

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
Monday 26th September 2022

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: A379 Speed Camera

Will the Cabinet Member confirm when the 'speed camera' on the A379 in Kenton, damaged in 2019 by a vehicle strike, will be repaired and put back in use?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

There are no plans to repair or replace the fixed safety camera on the A379 at South Town Kenton.

This camera site has been recommended by the Vision Zero South West camera partnership for decommissioning and removal. One of the reasons for this recommendation is due to road environment changes that have included the introduction of traffic signals within 40m of the current camera site and the impact that this has had on A379 traffic. But before removing any existing safety camera site, a decommissioning process is still undertaken to assess the risks of removal, including the potential impacts that this may have on driver behaviour and speeds.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: County Highway at Starcross and Flooding Issues.

The county highway at Starcross is often affected by flood in heavy rain.

As highways officer know, the problem is linked to the non-return valve which, I understand, is the responsibility of Network Rail.

However, it appears from the pictures supplied by a local resident that the non return valve is stuck and 'locked' in place by gravel (picture supplied with question submission and shared with Cabinet Member /Officers).

How is the County Council pursuing this issue with Network Rail so that they commit to regular and routine maintenance which will ensure the non-return valve operates properly and reduces the risk of flood water remaining on the highway?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The valve is indeed the responsibility of Network Rail. They inspect the valve every year and undertake any works that are required. The last inspection was undertaken on the 20th May, when they determined that the valve was operating correctly. Following a recent enquiry from a member of the public Network Rail have however informed the local Neighbourhood Highways Officer that they will undertake another inspection shortly when they are next in the area.

Any issues can be reported directly to Network Rail using their Contact Us page at www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/contact-us/

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT

Re: Vehicle Activated Speed Signs (VAS) in Kenton and Starcross

The communities of Kenton and Starcross are desperate to see their new Vehicle Activated Speed signs (VAS) installed.

The VAS signs were grant funded in November 2021. However, since then the installation of the signs and the posts they are fixed to seems to be delayed without end, causing frustration to the community, which had wanted them in place for the summer season this year.

1. Will the Cabinet Member confirm when the VAS will be installed in Kenton and Starcross?
2. Does the Council have any contractual control over the contractors who, it is suggested, are responsible for determining their own workplan?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Successful community bids were provisionally awarded by the Vision Zero South West road safety partnership with an agreed programme to approve and release the grant funding by the end of July 2022. This applicants proposed sites for mobile vehicle activated signing at Starcross and Kenton were agreed by officers in April 2022 and the grant funding was released to enable the applicant to purchase their signs.

Our contractors work programmes are coordinated to manage available resources, work priorities and to help maximise cost efficiencies for delivery. The officers work in partnership with the contractors and to support this community project quotes had been requested to prioritise delivery. The highway posts required for this bid are planned to be installed this month.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: Former Councillor Humphreys Investigation

On the 26th May 2022, I submitted a formal question to the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services asking when concerns were first raised with Devon County Council about former Councillor John Humphreys and what actions were taken to keep children safe.

In his response to me of 16th June 2022 the Portfolio Holder advised that a referral by the NSPCC had been made to the Local Authority Designated Officer at Devon County Council in 2014 but the appropriate multi agency safeguarding meeting had not been held. As a result of this error Devon County Council would be commissioning an independent investigation.

Please can the Portfolio Holder advise what progress has been made with this independent investigation including, but limited to: the terms of reference of the investigation, the identity of the organisation which will carry out the investigation and the expected timescale for completion of the investigation.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

An independent review of the information known to DCC, and the actions taken, in relation to Mr Humphreys, has been commissioned.

Mike Ferguson, an experienced social care practitioner and ex Ofsted HMI, has been commissioned to undertake the review. A brief biography of Mr Ferguson is attached at Appendix 1.

Terms of reference for the review have been reviewed, and agreed, by Councillors Hart, Leadbetter and Saywell, Phil Norrey, Melissa Caslake, and Andrew Yendole.

Final sign off has been delayed as the new Head of Legal services has been identified as the right person to sign off the TOR. To avoid delay the reviewer has begun his work based on the draft terms of reference.

It is anticipated that completion will be autumn.

Mike Ferguson Biography

Mike Ferguson is a qualified social worker with 30 years' experience working with children, including as a residential worker, social worker, manager, and foster carer. Mike has held several management positions in children's social care, both in local authorities and in the voluntary sector, and across a range of remits from safeguarding to children looked after.

Mike has worked as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors for Ofsted, taking part in and leading inspections of local authority children's services. Mike's most recent local authority role was as the senior manager responsible for services to children looked after and leaving care in a London borough, covering frontline social work, leaving care, fostering, adoption, placement, and contact services.

Since 2018 Mike has worked as an independent children's social care consultant, undertaking practice reviews with a range of local authorities to support their improvement journeys and other pieces of independent review work. Mike has also worked as an assessor for the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) and as the chair of a fostering panel.

In all his roles Mike's focus has been on improving outcomes for children. He has a strong track record of improving and sustaining positive outcomes for children and involving children and young people in service development.

Mike holds a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work and is registered with Social Work England (SW24189).