

Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 14 December 2016

Sustainability and Transformation Plan

The Sustainability and Transformation Plan for Kent and Medway was published in November. Fundamental to the success of the Kent and Medway Plan will be the need to reduce the scale of the financial challenge down from the expected £486million budget pressures in the absence of any changes.

While the full detail on how this will happen is yet to be developed, the Kent and Medway Plan will be designed to improve the quality and access of health services and social care within financial constraints by: tackling rising demand for these services; improving the health of the population through prevention measures; and reducing the number of patients supported in acute hospitals through the integration of primary community health and social care services.

New local care models are being designed to bring integrated health and social care into people's homes, with integrated care teams made up of community nurses and social care practitioners attached to GP clusters. It is expected that such community services will be 'wrapped around' groupings of GP practices, such as the multi-speciality community provider (MCP) 'Encompass' Vanguard which serves Faversham.

Prevention priorities for Kent remain focussed upon tackling obesity and increasing physical activity; smoking cessation; workplace health; and reducing alcohol-related harm. Local district councils are working closely with Kent CC Public Health colleagues to tackle these issues, and ensure these services are fit-for-purpose to meet the needs of our residents.

There will be a meeting with the Clinical Commissioning Groups in the new year to better understand the plans for Swale and their impact on local services. We are currently identifying a date which will allow Cllr Pugh, Amber Christou and I to all attend. We are confident that we will be able to find a way forward working together - as you all know, we worked successfully with our Health colleagues to prevent the closure of the Faversham Minor Injuries Unit, and will continue to provide such challenge and build on these relationships.

Full consultation on the Kent and Medway STP will not begin until June 2017. However, for any member wishing to understand more about the Plan, there is a presentation in the chamber at 7 pm tomorrow (15 December), and all Members are welcome and encouraged to attend.

Christmas 'Special' Park and Ride

This Christmas, in partnership with Chalkwell Coaches, Abbey School, Oasis Academy, and Meadowbank School, Swale Borough Council are trialling a 'Christmas Special' Park and Ride scheme in Faversham, Sheerness and Sittingbourne.

The Park and Ride is an exciting innovation to gauge whether this alternative parking option will be attractive to residents and visitors, and can make a positive contribution to our community, increasing the retail opportunity and festive experience at this time of year. The scheme has now run for the past two Saturdays, and will run again for the last time this coming Saturday, 17 December.

The scheme opened with a slow start on its first weekend, in particular in Sittingbourne and Sheerness, but was considerably busier in Faversham, despite unfortunate emergency works on the A2. Initial feedback from those using the service across the Borough was very positive with comments like "Fabulous idea, the driver and marshals are very friendly" from a visitor from Tunbridge Wells, whilst another local user said "No improvement needed".

Last Saturday the service was used more than the first Saturday with a marked increase in overall passenger numbers, although still considerably lower than we would have hoped.

In Faversham the services run well and to timetable. Customer comments have been very positive, and examples include: "It is first class, can't be improved" and "A very good idea, takes the hassle away and it was excellent". Customer numbers have increased since week one, and it is anticipated that we will see another increase for week three. Town centre car parks have been busy at peak times, so the scheme appears to have added extra capacity to the system.

The Sheerness Park and Ride service remains the lowest used, albeit more in the second week than in the first. The service has run well and to timetable, and some very constructive feedback has been received that will form an important part of the evaluation. Comments include: "Needs to be advertised"; "Change or add pick up/drop off points" and "Consider running a shuttle bus between Sheerness Town Centre and Neats Court".

In Sittingbourne, like Sheerness, although numbers have increased since week one, passenger numbers have been much lower than anticipated. Nonetheless, the service has run well and to timetable, and comments received have generally been favourable and constructive.

Agenda Item No. 9

May I take this opportunity to congratulate Jeff Kitson and his team for the tireless manner in which they have worked to make the 'Park and Ride' a reality in the Borough. In a few short months the simple idea has been transformed into a well-managed, professional partnership delivering a new service to our community.

I am not despondent about the number of passengers/cars, and nor should the Council or any of those involved in delivering the scheme be. This was Swale Borough Council's first scheme of this sort in the weeks before Christmas, and it will take time for residents and visitors alike to become aware of the alternative parking opportunities. I am optimistic that the scheme will be more popular in the final week, and we will once again see an increase in use of the scheme.

What is really important is that the number of cars parked was never the only goal: Swale BC has received very good press coverage and advertising, a great response from those who used the service, the scheme has contributed an important increase in our parking capacity whilst reducing congestion and pollution in our town centres, and the money we spent went into the local economy.

I therefore eagerly await the assessment of the trial in the New Year, together with feedback from users and residents on what they thought and how we might improve the service.

Police update

I have received a letter from the new Commander of Kent Police's North Division introducing himself. Chief Superintendent Tim Smith has taken over the role as Divisional Commander from Chief Superintendent Adrian Futers who held the post for almost two years.

Tim has a distinguished career in Kent Police, primarily within the Criminal Investigation Department.

I have extended an invitation to Chief Superintendent Smith to meet Members, together with Chief Inspector Paul Anderson and Inspector Gavin Wade, at the next scheduled Members' Policing update scheduled for Thursday 13 April at 7 pm in the Council Chamber, and I would encourage all Members to attend what should be an interesting session.

Cllr Andrew Bowles
Council Leader