

## **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, 11 November 2025.

PRESENT: Mr J Defriend (Vice-Chair), Mr W Chapman, Mr S Dixon, Mr B Fryer, Mr D Sian, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr N Williams and Mr J Baker (Substitute for Mr T Mallon)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P King, Mrs M Lawes, Mr J Henderson and Mrs B Fordham

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Miss M Bundy (Democratic Services Officer), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr S Samson (Head of Economy), Mr T Henderson (Project Manager) and Mr T Marchant (Head of Strategic Development and Place)

### **UNRESTRICTED ITEMS**

#### **26. Election of Chair**

*(Item 2)*

(The Vice- Chair presided over this item)

1. Mr Dodger Sian 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 Sian was declared Chair of the Committee.
3. RESOLVED that Mr Dodger Sian be elected as Chair of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.

#### **27. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item 3)*

Since the last meeting of the Cabinet Committee, Mr Thomas Mallon had joined the Committee Membership to fill a Reform UK vacancy.

Apologies were received from Mr Chamberlain, Ms Nolan and Mr Mallon.

Mr Baker was present as a substitute for Mr Mallon.

#### **28. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda**

*(Item 4)*

Mr Baker declared in reference to the verbal update on Libraries, Registrations and Archives (LRA), that Folkestone Library was in his ward.

## **29. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2025**

*(Item 5)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held of 11 September 2025 were a correct record and they be signed by the Chair.

## **30. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director**

*(Item 6)*

1. Mr Paul King, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration, provided an update on the following:
  - a) Thanks were expressed to Members and officers for their contribution to various strategic plans and events including the No Use Empty (NUE) scheme, 'Grow in Kent' Ashford and Ebbsfleet event, and Regional Energy Plans.
  - b) Mr King had recently attended and spoken at the launch of the 2025-26 Kent Property Market Report, held at the Ashford International Hotel on 5 November. He commended the event and the further progress anticipated following the creation of the new Grow in Kent team (Visitor Economy and Inward Investment).
  - c) Praise was given to Steve Grimshaw, who had received additional funding from the Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) towards the project. Business cases for further investment were ongoing with the KMBF Advisory Board.
  - d) There had been significant engagement with members of the public and various District Councils to discuss the future of economic development and Mr King encouraged Committee Members to share their constituents' views on this matter.
  - e) A visit had been made to the Northfleet Harbourside development, specifically to wharfs, local businesses and the scheme's developers.
  - f) Whilst visiting the Isle of Sheppey, Mr King had attended meetings on challenges faced by the community, specifically for those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
  - g) As a Member of the Neighbourhood Board for Ramsgate and Thanet Growth Board, Mr King had been able to assist in decisions regarding government funding.
  - h) Other visits included to the Eurotunnel to witness the new Entry/Exit System (EES) and to the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) to discuss their recent investments and future plans.

2. In response to comments and questions from Members and guests, discussion covered the following:
  - a) Discussions were ongoing on the specific policy wording surrounding the NUE additional investment, which would be communicated once confirmed.
  - b) During the visit to Eurotunnel, Mr King met with the Director of Public and Corporate Affairs, Mr John Keefe to discuss the £70 million investment in the EES system, the system roll- out and their management of traffic flow.
  - c) Mr King provided an overview of his involvement in North Kent growth opportunities, including recent meetings for the Lower Thames Crossing and future endeavours to aid the county's small and medium enterprises.
3. Mrs Mary Lawes, Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities, provided an update on the following:
  - a) Community Wardens remained a priority, with Parish Councils committing to fund additional Wardens and further options for financial support being explored. Community Wardens were also undergoing a training programme focussed on youth engagement, anti- social behaviour and harm reduction.
  - b) The Trading Standards Ports Team had hosted Mrs Lawes on a visit to their operations at Dover Port and Sevington. Mrs Lawes informed the Committee of the volume of non- compliant and unsafe items entering the market through both ports and the postal system.
  - c) Trading Standards had also supported a National Crime Agency operation in Kent targeting premises linked to organised crime and money laundering. The operation was successful and soon to be proceeding to Court.
  - d) Three defendants had been found guilty of fraud relating to the supply of solar panels following a Trading Standards investigation and subsequent trial at Maidstone Crown Court.
  - e) A Trading Standards campaign to tackle acid attacks was ongoing, as Kent had ranked as the 4<sup>th</sup> worst- affected region in England and Wales for corrosive substance attacks. To assist in delivering this, a dashboard was being created to compile relevant data and assign resources to target the distribution of acidic substances.
  - f) Mrs Lawes had visited the recently re- opened Dover Discovery Centre that had unveiled a new design of their library space. Mrs Lawes and Mr Webb had also travelled to multiple other libraries across Kent and Mrs Lawes praised the passion and innovation displayed in all locations they visited.
  - g) Temple Hill, Cranbrook and Sittingbourne libraries were all temporarily closed until early 2026, due to ongoing works. Sittingbourne library was undergoing a new layout redesign to increase its capacity, funded by developer contributions.

- h) Works on Stanhope library had already been completed and further co-locations at Cliftonville and Queenborough were expected to be delivered in early 2026.
  - i) The LRA service recently had its annual Customer Service Excellence assessment. The LRA achieved beyond the core standard and increased its Compliance Plus points by one to a total of 25, reflecting outstanding performance and best practice.
  - j) The 'Kent Speak their Name' Suicide Memorial Quilt had been hosted at a number of libraries around Kent including Broadstairs and Rochester libraries. The quilt was comprised of personalised squares representing the victims of suicide and their loved ones.
  - k) The Active Kent & Medway annual conference held at the Kent Showground on 15 October was attended by over 200 delegates, including Mr Webb, Sport England Strategic Director, Lisa Dodd- Mayne and local Channel swimmer, Sarah Philpott.
  - l) The Community Safety Team had organised and hosted a domestic homicide learning event focussed on the impact on mothers who had been separated from their children. Over 170 professionals attended and excellent feedback had been received.
  - m) Kent Scientific Services had recently signed a new contract for Felixstowe Port which was praised by Mrs Lawes.
  - n) Senior Coroner Mrs Patricia Harding had attended the High Sheriff of Kent's Justice Service at Canterbury Cathedral, addressed by Lord Reed, the President of the Supreme Court.
4. In response to comments and questions from Members and guests, discussion covered the following:
- a) Mr King and Mrs Lawes confirmed that financial investment and relevant expert advice would be explored surrounding a potential refurbishment of the Old Roundhouse Theatre in Dover.
  - b) Mrs Lawes established that the new Kent Scientific Services contract at Felixstowe Port was focussed on food and animal feed products.
  - c) Solar panel fraud in Kent had involved both the sale of counterfeit goods and poor installation practices.
  - d) The rise in acid attacks in Kent were concentrated in Dartford and Gravesham, however the Trading Standards dashboard was still collecting data on location.
  - e) Mrs Lawes highlighted a focus on utilising libraries as co- working and community hubs in Kent, with potential activities such as history talks and gardening to keep libraries popular community spaces.

- f) Mrs Stephanie Holt- Castle, Director of Growth and Communities, confirmed that a paper on the role of Community Wardens in individual districts could be considered. Mrs Lawes elaborated that Dartford Community Wardens were engaging in a water safety campaign due to a number of accidents around reservoirs.
  - g) Mrs Holt- Castle explained that KCC is eligible for a small financial benefit from certain criminal fines, however these amounts were usually minimal. She confirmed the interested Member would be provided a separate briefing.
5. Mr Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport (GET), provided an update on the following:
- a) KCC's economy team were developing opportunities linked to the Lower Thames Crossing and Gatwick Airport schemes to ensure Kent businesses and local providers were in a position to support these projects. Work included identifying supplier requirements, contractor obligations, value for money and apprenticeships. A skills hub in Gravesend had also been launched for the Lower Thames Crossing scheme.
  - b) Concerning the creative economy, Jasmin Vardimon, an international dance company had showcased its latest production, *Now*, at its bespoke home in Ashford. KCC had played a central role in the creation of JV Home, a flagship cultural and economic development that aimed to stimulate Kent's creative and business sectors. KCC led a dual- purpose development including a bespoke facility for the Jasmine Vardimon Company (JVC) and 29 light industrial units to support local economic growth. Mr Jones praised the success of the creative enterprise quarter and encouraged Committee Members to attend these local productions.
  - c) KCC's Public Health team were in collaboration with the Kent Trading Standards Team to address the issue of unregulated aesthetic treatments. Mr Jones assured the Committee that this economic and health issue was a priority for the service.
  - d) Following from the Summer Reading Challenge, Mr Jones highlighted a series of winter- mini reading challenges that would build on the LRA's work to encourage reading within Kent.
  - e) Mr Jones reminded Members to call attention to the increase in door- stop and online crime during the Christmas period to their residents.

6. RESOLVED to note the updates.

**31. KMEF- Ambition 2- Widen opportunities and unlock talent**  
(Item 7)

*Ms Claire Wray, Connect to Work Programme Manager, was present for this item.*

*At 11am, the Committee and attendees stood in silence for two minutes to mark Remembrance Day.*

1. The report was introduced by Mr Steve Samson, Head of Economy, who provided an update on the implementation of the Kent and Medway Economic Framework (KMEF) Ambition 2: widen opportunities and unlock talent. This included an overview of the following five activities: the Kent and Medway Employment Task Force; Local Skills Improvement Plan; Get Kent and Medway Working Plan; Skills Bootcamps; and Connect to Work Programme.
2. In response to comments and questions from Members and Guests, discussion covered the following:
  - a) Research by the Get Kent and Medway Working Plan indicated that reasons behind high unemployment rates in Kent were complex. Early findings identified the workforce skills gap, mismatched employer and employee expectations and access to training as potential points to address.
  - b) The current figure for NEET individuals between ages 16-18 was approximately 1600 throughout Kent. Work with partners had also identified where those NEETs were located in the county and the best methods to communicate with them.
  - c) Mr King acknowledged concerns about employment opportunities and the financial constraints facing small businesses and emphasised that KCC's approach was informed by national policy.
  - d) Mr Samson explained that incorporating AI and new technology into skills bootcamps required employers willing to offer guaranteed interviews and providers with relevant expertise to deliver training. Therefore, whilst a course could be considered for future bootcamps, those requirements would need to be met before it could proceed.
  - e) Mr Samson outlined how the Kent & Medway Working Plan aimed to address key employment barriers, such as transport being critical to enable access to work and training. Examples included Loc8 and Amazon buses which supported transport to work and assistance provided to help individuals attend training and bootcamps throughout Kent. Expansion of these provisions were subject to further allocation of funding and resources.
  - f) Ms Claire Wray, Connect to Work Programme Manager, confirmed that former members of His Majesty's Armed Forces or Armed Forces Reserves could potentially be eligible for support under the Connect to Work Programme. Spouses of these groups were also eligible and conversations with representative groups on the inclusion of Gurkhas would be taking place.
  - g) Ms Wray explained how stakeholder engagement and spreading awareness was being utilised to communicate with veterans and other eligible groups about the Connect to Work Programme. This included referral routes such as the Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) and Life Works programme, educating referral partners and distributing updates to the Armed Forces through their media channels.
3. RESOLVED to note the report.

## **32. Regional Energy Strategic Plan**

*(Item 8)*

1. The item was introduced by Mr King who provided an overview of the Regional Energy Strategic Plan (RESP), the transitional Energy Strategic Plan (tRESP) and KCC's role in shaping the energy system in Southeast England.
2. The report was introduced by Mr Tom Henderson, Principal Strategic Energy and Infrastructure Officer, who gave a short PowerPoint presentation, the slides of which can be found [HERE](#).
3. Further to questions and comments from Members and guests, discussion covered the following:
  - a) A concern was expressed on the policy's focus on heat pumps, rather than hydrogen energy alternatives.
  - b) In the case of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), Mr Henderson clarified that the RESPs would be transferred to a future strategic or Mayoral authority.
  - c) Mr King explained that due to the imbalance between energy needs and energy supply, current focus was on meeting demand rather than the method of energy production. Mr Henderson elaborated that the RESP would contribute to meeting nationally set targets for Clean Power by 2030.
  - d) Whilst KCC did not currently have authority over network upgrades, future RESPs could expand this role through a strategic board that KCC would participate in alongside other authorities and the National Energy System Operator (NESO). This would involve the development of a formal plan including recommendations for network upgrades that KCC would provide sign- off on.
  - e) Two major solar energy schemes had already been delivered by KCC with opportunities for expansion subject to the viability of the business cases and discussions with Property colleagues due to obligations under the disposals policy.
  - f) Mrs Holt- Castle explained that placing solar panels on KCC properties had previously been fully funded by government grants, and the reduction in this funding had created a financial challenge for the Council to continue roll-out at previous pace. She also advised the Committee that discussions for future reporting on e.g. Solar Together group community- buying energy initiatives were led by the Director for Environment and Circular Economy and reported to the Environment and Transport Committee.
4. RESOLVED to note the report.

## **33. Decisions taken between Cabinet Committee Meetings- 25/00084**

*(Item 9)*

1. The item was introduced by Mr King, who outlined the decision 25/00084 to reinstate a Visitor Economy and Inward Investment Service for Kent & Medway and the reasons why the decision could not have been reasonably deferred to the next Cabinet Committee meeting.
2. Mr Samson provided an overview of recent events, the strategic direction for Kent's Visitor Economy and Inward Investment service as well as future governance and reporting arrangements.
3. Further to questions and comments from Members and guests, discussion covered the following:
  - a) Mr Samson clarified that the reinstated Visitor Economy would most likely retain the title 'Visit Kent'. Discussions were ongoing on the title 'Invest Kent' for the Inward Investment Service with both organisations falling under a developing growth brand called "Grow in Kent".
  - b) The Committee was assured by Mr Samson that a review of digital assets would be undertaken, in collaboration with communications teams and universities, to ensure all digital marketing opportunities were fully explored.
  - c) Mr King outlined the financial timeline including stakeholder discussions and budgetary constraints and invited views from the Committee on alternative revenue streams for the established team.
  - d) Under Budget plans for 2026, KCC would commit £405k, whilst Medway would pay a proportionate amount (subject to final Medway governance processes) that would result in £476k total funding. This would cover Grow in Kent's core team and activity budget with ongoing plans to engage the private sector for additional financial support.
  - e) Mr Samson clarified the new service would be appointing a new team of employees on a fixed- term basis, contracted until March 2027. The reporting arrangements of this new team were still being finalised, subject to discussions with industry partners.
  - f) It was agreed that consideration would be given to Member involvement in the reinstated Visitor Economy and Inward Investment Service.
4. RESOLVED to note that decision 25/00084 to reinstate a Visitor Economy and Inward Investment Service for Kent & Medway was taken between meetings of the Cabinet Committee in accordance with the process set out in the Council's Constitution.

#### **34. Work Programme 2025/26**

*(Item 10)*

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.

#### **35. 25/00102- Discovery Park Technology Investment Fund (DPTIF)**

*(Item 11)*



*In accordance with Section 100B 4 (b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Vice-Chair in the role of Chair approved consideration of this item as agenda item 11 as a matter of urgency because the matter could not be reasonably delayed until the next scheduled meeting.*

*It was decided by the Chair that this item be taken as Item 10.*

1. The item was introduced by Mr King, who outlined the proposal to end the current Partnership for the Discovery Park Technology Investment Fund (DPTIF).
2. Mr Samson explained that the recommended action to transfer shares from the existing Partnership to KCC ownership upon the contract's expiration would not materially impact the trading of currently operating businesses.
3. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration to:
  - a) AGREE to end the current DPTIF Partnership and transfer the existing shares into the beneficial ownership of Kent County Council
  - b) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities to take relevant actions to transfer the shares and cease the operation of the DPTIF, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement this decision.