into use for school purposes as a matter of urgency. This should provide some of the much needed additional teaching space and reduce the burden on home to school transport.

Can the Cabinet Member for Education confirm this is being considered?

Answer

Thank you, Paul, for your request to review Kent County Council (KCC) owned property for potential use by educational services or alternative appropriate services.

The Kent Commissioning Plan for Education is updated annually and sets out the forecast demand for school places across the county, comparing this with current supply and outlining our commissioning intentions in response. While many schools are currently operating at full capacity, this is not the case across the board. A declining birth rate has led to surplus accommodation in some areas—for example, there were 2,000 fewer children born in Kent in 2024 compared to 2012.

This mixed picture of school capacity means that any review must be conducted on an area basis, taking into account local factors. Where additional school places are required, KCC carefully considers the drivers of demand, implications for school transport, and factors such as cost and deliverability.

Where a need for additional provision is identified, KCC does consider the appropriate use of land or property it owns, whether on existing school sites or other KCC-owned land. For instance, KCC-owned land was recently used to support the establishment of two new Special Free Schools, unlocking Government funding in the process.

We appreciate your interest and will ensure that any review of KCC property is aligned with our strategic planning and local needs.

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Question by Alan Cecil to Brian Collins - Deputy Leader

I was pleased to see the proposals set out by the Deputy Leader seeking to retain Sessions House as the County HQ. In my view it is likely to improve the mental wellbeing of staff by coming into the office more rather than WFH, and should improve the council's productivity and efficiency for Kent taxpayers, whilst providing valuable footfall and trade for local businesses and public transport.

The previously agreed sale did highlight some serious concerns about the inefficiencies of the fabric of the building and its intrinsic running costs, but we would not countenance the sale of the Houses of Parliament on such grounds, would we. I am pleased that the proposals from Reform are to work to find best value solutions to let us keep this beautiful building.

With the above in mind and in the event that the proposals are implemented, can the Deputy Leader please confirm any plans to reduce heat losses in this listed building and find more efficient methods of heating the large internal spaces?"

Answer

The preferred decision which was endorsed at P&R Cabinet Committee current proposal is remaining within Session House but only undertaking 'warm safe and dry' maintenance and compliance works. At the current time the scope of works and the budget allocation does not include any replacement or enhancement of the existing building fabric. Whilst there are some mechanical and electrical (M&E) works included within the scope of works this seeks to retain the current operational strategy and does not include any fundamental replacement or change of strategy for the heating and ventilation within Session House

Enhancement of scope of works can be looked at but this will alter and increase the budget which has been allocated on the basis of red condition items only in A,C and D Blocks of Session House.

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Question by Mike Sole to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

In recent months, heavy rain has caused flooding across the county whenever there have been storms. It is clear that Kent's drainage system can either not cope with the volumes of water that man-made climate change brings, or that moving all gullies onto either 6, 12 or 24 month cleansing schedules a few years, and expecting the public to take on the role of reporting blockages was the wrong route to take.

Will the Cabinet Member for Environment and Cabinet Member for Highways confirm whether, in response to this, they are looking to undertake a root and branch review of the resilience of the road drainage system, especially the frequency of cleaning and unblocking, that is often the main cause of flooding on Kent's roads?

Answer

Kent County Council's Highway Drainage Team manages over 220,000 highway drains across 5,400 miles of road. In response to increasing flooding incidents and public concern, the Council revised its approach in April 2023, moving from reactive maintenance to a structured, risk-based cleansing cycle. Gullies are now attended annually, biennially or triennially depending on road hierarchy and flood risk, with strategic routes still maintained annually.

Should we receive a report of a blocked drain, this is risk-assessed to determine whether an ad hoc visit between cyclical visits is required. The assessment determines if there is any risk to property flooding or a danger to the highway based on the information contained within the customer report. This assessment is essential to ensure the remaining budget is spent where it is most needed.

This new approach has allowed more efficient use of resources, but challenges remain. Not all gullies are successfully serviced due to access issues like parked vehicles or compacted silt. Additionally, defects such as broken or stuck covers and non-running drains require more costly interventions. These issues represent an estimated unfunded cost of nearly £4.75 million, excluding traffic management.

While blocked drains contribute to surface water flooding, they are not the sole cause. Extreme rainfall, overwhelmed outfalls, tree root intrusion, and increased runoff from hard surfaces like paved gardens all play a role. Highway drainage systems are designed for typical rainfall, and when external water bodies are at capacity, even functioning systems can struggle.

The current service levels are still embedding, and by April 2026, most gullies will have received at least one visit under the new cycle. A review of the system's resilience, including cleansing schedules and infrastructure capacity will be undertaken afterwards and this will form part of the forward planning and resourcing of the authorities drainage service.

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Question by Mark Hood to Paul Webb,
Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

This question was answered by Mary Lawes, Deputy Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services.

On 22 July, following a visit to Dartford Library, the Education Cabinet Member spoke very positively about the role of Libraries, including comments about how she welcomed their contribution to the ongoing education and development of our young people. I couldn't agree more on how important protecting KCC's libraries should be.

With that in mind, will the Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services confirm whether he is committed to ensuring no library in Kent will close during the term of this administration and if he will be working to protect these special places so valued by his Cabinet colleagues?

Answer

I appreciate the positive words about the role of the library service and of course I recognise the important role it plays across a range of agendas. You particularly pick out the positive role libraries play in young people's lives but equally this is a service for all ages, and I have in recent months been privileged to see some of that delivery in action.

As all Members are fully aware the financial situation facing the authority is serious and as part of the collective Cabinet I recognise that there are and will continue to be significant financial challenges that the authority will face and that we will need to make savings and efficiencies across the whole council over the time of this administration, that may well have to include from the library service. But I am also very focused on where we can generate income, and the Libraries, Registration and Archives service is delivering an impressive £450k of additional income this year 25/26. This brings the total income target across Libraries, Registration and Archives to over 6m.

I don't think as such it would be right to offer guarantees for the life of the Administration as I am examining every aspect of my portfolio, as you would expect, but what I can say is that I do recognise the importance of the library service, the value it holds to Kent people and I will work to ensure the best possible library service is delivered within the budgets available to us.

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Question by Paul Stepto to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader of the Council

Would the Deputy Leader kindly confirm the number and values of Treasury loans that have matured since this year's County Council election?

Answer

The total Treasury Debt portfolio at the start of this financial year was £732.6m. Since the election this has been reduced to £714.7m. The Council has a diversified portfolio, and this reduction represents two loans (£14m in total) maturing and additional repayments of £3.9m of principal on non-maturity debt.

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Question by Alan Ricketts to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

Church Street Playing Field, on the Chestfield/Whistable border was chosen by the previous administration to be site of a new SEN school. The gates were then unceremoniously locked and only reopened following sustained and well organised opposition from local residents and councillors. The Friends of Church Street Playing Field already do a large amount of work to keep the site clean and safe, with regular litter picks. They have submitted a village green application, currently under consideration.

Can the Cabinet Member provide some clarity for residents and confirm if the site is still required for SEN provision, and if so which other sites in the area have been considered and rejected? In answering, can the Cabinet Member clarify what consideration has been given to the high infrastructure costs (£10m+) for making the location suitable for bringing the school online in 2026 as per the original plans?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Alex.

As you are aware, the commissioning of this new school plays a key role in delivering our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) strategy, helping to provide much-needed capacity for children with Profound, Severe and Complex Needs (PSCN).

KCC submitted a successful bid to the Department for Education (DfE) for this new school, supported by robust data that clearly demonstrates the local need for this type of provision.

We remain fully committed to bringing forward the 120-place PSCN school on the Church Street site. This is a key part of our Safety Valve agreement and is essential to meeting the growing demand for specialist places. The Church Street site has long been held by the Council for educational purposes. While a number of alternative sites were considered, Church Street was ultimately identified as the most appropriate location.

As this is a DfE-funded project, KCC will be making the land available and contributing to some associated off-site infrastructure costs, such as highway mitigations. The majority of the capital costs will be funded centrally by the DfE. For any costs that may fall to KCC, a £2 million budget has been allocated within our capital programme.

At this stage, we are unable to confirm timeframes until the outcome of the village green application has been determined.

WITHDRAWN

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**Question by Stuart Hever to Matthew Fraser Moat,
Cabinet Member for Department of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE)**

Last year this Council spent more than £598,000 of Council Tax payers money on Glyphosate, a toxic herbicide and a known carcinogen.

Will the cabinet member for local government efficiency (DOLGE) please confirm he will consider cutting this wasted spend on a dangerous chemical which poses a direct threat to human health and the greenness of Kent.

Answer

As the Highway Authority, Kent County Council (KCC) undertakes targeted weed treatment on roads and pavements twice a year. This forms part of our statutory duty under the Highways Act to maintain a safe, accessible, and well-managed highway network for all users.

It accomplishes this by contracting the work out to specialist weed contractors. The budget for doing this is in the 2024-2025 season was £598K. This includes the whole service delivery, the majority of the cost of which is the labour required to apply the treatment with herbicide making up a lesser part of this.

The herbicide we use is glyphosate diluted with water, which is the most widely used product for weed control in public areas. Glyphosate is readily available from retail outlets and is approved for use by the Chemical Regulations Directorate (CRD) of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). It is considered safe for both users and the public when applied in accordance with relevant legislation and codes of practice. There are no other herbicides available to use on hard surfaces. KCC strictly adheres to all statutory requirements and safety guidelines in the delivery of this service.

The continued use of glyphosate for highway weed control was reviewed and supported at the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee meeting on 8 November 2022. At present, there are no plans to suspend its use, as the HSE maintains that glyphosate is safe when used responsibly and legally.

Identifying some residents' and members concerns, KCC Highways have and continue to explore pesticide use reduction, and trial alternative methods for weed control. This includes Hot Foam, Hot Water, Infra-Red and various Cultural methods of clearing weeds. However, to date, no alternative has proven to be as effective, affordable, and environmentally sustainable as glyphosate. It is also important to note that many proposed alternatives pose greater risks to pollinators such as bees or have a higher environmental impact.

KCC receives in the region of a 1000 enquiries each year regarding weeds and while we understand and respect concerns about herbicide use, KCC is confident that our current approach meets all statutory obligations and safety standards. We remain committed to reviewing best practices and exploring viable alternatives, but at this time, glyphosate remains the most appropriate solution for highway weed control.

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Question by Trudy Dean to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

It has come to my attention that parents have been receiving notice of the removal of their child's support for transport to school by way of emails, sent from a no reply email address after schools have ended from the Summer break and with the emails containing no information about, or referral to, the appeal route should parents wish to appeal.

Please can the Cabinet Minister confirm whether there has been a change in policy to deny parents this information and the fair opportunity to contest officers' decisions, or can they confirm that such notices will be communicated to parents fairly, transparently and with all the information parents need to challenge the decision if they wish?

Answer

Thank you, Trudy, for raising this issue.

I would like to begin by offering an apology to any parents who may have been affected. This was a one-time error, and I can confirm that there has been no change in Kent County Council's (KCC) policy regarding how transport arrangement changes are communicated to families, nor in the areas where families have the opportunity to appeal.

Each summer, KCC undertakes a significant volume of transport tendering activity. This is driven by the influx of newly entitled learners due to school intakes and secondary admissions. As a result, existing transport arrangements for other pupils may be impacted as routes are updated. KCC's transport policy clearly sets this expectation.

This work is essential to ensure pupils are transported efficiently and safely, while also making effective use of limited council funding. It's important to note that parents are not routinely offered an opportunity to appeal the mode of transport their child uses. Additionally, Officers do not have discretion to determine transport entitlement; they are required to apply KCC's transport policy, which was developed following public consultation and approved by the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee.

To manage communications with large numbers of Kent families, the Transport team uses semi-automated email tools. These tools send messages from "do-not-reply" addresses, which is a necessary measure to avoid sending thousands of individual emails manually. Unfortunately, in this instance, the batch of emails did not include the usual team signature, which typically provides contact details and links to relevant council webpages. This was a one-time error and steps have been taken to ensure it does not happen again.

However, the email did include assurance that Client Transport Officers would be in touch shortly, giving families the opportunity to engage directly with KCC officers well ahead of the new academic year.

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Question by Richard Streatfeild MBE to Brian Collins,
Deputy Leader of the Council

In the recent budget consultation the administration highlighted the difficulty of making savings even though council tax had gone up by 5%. During the County Council elections many Reform candidates promised to cut council tax.

Can the Deputy Leader confirm whether they are going to keep that promise and if the answer is yes, could he say where the further 45M pounds of savings will fall in order to pay for it?

Answer

It is indeed our intention to lower Council Tax for residents of Kent when, and only when, the financial situation of the council dictates that it can be done.

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Question by Colin Sefton to Diane Morton,
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

I very much welcomed learning in July that the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health wrote to Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, and Minister for Care Stephen Kinnock "with grave concern for the new immigration bill plans to reduce health and social care visas to the United Kingdom and in particular closing the Social Care Worker Visa route to overseas recruitment for new applicants from 22 July 2025." The Cabinet Member commented that "There are many areas that this could impact including the Council's own services and our provider network with which the Council commission. They also stated that they will liaise with the Kent Integrated Care Alliance to support the market through any challenges and difficulties that may emerge due to these changes.

Can the Cabinet Member please advise what response there has been to this letter and provide an update on discussions with the Kent Integrated Care Alliance on this issue?

Answer

Thank you, Mr Sefton, for the question. Yes, there was a response to the letter, and I will ensure that you receive a copy of the letter following this meeting.

I have spoken to KICA and to the National Care Association on this matter, as well as on many other issues. They are currently working to support displaced workers who came here to work in social care but were misled by unscrupulous agencies that did not hold CQC registration. Kica have helped place 50 staff so far and that's the second highest in the south east region. They report that the providers are nervous to taking on more from the international community because they do not know what the government is going to do next. They also reported that they were very positive about how honest we have been here at kcc and on one day recently said they have never been used to this much sincerity and support from an administration before!

Unfortunately, the Department of Health and Social Care or the Home office did not consult with the industry before closing the window for social care visas, nor did it take on board the sector's recommendation that only CQC-registered agencies should be permitted to recruit from abroad.

Skills for care tell us that in 2023/24 30% of the the kent social care workforce comes from overseas.

We must now focus our efforts on training and equipping people in this country, paying them a fair wage, and ensuring that the sector is properly funded – not borne solely by local council taxpayers.

If the adult social care workforce in Kent is to grow in line with the increasing number of people aged 65 and over, then by 2040 the number of posts will need to rise by 33% – that is, an additional 19,500 posts.

Mr Sefton, I will also be visiting a social care boot camp in Kent shortly as part of our workforce programme to encourage and foster growth in this sector, and you would be most welcome to join me on that visit.

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Thursday 18 September 2025

Question by Geoffrey Samme to Mr David Wimble,
Cabinet Member for the Environment

On 29 August 2025, ten Kent beaches were issues with sewage warnings, following on from numerous other incidents of sewage being discharged around our coast over the year. This is bad for people who like to enjoy the beach, bad for wildlife and bad for the visitor economy - so it impacts on a range of our policy areas including economic development and environmental protections.

Will the Cabinet Member for the Environment set out what the Council is doing to address the negative impacts on our areas of responsibility?

Answer

Kent County Council (KCC) is committed to improving the marine environment and shares the concerns about the impact of sewage discharges and other pollution events on our coastal and marine waters. However, it is important to note that the regulation, enforcement, and monitoring of water quality fall under the remit of the Environment Agency.

KCC plays a key role in developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), and over the past 12 months, we have worked with a wide range of stakeholders to identify nature recovery priorities across the county. Water quality—its impact on marine life, local economies, and coastal activities—was a recurring concern throughout this process. While water quality regulation lies outside the scope of the LNRS, the strategy does address the effects of poor water quality on coastal habitats and species. Measures have been identified to minimise, mitigate, and reverse these impacts. However, broader marine water quality issues are beyond the LNRS's remit.

To address this gap, KCC is developing a new strategy called Plan Sea, which will build on the strong partnerships formed during the LNRS process. Plan Sea aims to ensure that our marine environment receives the same attention and collaborative support as our land-based habitats. A draft of this strategy is expected by Spring 2026.

One significant contributor to poor coastal water quality is the use of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs). These systems, part of the historic Victorian sewer network, are designed to prevent flooding during heavy rainfall by releasing excess water. While new developments must now separate surface and foul water systems, many established coastal communities still rely on combined networks that are under increasing pressure.

Southern Water has acknowledged these challenges and is implementing its Clean Rivers and Seas Taskforce programme. This initiative focuses on removing surface water from highways and private connections to the combined network. Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) are being used to manage surface water more effectively, reducing flood risk and reliance on CSOs. KCC is partnering with Southern Water on a pilot project in Gloucester

Avenue, Margate, which uses SuDS to divert surface water from the sewer network. Southern Water is also working with schools and upgrading pumping stations.

It is important to recognise that CSOs are just one part of a complex system. Other factors affecting water quality include agricultural and urban runoff, marine activities, climate change, and development. To address these challenges, KCC has convened a stakeholder group—including water companies, the Environment Agency, and Internal Drainage Boards—to explore more integrated solutions. This group will continue to meet in the coming months, with water quality as a key focus.

Last week, Southern Water announced a series of long-term projects to reduce storm overflows over the next ten years. Coastal towns such as Queenborough, Herne Bay, and Whitstable will benefit from increased storage capacity at treatment works, new surface water pipelines, and expanded sustainable drainage systems—all aimed at reducing sewage discharges into the sea.

While these infrastructure improvements are underway, KCC continues to support the visitor economy in coastal towns. Through the Kent & Medway Business Fund, we are providing loans to leisure, accommodation, and hospitality businesses to enhance the tourism offer and attract more visitors to destinations such as Ramsgate and Whitstable. We are also working to ensure that year-round coastal itineraries are promoted in future visitor economy initiatives commissioned or delivered by KCC.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 September 2025

Question by Mark Ellis to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

I have been made aware of the Executive Decision regarding the former Southborough Children's Centre, which is located on the grounds of Southborough Church of England Primary School but with a separate title deed. The school has grown significantly, and now has a greater number of children with complex needs, requiring additional space for bespoke learning, after-school care, and mental health support. The school has requested the use of the vacant Children's Centre building to meet this need. However, the report for the Children's Centre also presents the option of commercially disposing of the site. I am concerned about the potential for Kent County Council to incur greater costs in the long run.

Will the Cabinet Member please confirm whether, before any decision is made to sell the Southborough Children's Centre, a full cost-benefit analysis will be conducted to confirm that this action would not result in KCC spending more money to deliver a new building to meet the school's SEND provision needs, compared to the cost of modifying the existing Children's Centre?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Mark

As part of the 2013 school expansion programme at Southborough Primary school the County Council provided a new teaching block and hall to support accommodate the increased numbers of children attending the school.

Over recent years the number of children being born in Tunbridge Wells has decreased significantly and the County Council does not intend to increase pupil numbers at Southborough Primary or any other nearby school for the foreseeable future.

As part of the County Council's SEND strategy, it is seeking to commission the establishment of a Specialist Resource Base in Tunbridge Wells to support children with an EHCP and has invited expressions of interest from all local schools as part of this process, to date Southborough Primary School hasn't done so.

In 2024, the Kent Communities Programme decision was implemented by the Council which meant that the children's centre which adjoined the school site was no longer required and whilst no formal decision has yet been taken regarding the disposal of the former Southborough Children's Centre, it has been identified as surplus to KCC's operational requirements.

KCC is aware of the school's interest in the site and they have been invited to prepare a business case which the council will consider. Any proposal from the school will be considered against KCC statutory service delivery, KCC policies and legislative requirement along with financial considerations.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 September 2025

Question by Tim Prater to Linden Kemkaran, The Leader

Can the Leader tell us how many of the other 13 Kent Council Leaders support her in asking the appointed consultants to consider the case for a single Unitary Authority for Kent?

Answer

Thank you for your question. The answer is simply that there are none.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 September 2025

Question by Ben Fryer to Peter Osborne,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

The ONS 2023 Mid-Year Population Estimates show that Dartford now has the highest population density in Kent at 16.6 people per hectare - nearly four times the county average of 4.5 persons per hectare. This high density, combined with continued population growth, and living next to the QEII Bridge is placing extreme pressure on local roads, many of which are already worn, damaged, and struggling to cope with the volume of traffic. Residents endure daily gridlock, longer journeys, and congested roads. While the proposed Lower Thames Crossing may eventually help, it will take years to deliver and provides no immediate relief. With Dartford Borough Council's Local Plan, signed off in 2024, allocating a further 12,640 homes between 2024 and 2037, our roads will face even more overwhelming pressure.

What urgent action will the Cabinet Member take to ensure Dartford receives larger, targeted funding to repair highways and improve transport networks and will the Cabinet Member be lobbying Government for additional funding to support this?

Answer

Kent's highway network is one of the largest in England, with a total of 5,400 miles of roads and other highway assets. Local growth in the county, particularly in areas like Dartford, will inevitably result in increased demand on our existing network.

Our development planning team works closely with Dartford Borough Council to ensure that there are contributions from new developments to mitigate the impacts on the highway and transport networks. However, we are limited to what is set out in the government's National Planning and Policy Framework which has a presumption in favour of development and no definition of what is considered a "severe" impact on the highway network, therefore highway schemes are often modest or require further funding to deliver.

In terms of funding highway repairs, KCC has an asset management data led approach with targeted investment to make every pound count.

However, funding from government remains insufficient with Department for Transport (DfT) capital grant for highway maintenance in 2025/26 at only £54.2m and KCC borrows £25 million annually to top this up. However, our highway maintenance backlog is around £1.1 billion and we have an annual capital funding shortfall of over £90 million.

DfT capital grant needs to more than double and be confirmed for a prolonged period to stop the decline. The current funding formula based on length of road network does not reflect the realities of Kent's highway network and its use - strategic position in terms of gateway to Europe, large population, and high traffic volumes. We have continually lobbied government that it should also be based on traffic volumes, population and

economic growth, and delivery of other agendas such as active travel, carbon reduction and innovation.

In terms of targeted investment specifically for Dartford, following the government's announcement that the charges at the Dartford Crossing were to be increased from £2.50 to £3.50 for cars, which came into effect this month, the Leader wrote to the Roads Minister to request that a proportion of the revenue generated from the Dart Charge is passed to KCC to aid the upkeep of the wider road network in Dartford and North Kent.

A similar case will be made to government for a proportion of the revenue generated by the foreign Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) Road User Levy to be allocated to Kent to account for the damage done to Kent's roads as we are the gateway county to Europe.

Other work to improve road conditions in Dartford includes KCC working in partnership with Dartford Borough Council and National Highways to conduct an optional appraisal to improve the capacity of Junction 1a of the M25. The work aims to identify feasible options to improve the east-west connection across the junction for local traffic as well as improve overall capacity. A conclusion to this initial study will be reported to Dartford Borough Council's Joint Transport Board in Spring 2026.

The ongoing closure of the A226 Galley Hill Road continues to cause significant congestion and disruption throughout Dartford and Gravesham. The local community has been severely impacted due to diverted traffic, including many HGVs, using unsuitable alternative routes.

Further to this the closure of this route continues to cause major disruption locally and is acting as a blocker to the development of new housing and other economic growth in the area. KCC continues to work to progress options to reinstate the crucial link between Dartford and Gravesham and has continually lobbied Government for additional funding to support the restoration of the chalk spine, accompanying successive ministers, including Lilian Greenwood, on visits to witness the scale of the problem.

KCC has lobbied for increased funding for our highway structures and will continue to make the case for Galley Hill, applying for all possible funding opportunities such as the Structures Fund previously announced by government.

KCC continues to support the public transport network in Dartford, especially with the Fastrack network and launch of new electric buses and the Hoppit mobility as a service platform. We are also working with partnerships such as Transport for the South East who have funded study work to look at how the Fastrack network could be expanded to meet the needs of further development in the area.

KCC is also actively lobbying government for a funding solution to re-instate the Gravesend to Tilbury ferry so that a public transport alternative can be provided to the Dartford Crossing.

Finally, KCC continues to work with National Highways on the development of the new Lower Thames Crossing through detailed design and pre-enabling works which will start next year to ensure that the new Crossing opens to programme in 2032 following the government's approval of the Development Consent Order last March.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 September 2025

Question by Antony Hook to Beverley Fordham,
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

We all wish to congratulate young people in Kent, and the teachers, parents and carers who have supported them, on their GCSE, A-level and other exam results this year. Nationally, boys performed significantly less well than girls in GCSEs, which is a long-standing trend.

Can the Cabinet Member for Education say whether this was the case in Kent and if it is, what can be done to fully understand and remedy the relative underperformance of boys?

Answer

Thank you, Anthony. I would also like to join you in congratulating the young people of Kent, along with the teachers, parents, and carers who have supported them, on their GCSE, A-Level, and other qualification results this year.

It was a pleasure to celebrate with students at Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School and St John's Catholic Comprehensive School in Gravesend, where the atmosphere was filled with both joy and reflection. The support provided by school staff to help students navigate their next steps was particularly impressive at both schools.

While the results published in August offer an early indication of performance, they must be validated, and we await the Department for Education's (DfE) national data release later this autumn to gain a full and accurate picture of Kent pupils' achievements and any emerging gaps.

Kent County Council (KCC) remains committed to promoting high educational standards for all learners and to narrowing attainment gaps, despite the reduction in our formal role in school improvement over the past decade due to changes in government policy and funding.

KCC's current responsibilities and actions in school improvement are outlined in our new strategy:

Raising Ambition. Enabling Curiosity. Building Resilience. A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent, 2025–2030, which was debated and adopted by the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee in February 2025.

We continue to provide statutory school improvement support to 17 maintained secondary schools out of a total of 104 secondary schools in Kent. These schools are responsible for purchasing additional services to meet their training and development needs. The remaining 87 secondary schools are academies, which are directly accountable to the Department for Education and their respective Academy Trusts.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Thursday 18 September 2025

Question by Maxine Fothergill to Linden Kemkaran, the Leader

Leader, for the record, before any Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposal is submitted to Government, will you confirm that:

1. Members will receive full briefings, including the financial appraisals (one-off transition costs, savings profile and sensitivities) and the service-impact assessments/mitigations (including adult & children's social care, highways and waste);
2. The Executive will publish a plain-English public information pack setting out the options under consideration, headline costs, risks and transition implications, together with a clear timetable for residents to give their views; and
3. Full Council will have the opportunity to consider the Executive's recommended position in public before any submission is finalised?

Answer

I shall deal with each question in turn.

1. All political groups in KCC have received a Group briefing from KCC officers on the latest position on local government reorganisation. Further briefings have been offered as we move closer to 28 November deadline for submission of LGR proposals to the Secretary of State. KCC has already, more than any other council in Kent and Medway, put a significant amount of financial and other detail into the public domain on a number of LGR options (including costs and service implications) in the papers considered at the Devolution & Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee meeting on 28 July. As the preferred KCC option is developed into a full business case for submission, financial details and service implications for the services listed will be set out within it.
2. KCC will be undertaking public engagement and consultation on its preferred option for LGR ahead of submission of a final business case to the Secretary of State. For the record, it is the Secretary of State who makes the final decision on LGR proposals, and therefore it is the responsibility of the Government to publish the information required to support their consultation on the proposals under consideration, as per the expectations under the Gunning Principles. Any Government consultation on options for LGR in Kent and Medway is expected to start in early 2026, as has been outlined by Ministers and Civil Servants.
3. Yes. The draft KCC business case submission will be on the agenda for the 6th November Full Council meeting ahead of the necessary key decision by Cabinet later that month.