

From: David Wimble, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects

Simon Jones, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Growth, Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee

Subject: Implementation of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework - Ambition 4

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 4. It sets out the high-level key actions that have taken place recently and the future activity planned to support sustainable growth of Kent & Medway’s economy, through to 2030. This one of a series of updates on 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 Kent and Medway 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 4 of the KMEF: 'Place economic opportunity at the centre of community wellbeing and prosperity'. The four action areas under this ambition are:
 - Ensuring that everyone who wants a job can find work
 - Developing a strategic partnership for health and the economy
 - Building links between anchors of growth, key investments and community opportunity
 - Embedding economic opportunity at the centre of local regeneration
- 2.4 This paper provides short updates on:
 - The Connect to Work Programme
 - The Get Kent & Medway Working Plan
 - The Strategic Partnership for Health & Economy
 - Early work with local Anchor Institutions
 - Programmes that are contributing to local regeneration across the county

3. Action Area 13 - Ensuring that everyone who wants a job can find work:

- 3.1 Kent County Council is currently delivering Wave 6 of Skills Bootcamps across the following sectors: creative, construction, early years/schools, health and social care, and retail. We have created over 600 learner places, with a target to achieve at least 500 filled. So far, 350 learners have enrolled.
- 3.2 Of the 350 starters, 170 learners have completed their Bootcamp. Among those who have completed, 90 learners have already progressed into a new job, moved into an enhanced role with new responsibilities, or—if self-employed—secured new contracts as a direct result of the Skills Bootcamps.
- 3.3 The programme continues to be highly popular, with many courses receiving strong application numbers—particularly those in creative industries, construction, and early years/schools. Learner satisfaction also remains exceptionally high, with a 98% satisfaction rate, based on 80 responses. This represents a 50% response rate from learners who have completed the programme.
- 3.4 Key highlights and common strengths
 - Overall learner satisfaction: 98%
 - 100% of learners reported gaining new skills or understanding (a key DfE KPI)

- 100% felt the teaching methods were effective
 - 100% felt supported by tutors and staff throughout the Bootcamp
 - 100% said the Bootcamp helped them develop skills for the workplace, future employment, or self-employment
 - 100% received information on safeguarding procedures during the Bootcamp
- 3.5 We are now preparing programmes with our existing providers for Wave 7 Skills Bootcamps. We have received £1.5 million in funding, which represents a 20% reduction compared with Wave 6. We will be offering at least 400 learner places, as directed by the DfE, and we are exploring the addition of the agricultural sector. The new programme will run from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027.
- 3.6 The recently published [Get Kent & Medway Working Plan](#) confirmed that of the 215,000 people in the county who are currently economically inactive, 56,667 cannot work due to a long term health condition and 74,413 due to caring responsibilities. Not only does this impact negatively upon people's own lives, but skills gaps and vacancy rates among local employers are exacerbated, hindering business growth.
- 3.7 This action area is broad and cannot be achieved by a single programme or organisation but rather requires a system-wide approach to tackling economic inactivity in Kent & Medway. A number of programmes and activities are, however, underway to support people who are keen to work, to access employment opportunities.
- 3.8 The [Thrive Programme](#) was co-created by a number of local partners and delivered by East Kent Colleges Group towards the end of 2025 in Margate and Swale. Thrive provided support over a period 12 weeks to help people who had been out of work for some time due to sickness regain confidence and skills to improve their employability. The courses covered digital skills, personal development and confidence building activities and work experience. There are plans to build on the success of initial courses and run them in additional locations.
- 3.9 [Connect to Work](#) is a flagship supported employment programme funded by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) and managed by Local Authorities. KCC is the accountable body for the Kent & Medway programme which will provide support to over 9,000 individuals to access and remain in work. Target groups include people with long term health conditions, disabilities and a range of disadvantaged groups including ex-offenders, people at risk of homelessness and care experienced young people. Kent was among the first four areas in the UK to launch at the end of June 2025 and by the end of January 2026 over 700 people had started on the programme with 80 first earnings reported (i.e. job secured) through the monitoring system. A recent [article in South East Business](#) reports on one of the first scheme participants to secure a new role with a local employer. As the programme continues, there will be many other similar success stories to share.
- 3.10 To further support this action area, KCC is working with partners to map local programmes that can help people into work and support local businesses with addressing their skills gaps and filling vacancies. Resources for employers will

be made available on the Kent & Medway Growth Hub Website while resident-facing information will feature on various local websites and social prescribing platforms.

- 3.11 In order to help young people with their career aspirations, this workstream is also making links to activities delivered by the [Kent & Medway Careers Hub](#) and The Education People whose [Kent choices website](#) provides detailed information about career pathways in different industry sectors and live apprenticeship vacancies.
- 3.12 The success of Action Area 13 is being tracked using data from Connect to Work and other programmes to enable KCC to monitor how many local people are being supported into sustainable employment.

4. Action Area 14 - Developing a strategic partnership for health and the economy:

- 4.1 The rationale for this action area is based on the proven relationship between health outcomes and economic outcomes whereby some 40% of the determinants affecting people's health and wellbeing are socio-economic and include those directly related to education, employment and income. In turn, local firms need access to a skilled and healthy workforce to be able to thrive and grow.
- 4.2 The Kent & Medway Strategic Partnership for Health & Economy was established in October 2024 and brings together key local stakeholders working in the fields of health and economic development. Membership includes public health, the NHS, the voluntary / community sector, private sector (in particular through business membership organisations), the Department for Work & Pensions (Jobcentre+) and also representation for people with lived experience. The group reports into the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) and the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Partnership (ICP).
- 4.3 The group supports the implementation of KMEF Ambition 4 and relevant parts of the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Strategy as well as specifically providing oversight of the delivery of the [Kent & Medway Work & Health Strategy](#) (Also see Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee paper, July 2025: [Integrated Work & Health Strategy](#)) which is a key part of the delivery of shared objectives. Various task and finish groups have been organised to take forward actions in recent months.
- 4.4 The partnership also supports improved integration and connectivity of programmes across the local health and employment system and provides expert advice and guidance on key areas of joint work.
- 4.5 Recent activity supported by the SPHE includes:
 - Actively shaping the **Get Kent & Medway Work Plan** and **Work & Health Strategy** action plans which will directly deliver against this KMEF action area.
 - A Task & Finish Group focusing on **employer engagement** with the aim of helping local businesses to support people with long term health conditions and to keep their current workforce healthy. A number of business-facing

pages are being added to the Kent & Medway Growth Hub website with work and health content, including employer support resources, inclusive recruitment guidance, wellbeing tools and related materials.

- A subgroup to consider actions that can improve access to locally produced healthy food through **supply chain development** activity.
- Scoping potential **pilot projects** to support local businesses by providing, for example, access for SMEs with limited in-house capacity to human resources and occupational health services and evaluating the effectiveness of transport to work schemes
- Carrying out a **lived-experience deep dive** into priority cohorts such as young people currently not in education, employment or training (NEETs).
- Planning and promoting the February 2026 **Kent & Medway Summit on Employment, Skills and Health**, a county-wide partnership event focused on strengthening integration across the work, health and skills system.

4.6 Ongoing priorities for the partnership include making links between programmes and activities delivered across Kent & Medway to support the health and work agenda and finding ways to expand and roll out successful programmes in new locations across the county.

5. Action Area 15 – Building links between anchors of growth, key investments and community opportunity:

- 5.1 This action area is broad in nature, but a number of activities are underway to support anchor institutions (large employers) in the county with undertaking activities that benefit local people and smaller businesses.
- 5.2 Early work has begun with HR services within a number of large local employers including KCC, Medway Council and some larger businesses to identify good practice in recruitment and retention. The aim is to produce a series of case studies that could encourage smaller local businesses to develop more inclusive employment practices as a way to tackle skills gaps and boost productivity through reducing time lost to sickness and ill health.
- 5.3 KCC itself is also exploring ways to enhance social value activity through its own supply chain to make use of additional flexibilities brought about by the new Procurement Act. The Economy team has worked with the procurement team to see how businesses bidding for KCC contracts can be encouraged to consider how they might, for example, provide apprenticeship opportunities for local people or ensure that they adopt inclusive employment practices. The recent supplier day in January 2026, was one way of enabling local firms to better understand how to bid for work with KCC itself as an anchor institution.
- 5.4 Work is also being undertaken by the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce to help local firms, and therefore the local workforce, to be better prepared to access supply chain opportunities through major investment schemes such as the Lower Thames Crossing, the Gatwick Northern Runway expansion and the Sealink renewable energy projects. Workshops throughout 2026 and across the county are being planned to help local firms to get 'bid-ready'.

6. Action Area 16 – Embedding economic opportunity at the centre of local regeneration

- 6.1 A number of wider programmes and activities are actively contributing to the aims of this action area to support economic development and regeneration activities in parts of the county where the need is greatest.
- 6.2 **Connect to Work** delivery is using data on unemployment, ill health and deprivation to target support to areas of greatest need in Kent. The team is working with the District Councils to ensure that Connect to Work employment support is targeted at areas of particular need such as the High Street ward in Maidstone or co-located with services that support vulnerable residents in Gravesend.
- 6.3 **Skills Bootcamps** courses are being delivered in places such as Herne Bay and Swale to provide opportunities for local people who have been out of the job market to gain new skills and secure a guaranteed job interview, and often employment on completion of a course.
- 6.4 The **No Use Empty** scheme continues to bring empty residential properties back into use in areas of relative deprivation, lifting formally derelict areas in places such as Folkestone and reducing the negative impacts for local communities such as reducing antisocial behaviour.
- 6.5 The new in-house **Visit Kent** team is working on a coastal Kent visitor economy campaign for 2026 to counter some of the recent negative media coverage associated with the county’s coastal towns. The campaign aims to boost visitor numbers and drive footfall in Kent’s coastal towns which will increase spend in the area making a contribution to local business growth and employment prospects.
- 6.6 The **Kent & Medway Business Fund** continues to loan money to businesses based in local highstreets with recent applications approved from companies wishing to expand their activities in Chatham town centre, Swanley and Deal.
- 6.7 The **Kent & Medway Growth Hub** has been tasked with running a series of online workshops in March 2026 for high street-based businesses in recognition of the challenges faced across the county’s high streets in recent years. Topics include attracting more customers, excellence in customer service, adapting and successful promotion techniques.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 This report has provided a brief overview of some of the progress in implementing Ambition 4 of the Kent and Medway Economic Framework. Significant work is underway with more future activity planned to support sustainable growth of Kent & Medway’s economy, through to 2030.

8. Contact details:

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