

From: Paul King, Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration

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To: Growth, Economic Development & Communities Cabinet Committee – 11 November 2025

Subject: Implementation of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework Ambition 2

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: All KCC electoral divisions

Summary: This report provides an overview of the progress in implementing the Kent and Medway Economic Framework Ambition 2. It sets out the high-level key actions that have taken place to date and the future activity planned to support sustainable growth of Kent & Medway's economy, through to 2030. This paper is one of a regular series of deep dives into the Framework's five ambitions.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report.

1. Background

- 1.1 In April 2024, the [Kent & Medway Economic Partnership](#)¹ (KMEP) approved the publication of the [Kent & Medway Economic Framework](#) (KMEF). This a medium-term strategy that looks to guide actions that support the growth and prosperity of the region (functional economic area) through to 2030.
- 1.2 The Framework focuses on three overarching objectives (Productivity, Sustainability and Inclusivity) which sit above five ambitions for delivery, these being:
1. Enable innovative, productive and creative businesses
 2. Widen opportunities and unlock talent
 3. Secure resilient infrastructure for planned, sustainable growth
 4. Place economic opportunity at the centre of community wellbeing and prosperity
 5. Create diverse, distinctive and vibrant places.

¹ KMEP is the local growth board for this area, and its membership includes Kent County Council, Medway Council, all district councils' leaders, businesses, universities and colleges. Its website is www.kmep.org.uk

2. KMEF Implementation

- 2.1 Since publication, the KCC Economy Team (which acts as the KMEP Secretariat) has been working to implement the KMEF ambitions in partnership with the KMEP Board Members, the Business Advisory Board (BAB), and a range of local partners and stakeholders.
- 2.2 For each of the five ambitions, a private sector board member and a local authority officer acts as a Thematic Lead for the ambition, helping to oversee the implementation of the KMEF and direct the team's activities.
- 2.3 The information below outlines the focus of the work to date against the ambition 2 of the KMEF: 'Widen opportunities and unlock talent'. The four action areas under this ambition are:
- Embedding the Local Skills Improvement Plan at the heart of a closer relationship between employers, further education and other skills providers to meet current and future skills needs
 - Investing in Kent and Medway's skills infrastructure to harness the potential of the long-term transformational trends we have identified and support the growth of our sectoral strengths
 - Collaborating to make the most effective use of skills budgets, focused on Kent and Medway's shared priorities
 - Retaining and developing talent
- 2.4 This paper provides updates on:
- The Kent & Medway Employment Task Force
 - The Local Skills Improvement Plan
 - The Get Kent & Medway Working Plan
 - The Skills Bootcamps Programme
 - The Connect to Work Programme

3. The Kent & Medway Employment Task Force (ETF)

- 3.1 The ETF was established in 2020 in direct response to the Covid pandemic, to address anticipated challenges in the local employment and skills landscape coming out of the pandemic and to coordinate recovery activity across Kent and Medway. Membership includes Kent County Council (KCC), Medway Council (MC), the South East National Careers Service Prime Contractor CXK, the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) and key stakeholders including Further Education, Higher Education, local MPs, skills providers, local leaders and a range of key employers across diverse employment sectors.
- 3.2 Key achievements since inception include:
- Getting behind the DWP Kickstart programme, helping to make it one of the best performing programmes nationally.
 - Linking skills provision with local business need through support of the Kent & Medway Workforce Development Plan which led to the business-

led Local Skills Improvement Partnership (LSIP) which gave it trailblazer status (one of only seven nationally). See also 4.1 below.

- Bringing £15m new investment into Kent's leading FE Colleges, focussing on Kent's priority sectors including major new facilities such as the UK's first centre of excellence in greenhouse growing at Hadlow College.

3.3 More recently, the group has been focusing on taking forward activity under KMEF Ambition 2 including:

- Working to generate and secure local employment and skills opportunities from new investment (such as the opportunities provided by the Lower Thames Crossing).
- Championing apprenticeships, reducing barriers and supporting new work-based opportunities for local young people.
- Providing a forum for overseeing the delivery of major new Government initiatives including the Local Get Britain Working Plan, the Kent & Medway Work & Health Strategy, the Skills Bootcamps initiative and Connect to Work Programme.

3.4 The ETF met most recently in September and heard from the University of Kent about the creation of the London and South East University Group with the University of Greenwich, the new investment secured in North Kent to create a Construction Technical Excellence College and the latest developments with the Lower Thames Crossing Skills Hub in Gravesham. The group agreed to establish an apprenticeships task and finish group which will meet in November to support Kent County Council's plans to simplify access to information about apprenticeships for potential apprentices, employers and local training providers via a digital apprenticeships hub. The group will also consider how best to bring employers and potential apprentices together to highlight opportunities for local people to access apprenticeships with local employers.

4. The Local Skills Improvement Plan

4.1 The [Local Skills Improvement Plan](#) (LSIP) is a strategic initiative designed to address skill gaps and drive economic growth in Kent & Medway. Led by the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, funded by UK Government and supported by the Department for Education, the LSIP enables local employers to influence the skills development of their current and future workforce.

4.2 The LSIP was developed through extensive collaboration with employers, education providers, and stakeholders. The LSIP provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the Kent & Medway's unique skills challenges across five priority sectors:

- Manufacturing & Engineering
- Construction
- Fresh Food & Food Production
- Education
- Health and Social Care

- 4.3 The most recent [LSIP report](#) was published in June 2025 and highlights examples of recent activity including:
- The establishment of a construction Academy at EKC Canterbury College
 - Digital skills in social care courses
 - The launch of the Thanet Earth Centre of Excellence at Hadlow College
- 4.4 Given that the skills and workforce landscape is constantly evolving, the LSIP is a plan that requires regular reviews and updating. Currently in its third phase of activity, work on a new 3-year LSIP for Kent & Medway covering the period of 2026-29 is now underway. Over the next few months, work will focus on gathering intelligence and analysis the latest skills and employment data activity and facilitating sector roundtable discussions with employers to understand the emerging local training and skills gaps.

5. The Get Kent & Medway Working Plan

- 5.1 KCC was asked in April 2025, by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), to coordinate the development of a local Get Britain Working Plan. The plan was to be agreed collaboratively by KCC and Medway Council as the two upper tier authorities, Jobcentre Plus and the Integrated Care Board. The plan was finalised over the summer and published in October. The full plan is available on the [KCC Website](#).
- 5.2 The plan focuses on health, work, and skills across Kent & Medway and includes:
- An analysis of key local labour market challenges for different groups of people and employers.
 - An overview of the support available for individuals and employers
 - How local organisations can work together to support those looking for a job.
 - How to tackle barriers that prevent people from working.
- 5.3 Key findings in the plan are as follows:
- 215,000 people are not part of the active working economy in Kent & Medway (this excludes students and retired people). This figure is made up of a high numbers of carers (74,000), people who have long-term sickness or disability (57,000) and people who are unemployed (40,000).
 - The rates of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Kent and Medway are significantly above comparator areas for 16/17 year olds
 - The main causes of supply and demand issues in the labour market include:
 - Workforce skills gaps with employers saying recruitment is a problem and citing gaps in existing workforce capabilities
 - Mismatches in employer / employee expectations a gap in terms of younger people lacking job readiness skills and confidence for work
 - This employer-employee gap is more acute in respect of potential employees with complex needs. Employers (especially SMEs) report concerns about whether they are able to make reasonable adjustments for employees with disabilities

- For young people there has been a sharp decline in education provision for those who are not, or perceive they are not, suited to a traditional academic route and require places at Level 2 and below
- Jobcentre Plus teams report health issues as a widespread driver of economic inactivity (mental health and musculoskeletal problems)
- There is a high number of economically inactive people with learning disabilities
- A high prevalence of health issues creates care demands on unpaid family members, which limits those family members' ability and availability to work
- Data shows that there are over 150,000 unpaid carers in Kent and Medway, around a third of whom provide care for more than 50 hours a week.

5.4 Now the plan has been published, KCC and its partners and stakeholders are working on the delivery plan to identify activities that can enable the Kent & Medway 'system' to tackle the challenges identified in the plan. Input and steer will be received from a number of groups and partnerships including the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership, the Strategic Partnership for Health & Economy, and The Employment Task Force.

5.5 The action plan is available in the published plan via the link above and focuses on five areas of activity:

1. Focus on the individual
2. Focus on employers
3. Influence training and work supply
4. Influence the wider determinants of health and work
5. Operate as a system

6. Skills Bootcamps

6.1 [Skills Bootcamps](#) are intensive, Level 3-5² or equivalent flexible training courses up to 16 weeks, which equip adults with technical skills that enable them to access in-demand jobs, apprenticeships, new opportunities and an increased level of income over time.

6.2 KCC is the accountable body for the Kent & Medway 2025-26 Skills bootcamps programme which funded by the Department for Education and is delivering courses across six key sectors:

- Creative Industries
- Agri-food
- Construction
- Retail
- Health & Social Care
- Early Years & School

² There are nine qualifications levels in England. Level 3 includes A-level, T-Level, level 3 NVQ, advanced apprenticeship. Level 4 includes certificate of Higher Education, higher apprenticeship, level 4 NVQ. Level 5 includes diploma of higher education, foundation degree, level 5 NVQ.

- 6.3 The programme launched in July 2025 and KCC is working with 12 training providers to deliver 60 courses. There are now spaces for 647 learners to participate in a course which lead to a guaranteed job interview for people currently out of work or an enhanced job role for existing employees. Over half of the course places in Kent & Medway are in construction and the team is working with the Lower Thames Crossing to deliver two courses at the new skills hub. As at October 2025, over 200 places have been filled and a number of courses are well underway including in construction and social care.
- 6.4 Employers and learners can find out more and register their interest via the website: [Skills Bootcamps | Kent Adult Education](#).

7. Connect to work

- 7.1 The Kent & Medway [Connect to Work programme](#) went live on 30th June and has just completed its first full quarter of operation. KCC is the accountable body for this DWP-funded supported employment programme that aims to support over 9,000 people into work, or to remain in work by 2030. The programme can help people with a long term health condition, disability or other potential disadvantage.
- 7.2 The Education People (TEP) is the first service provider commissioned to deliver the programme, with a procurement process currently underway to secure a further three providers. As at October 2025, 305 participants have started on the programme with 11 people already having reported first earnings i.e. securing employment.
- 7.3 As the county was among the first four areas in the UK to launch, we have recently been allocated an additional £400,000 to spend before April 2026 which will support an additional 117 participants during year 1 (total target now 1407).
- 7.4 KCC's Connect to Work team has been working closely with KCC's Marketing and Resident Experience (communication) team to develop leaflets, posters, graphics for GP waiting room screens, social media content and more to promote the programme as widely as possible. Referrals have been coming in from every Jobcentre in Kent and Medway and the team and TEP have been working with stakeholders across all eligibility groups to reach suitable participants.

8. Next steps and Conclusions

- 8.1 This report has provided an overview of the progress in implementing Ambition 2 within the Kent and Medway Economic Framework. As can be seen above, significant work is underway with more future activity planned to support sustainable growth of Kent & Medway's economy, through to 2030.

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