

COUNCIL UPDATE 7.2022

SOUTHEAST COAST AMULANCE SERVICE (SECAM)

Councillors reviewed the performance of SECAM in the light of recent reports in the press of delays to answering 999 calls, issues with triaging patients into the correct response category which results in ambulances being sent where they are not needed (ambulances are for urgent and emergency care – around half ambulances leave the site without conveying a patient) and delays to the handover of patients to A&E units.

Mean answering times at SECAM are 14 secs against national average of 19 secs ranking 5th out of the 11 ambulance trusts in England. Target is 5 secs. 6 months ago, mean SECAM answering was 25 secs (nationally 45 sec). This shortfall is being tackled by an ongoing recruitment programme and offering existing staff incentivised shifts. A problem is callers redialling 999 to get an update on the ambulance arrival time, callers need to better understand the purpose of 999 calls as opposed to 111 calls.

A new Single Virtual Contact Centre (SVCC) is being rolled out to enable calls to be answered on a regional footprint. The current arrangement is that SECAM provides 111 services for Kent, Medway and Sussex with other providers delivering elsewhere. NHS 111 Clinical Assessment Services gives ambulance staff the opportunity to discuss the presenting condition and agree the best course of action.

The NHS long term plan sets out as one of its priorities “zero tolerance” towards any delays greater than 60 minutes. This is because 53% of patients of who were delayed in their handover experienced some harm.

SECAM’s Annual Members Meeting will take place on Friday 2nd September 2022 from 1.15pm – 4.30pm at Lingfield Park, Racecourse Road, Lingfield, Surrey, RH7 6PQ. It’s an opportunity to learn more about different SECAM departments and areas of work including a vehicle display. There is also a formal meeting where they will take a look back at the last year with the Chair and Chief Exec – focussing on what they did well and what they still need to work on. There will be a Q&A session.

NHS COMMUNICATION

The NHS want to know about your experiences of health and care in Kent and Medway and your ideas for how they can improve services. A website has been launched called Have Your Say in Kent and Medway (<https://www.haveyoursayinkentandmedway.co.uk/>)

It includes details of the topics they are actively seeking views on, but it also encourages people to get in touch to let them know about their experiences of health and social care. The topics they are now seeking views on include:

- the ways we work with people and communities
- wheelchairs and community equipment
- social prescribing, which connects people to practical and emotional community support.

YOUTH OPPORTUNITY FUND

KCC and ABC are together exploring how the latest Government “levelling up” funding could be accessed by Ashford. No date has been announced for the opening of Phase II applications, but DCMS will appoint an Intermediary Grant Maker to assist with applications. Strategically, any application must show how young people will benefit from any application and initial scoping from KCC has calculated that would be 4,500 for a new hall in Bockhanger vs. up to 1,000 from a bid for a community gym from the John Wallis and 500 from a refurbished Stanhope Hub at the old Police Station. DCMS has asked that KCC coordinates bids but does not preclude applications from the Community Council or ABC. Contact at DCMS is emma.maklin@dcms.gov.uk (& yif@dcms.gov.uk)

M20 BRIDGE



I have reported the amount of litter on the approach to the M20 footbridge in Eureka. The bridge is yet to be adopted and this is a responsibility for the owners of Eureka. I have asked the owner of the Sainsbury / M&S retail park on the south side to improve disabled access from the bridge into the M&S

side. At the moment access is only via the road so wheelchair users have to share the road with vehicles which is unsafe.



SOLAR LIGHTS



I have asked KCC to order new solar lights to replace those that no longer work on the “zig-zag” path between Cemetery Lane and the Cineworld car park at Eureka. There is a 6 week deliver time so they should be in by early

September. Once the new lights are shown to work I will ask for the lights on The Street, Mersham to be replaced with the new ones (near the footpath “behind the hedge”).

QUANTOCK VILLAGE GREEN

Following the application for Village Green status in June 2022, a TPO has been issued. They are shown as the circles on the following map. KCC have applied to ABC to confirm that no planning application has been submitted on the land.



BUS SERVICES

A paper was considered at KCC’s Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 6th July to withdraw 48 supported bus services. A the link to the related consultation is www.kent.gov.uk/bussavings. Of the 48 services being withdrawn, 2 are in Ashford:

111	Stagecoach	Ashford to Folkestone	Withdrawal of Thursday only service also operating via Mersham, Aldington, Lympne, West Hythe and Burmarsh.	£13,007
123	Stagecoach	Biddenden to Ashford	Withdrawal of the whole service operating Monday to Friday to Ashford from Smarden, Pluckley, Egerton and Hotfield, including journeys to and from Ashford schools.	£85,627

Separately, services in Ashford are being changed by Stagecoach due to reduced demand following the pandemic. These are:

517	Stagecoach	Hythe Road Schools – Knole Lane	Withdraw the 15:15 from Hythe Road due to low usage. The 15:45 departure remains unchanged.
666	Stagecoach	Ashford to Faversham	Sunday and Bank Holiday journeys withdrawn. This is the commercial part of the 666 Monday to Saturday is tendered and will remain.
925	Stagecoach	Stanhope – St Anselms School	Service withdrawn.
15S	Stagecoach	Wye to Towers School	Service withdrawn.
2A	Stagecoach	Tenterden - Ashford	Peak school journeys to and from Homewood School will be covered with one bus, instead of two.
B Line	Stagecoach	Kennington – Town Centre - Bridgefield	Frequency reduction on Mondays to Saturdays from 15 to every 20 minutes.
G Line	Stagecoach	Godinton Park – Town Centre - Orbital Park	Service reduces to hourly but peak service maintained.

The following is the explanation I have used to explain the changes to residents who have asked:

Thank you very much for emailing me about the withdrawal of a number of bus services which serve children traveling to school.

These decisions reflect the pressures experienced by the commercial bus industry. Contrary to what has sometimes been said, they are not a result of any decision or funding reduction by Kent County Council.

Almost all (I think 97%) of bus routes in Kent, including these that are being withdrawn, are commercial routes, neither subsidised nor commissioned by KCC. Across the country bus operators are under pressure, chiefly because of reductions in usage (still down at least 20% on pre-pandemic levels), along with fuel cost increases and severe labour shortages.

Government did make available a Local Transport Fund (LTF) to help sustain services; some of it went via us, some of it direct to operators. But in any case, it was central government, not KCC funding and government has been very clear that this funding ceases at the end of September. So, what we have are essentially commercial decisions to set what is intended to be a network that can keep running after the central government support ends. KCC officers have been required by government to work with and survey operators concerning their plans, but we are not the decision maker for them.

I appreciate that it is confusing that, at around the same time, KCC did consult and decide on reductions in our subsidies for certain bus routes. This was not a decision that we wanted to take, but it was part of the budget that we approved in February, and reflected the massive pressures on the council's finances, which with rising inflation have only become more severe since the budget was set. Most importantly, those subsidy reductions are unrelated to, and have no effect on the school routes.

We recognise and fully understand the great difficulties that these commercial route reductions mean for many families. The next stage for our officers is to work with operators to

see if others can provide alternative services, doubtless configured differently from the existing pattern, that nonetheless address at least some of the gaps in service that have arisen. In a number of cases in the recent past, we have been able to do this to address threats to specific routes and will do our utmost in this case. But I have to be clear that there is no guarantee that this can be delivered.

You may also have heard a couple of months ago that Kent (unlike many other parts of the country) had been successful in securing £35 million over three years for delivery of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) starting in October. There are significant constraints on how this money can be spent. Two thirds of it is required to go on capital, not revenue spending, and within the revenue spending government has been very clear that this is not to be used to prop up existing service patterns. However, there may be some scope to use BSIP funding to pump prime new services that could help address some of the routes that have been lost. Again, while we cannot make any specific promises, we will do our utmost to address this where we can. We are currently negotiating the details of our BSIP with the Department for Transport.

ASHFORD POLICE

Ashford Police Station is trialling (since 11 July 2022) carrying out interviews under caution which are relayed to the custody suite in Folkestone. Before the trial, suspects under arrest had to be conveyed to Folkestone where there is a custody suite which took time and resources. These can now be used on front line activities.

There were reports of delays in answering the 101 number over the weekend 10th / 11th July. It has been suggested these were BT issues and outside the police control but in these circumstances the Police highly recommend their live chat facility, which offers all the benefits of speaking (messaging) someone, but with the speed of response residents are seeking from the 101 system. It is not an automated system unlike other companies, and operators can respond immediately to multiple call via this method. It is receiving lots of positive feedback. You can access this at <https://www.kent.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime/>

“My Community Voice” is a two-way engagement tool that Kent Police use to hear the concerns of residents, provide crime prevention advice and latest updates on scams, events and local Police activity on the district. Residents can sign up to My Community Voice and find out further information at www.mycommunityvoicekent.co.uk

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT

KCC has received Household Support Funding from the Government in and has confirmed an allocation of £374,179 for Ashford. This is split into £290,700 to support pensioners with energy bills and £83,479 to support vulnerable households. The details of the Ashford scheme are as follows:

For pensioners

Provide all pensioners who were in receipt of the £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate for properties in bands A to D with a payment of £100 towards their

energy costs. It is important to be aware that ABC are not able to use the data obtained via the Energy Rebate Scheme to make direct payments from this funding, therefore a letter will be sent to all 2,840 eligible pensioners in the Borough to advise them of the opportunity to claim this £100 and to provide their bank details to enable a direct payment. This means that this £100 must be claimed.

For other vulnerable households

Support of up to £100 per household, for assistance for energy or food could be applied for from <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/benefits/claiming-benefits/household-support-fund-1-april-30-september-2022/>

PENSION CREDIT

Around 850,000 people in the UK are missing out on Pension Credit and £1.7bn is going unclaimed. This is a reminder for retirees to put in a claim for pension credit to avoid missing out of the £650 of extra financial support this year. Pensioners have until August 18th to apply in order to qualify for the Government’s new cost of living payment. Call 0800 99 1234 to apply or visit gov.uk/pension-credit-calculator. If you apply for Pension Credit you may be eligible for the Cold Weather Payment between November and March, a free TV licence (if you are over 75), reductions in broadband charges, NHS services, Council Tax reductions, money off heating costs (Winter Fuel Allowance) and the Pension Credit itself.

CONNINGBROOK DEPOT, KENNINGTON ROAD

At KCC’s Policy & Resources Committee on 13th July, KCC agreed to sell the former KCC Conningbrook Depot site of 1.4 acres. The Council acquired the site in 1934 and was used as works/highway depot and Landscape Service until December 2018. The proceeds will be used to invest in the Council’s capital investment programme which is mostly in schools and roads.

SHEDKWICK



I visited the Shedkwick set up on the A28 Canturbury Road on 19th July ahead of their pop up event on August 13th on Bockhanger Square. They plan a further scheme on land adjoining the Eastmead Road social housing development (near to the Stour).

STATION UNDERPASS

Network rail have a project to put white and colour changing lighting though the brick section of the underpass and standard white anti vandal lighting in the concrete section. Work starts on this project on 15th August and will be completed by 5th September. Network rail will be working double shifts to complete the project with their contractors. The underpass will be closed during this period but signs with an alternative route will be placed.

IBF



New fencing going up on the footpath between the footpath through the High Field between Blind Lane and the IBF to protect the wildlife / biodiversity area from access.

RYLANDS ROAD ADULT GYM



The Mayor of Ashford, Cllr Jenny Webb, opened the outdoor gym at Rylands Road on 23rd July. The gym is the result of the hard work of the Rylands Road Park Renovation project, with support from the Community Council and Ashford Borough Council.

PROW AE639, 338 & 371

NOTICE OF ORDERS Highways Act 1980 S118 & S26

Kent County Council
(Public Footpaths AE639 (Part), AE338 and AE3371 Sevington) Public Path
Extinguishment and Definitive Map and Statement Order 2021
&
(Public Bridleway AE672 Sevington and Mersham) Public Path Creation
and Definitive Map and Statement Order 2021
&
(Public Bridleway AE673 Mersham) Public Path Creation and Definitive
Map and Statement Order 2021

Notice is hereby given that the above referenced Orders have been submitted to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for determination. An Inspector will be appointed by the Secretary of State to determine the Orders.

The **start date** for the above Orders is **02 August 2022**.

Consideration of the Orders will take the form of a public local inquiry.

The Inquiry will be held at **Christchurch Hall, Christchurch Road, Ashford, Kent, TN23 7XB** on **24 January 2023** at **10.00am** (2 days have been reserved).

We now have the date of the public inquiry into the extinguishing of the PROW across the IBF in Sevington. It is 24th & 25th January 2023. It is very important that if you wish to speak, give evidence or contribute to the inquiry in any way, that you attend on the opening day. Please confirm whether or not you will be attending the inquiry to rightsofway2@planninginspectorate.gov.uk.

It is open to anyone who has made an objection or representation and anyone else with an interest in the Order.

It is very important that we maintain existing PROWs, this one more than usual because it was supported to avoid a mammoth distribution hub being built when the DfT vacate the site in December 2025. They plan to leave at that date because by then all EU to UK trade will be controlled electronically with associated VAT paid automatically to HMRC.

FREE TREES

Kent County Council (KCC) is inviting applications for free trees to help reach its ambitious target of an additional 1.5 million trees to be planted in the county. The council launched a series of pilots as part of the Trees Outside Woodland programme which is developing innovative and sustainable new ways to increase tree cover with all the many benefits that this brings in dealing with weather extremes, helping nature and improving the environment for people. The £2.5 million, three-year programme is funded by government and delivered in partnership by The Tree Council, Natural England, and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs with five local councils. As part of the scheme, thousands of native trees will be available ready for planting later this year. Kent schools, community groups, landowners, businesses and residents will be able to apply for them from 1st August.

Trees can be planted in school fields, open spaces, public gardens or private land, as long as you get landowner's permission. Trees will be supplied in bundles of 10, 20, or 30 and not as individual trees. Applicants can apply for different bundles to suit the location and soil type of the area in which they plan to plant them. Plastic-free biodegradable guards and stakes will also be provided with the trees to help them grow and thrive. Online applications will close on Monday 8th August 2022, or when all the trees have been applied for. Successful applicants will need to be able to come and collect their trees from one of three designated collection points across the county. People can find more information and guidance notes on the scheme by contacting the council's dedicated Trees Outside Woodlands Project Officer by emailing PlanTree@kent.gov.uk or online at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/.../apply-for-free-tree-bundles>

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