

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 1 July 2025.

PRESENT: Mr O Bradshaw, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr S Dixon, Mr B Fryer, Ms C Nolan, Mr D Sian, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr P Thomas, Mr N Williams and Mr J Defriend

ALSO PRESENT: M J Henderson, Mr P King and Mr P Webb

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr J Pearson (Head of Libraries Registration and Archives), Mr M Reeves (Project Manager), Mr S Samson (Head of Economy), Mr M Wagner (Chief Analyst) and Miss M Bundy (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Election of Chair

(Item 2)

1. Mr Paul Thomas was nominated by the Leader to be the Chair of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.
2. The Committee agreed this nomination and Mr Thomas was declared Chair of the Committee.
3. RESOLVED that Mr Paul Thomas be elected as Chair of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.

2. Election of Vice-Chair

(Item 3)

1. Mr Sian proposed, and Mr Dixon seconded that Mr James Defriend be elected as Vice- Chair of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.
2. As there were no further nominations, the Chair declared Mr James Defriend as Vice- Chair of the Committee.
3. RESOLVED that Mr James Defriend be elected as Vice- Chair of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.

3. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 4)

Note: Since the agenda was published, there had been an update in Committee Membership that Mr James Defriend had joined the Committee and filled the Reform vacancy.

No apologies or substitutes were received.

4. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda
(Item 5)

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2025
(Item 6)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2025 be approved as a correct record.

6. Kent County Council - Introduction to Growth and Communities Division
(Item 7)

1. The item was introduced by Mr Paul Webb, Cabinet Member for Community & Regulatory Services, and Mr Paul King, Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration. The report was introduced by Mrs Stephanie Holt- Castle, Director of Growth and Communities, who provided an overview and introduction to the Growth and Communities Division and established the existing scope of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.
2. In response to comments and questions from Members the discussion covered the following:
 - Verbal updates were not an item on the agenda and directorate newsletters had been circulated by officers to Members which included detailed information on services.
 - There was a default rate for the Kent & Medway Business Fund that was very low. A performance report on the Kent & Medway Business Fund was scheduled every six months on the Cabinet Committee work programme.
 - KCC, in partnership with various intelligence experts and agencies were running a successful pilot to tackle Waste Crime in one district within Kent.
3. RESOLVED to note the report.

7. Performance Dashboard
(Item 8)

1. The report was presented by Mr Matthew Wagner, Chief Analyst, which included the performance of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and activity indicators for Quarter 4 of 2024/25. Mr Wagner provided a brief overview of performance whereby 19 of the 24 KPIs were RAG rated green, 5 were amber, and none were red. He also highlighted the 10 new indicators that had been added across the report and the 4 that had been removed.
2. In response to comments and questions from guests and Members the discussion covered the following:
 - The target for EC12, relating to 'visitor economy' encompassed a broad range of businesses that Visit Kent supported. The KPI was narrowly missed, primarily due to contracting delays.
3. RESOLVED to note the performance report for Quarter 4 of 2024/25.

8. 25/00043 - Old Rectory Business Centre Management Contract (Item 9)

1. Mr King and Mr Mark Reeves, Project Manager, introduced the report regarding the next steps for the Old Rectory Business Centre in Northfleet. A previous decision had been taken to dispose of the site as a going concern with a 9-month contract extension put in place that was due to expire in August 2025. The report proposed an extension of the current management contract and procurement of management services to November 2026 whilst the disposal decision continues to be progressed.
2. In response to comments and questions from Members the discussion covered the following:
 - The decision to dispose of the asset as a going concern was endorsed at a previous meeting of the Cabinet Committee and taken by the Cabinet Member, following a wider options appraisal and consideration of KCC's financial circumstances. Due to the complexities of disposing it as a going concern a 15 month extension was now being proposed to take forward the original decision.
 - A motion was explored, as initially proposed by Ms Nolan and seconded by Mr Stepto, to recommend to the Cabinet Member that the tenants are asked if they wished to form a management company themselves and that alternative options to the disposal of the site be explored - following discussions among the Committee and the provision of clarifications from Officers as to the decision details and assurances from the Cabinet Member that the comments would be noted and taken into account as part of the decision-making, the Members were satisfied to proceed without a formal recommendation on this point.
 - Further comments were also noted on the protection of individual tenant's agreements and the potential lower financial return for KCC, if the site proceeds to be sold as a going concern, in line with the existing decision.
 - Members were assured that selling the site as a going concern ensured that the contract would protect the existing tenants and the site's status as a business centre. The benefit of this offsets the one- off capital gained by KCC from a potential outright sale.
 - Ms Nolan proposed, but found no seconder for, a specific recommendation that option 2 (as set out in the reports) be explored further.
3. RESOLVED that the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee made comments and endorsed the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration to:
 - APPROVE the extension of current contractual arrangements for three months from (1 September 2025) to (30 November 2025) and undertake a procurement process to secure management services for a further 12 months with extension clauses to 30 November 2026 to allow time to undertake the disposal and ensure that any new owner has the option of an existing management company in place.
 - CONFIRM the decision to dispose of the Old Rectory Business Centre in Northfleet as a going concern as detailed in decision 24/00083. Page 47 Agenda Item 9
 - DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities, working with the Director for Infrastructure in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration to exercise relevant

contract extensions and oversight of a procurement process and enter into relevant contracts or legal agreements.

- DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision to extend and reprocur management services; as shown at Appendix A

9. 25/00046 - Get Kent & Medway Working Plan

(Item 10)

1. Mr King and Mr Samson, Head of Economy, introduced the report and gave an overview of the Government- funded joint plan that was under development with Medway Council, the Integrated Care Board and Jobcentre Plus. An overview was provided of the challenges and opportunities related to health conditions, economic inactivity and skills. The report also highlighted the data-driven approach to address the needs of those with long- term health conditions, caring responsibilities and young people classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).
2. In response to comments and questions from guests and Members the discussion covered the following:
 - Mr Samson detailed the strategy to support employers into engaging with schools as a work in progress and acknowledged the higher proportion of home- educated students in Kent than in other local authority areas, who may be possibly missing out on careers education.
 - Connect to Work had recently been launched to support 9,000 people across Kent and Medway into work through supported employment.
 - As part of the plan to address barriers to employment, a cohesive approach that integrated work experience throughout the school process to increase student and employer interaction was being developed nationally.
 - Factors to explain variation in employment statistics between districts were identified e.g. student population, elderly residents etc.
 - Success indicators for this plan would include a reduction in economically inactive residents and an increase in secure employment and training opportunities.
 - It was acknowledged that coastal and certain rural areas were disproportionately affected by low employment rates due in part to poor transport links.
 - The Plan was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions and resource was required to deliver it. The Connect to Work programme and the Skills Bootcamp programme would contribute to meeting some of the objectives set out in the plan.
3. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration to:
 - APPROVE and ADOPT the Get Kent and Medway Working Plan on behalf of Kent County Council. Other partner organisations (Medway Council, the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board and Jobcentre Plus) will also be taking the Plan through their own approval processes.
 - DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth & Communities in consultation with the Director for Public Health; Corporate Director for Children, Young People & Education; Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal

Regeneration; Page 69 Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health; and Cabinet Member for Education & Skills to sign off the final plan.

- DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth & Communities in consultation with the Director for Public Health; Corporate Director for Children, Young People & Education; the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration; Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health; and Cabinet Member for Education & Skills to refresh and/or make revisions to the Plan as appropriate during the lifetime of the plan.
- DELEGATE authority to the Director Growth & Communities in consultation with the Director for Public Health, and Corporate Director for Children, Young People & Education to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A

10. 25/00005 - Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent and Medway

(Item 11)

1. Mr King introduced the report and provided an update on the development of the Integrated Health and Work Strategy for Kent and Medway which aimed to address issues linked to economic inactivity related to long- term health conditions.
2. Mr Samson explained that a similar paper would be considered by the Adult Social Care & Public Health Cabinet Committee as well as organisations such as Medway Council and the Integrated Care Partnership. He established key elements of the implementation plan, including building employer confidence, skills and training priority, anchor institutions and keeping workforces healthy.
3. In response to comments and questions from guests and Members the discussion covered the following:
 - Members praised the report and comments were acknowledged on the benefits of flexible working arrangements.
 - In the report, the term 'job carving' referred to the match between the skillset of an individual and the needs of an employer when it comes to shaping job roles.
4. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration to:
 - APPROVE and ADOPT the Kent and Medway Integrated Work and Health Strategy on behalf of Kent County Council. Other partner organisations (Medway Council, the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board) will also be taking the Plan through their own approval processes.
 - DELEGATE authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Director of Growth and Communities, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health and Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration, to sign off the final plan, refresh and/or make revisions to the Plan as appropriate during the lifetime of the plan.
 - DELEGATE authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Director of Growth & Communities, to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.

11. Work Programme 2025/26

(Item 12)

1. It was acknowledged that a Programme for Member visits to Kent districts would be discussed at agenda setting meetings.
2. RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.