
From: Simon Jones, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment & Transport

To: David Wimble, Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Special Projects

Subject: Grow in Kent – Extension of Service

Decision no: 26/00033

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: [Decision - 25/00084 - Reinstating a Visitor Economy and Inward Investment Service for Kent & Medway](#)

Electoral Division: All KCC electoral divisions

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: This report sets out the rationale for continuing, after 31 March 2027, the recently established in-house Visitor Economy (Visit Kent) and Inward Investment (Invest Kent) service for Kent and Medway, delivered through the Grow in Kent team.

The proposed decision is to continue the current in-house delivery model for the service until such time that the successor local government arrangements are implemented through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution arrangements. The service will transfer to the successor authority/ies in accordance with statutory arrangements, thus ensuring continuity of delivery. The detailed future operating model will be determined by the successor body/ies.

Extending the service will ensure continuity of delivery which supports local economic growth, securing inward investment, provides assurance for industry, partners and stakeholders and maintains capacity and expertise for the county.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects is asked to endorse the decision to make permanent the operating model for the recently established in-house Visitor Economy (Visit Kent) and Inward Investment (Invest Kent) Service for Kent & Medway as shown in Appendix A.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Visitor economy and inward investment services are essential components of local economic development, supporting business growth, job creation, productivity and place competitiveness. They play a central role in shaping how Kent locations are perceived by external audiences, influencing both visitor behaviour and business investment decisions, and contributing to the overall economic resilience and competitiveness of Kent and Medway.

- 1.2 Kent & Medway's Visitor Economy is worth £4.1bn annually and its 6,000 businesses support more than 82,000 jobs (11% of the county's employment). All industry sectors are supported by inward investment activity which brings new business, opportunities and growth opportunities to the county.
- 1.3 The Grow in Kent team delivers Kent and Medway's in-house visitor economy (Visit Kent) and inward investment (Invest Kent) functions following the closure of Visit Kent and Locate in Kent in September 2025. These services provide a coordinated approach to destination management, place promotion and inward investment, forming a core part of Kent County Council's approach with Medway Council to economic growth and competitiveness.
- 1.4 Key decisions were taken by Kent County Council and Medway Council in 2025 to bring the services in house, hosted by KCC, with initial arrangements put in place until 31 March 2027. The in-house delivery model has already gained wide support from stakeholders and industry and remains essential for supporting and promoting Kent & Medway's visitor economy offer and investment offer. It is recommended that the current arrangements continue to avoid any disruption in delivery and maintain this strategically important function for the county.

2. The Grow in Kent Service

- 2.1 Services were previously delivered through externally commissioned organisations – Visit Kent and Locate in Kent. Following the closure of both organisations in September 2025, Kent County Council, in partnership with Medway Council, established a new in-house, partnership-led service (Grow in Kent) to ensure continuity of key functions. This transition was delivered at pace to retain specialist capability, protect established networks and relationships, and ensure that the county continued to be represented in competitive national and international markets. It should be noted that the new service has considerably less resource, in both financial and staffing terms, than the previous organisations with a team of only six officers forming the in-house team compared to more than 25 staff working at Locate in Kent and Visit Kent.
- 2.2 The Grow in Kent model brings together visitor economy and inward investment functions within a single, integrated service. This approach aligns destination management, place marketing and investment promotion behind a shared strategic narrative, enabling Kent and Medway to present a clearer, more consistent and more regionally, nationally and internationally competitive offer to investors, businesses and visitors. The current model also strengthens coordination across local partners and supports delivery at the scale of the Government's preferred 'functional economic area', in line with national policy expectations and the emerging devolution agenda.
- 2.3 Since its establishment, the new service has focused on stabilising delivery and rebuilding core capability following a period of disruption. This has included re-establishing key communication channels, securing and deploying legacy assets (including digital platforms and brand), rebuilding stakeholder and partner engagement, and restoring a coordinated approach to business support, sector engagement and place promotion. Engagement with district

partners, businesses and industry stakeholders has been a key component of this work, ensuring that delivery reflects local priorities and opportunities across Kent and Medway.

- 2.4.1 Key achievements to date include the following;
 - 2.4.2 The service has now moved beyond initial stabilisation and has begun to deliver a programme of activity that is re-establishing Kent and Medway's external profile and market presence.
 - 2.4.3 Within the visitor economy, recent activity has included the relaunch of Visit Kent in May 2026 with industry stakeholders, supported by targeted sector engagement activity, including county-wide partner events bringing together tourism businesses and stakeholders.
 - 2.4.4 Three destination campaigns have been delivered including activity with London St Pancras resulting in more than 13m impressions, a place-marketing campaign ("The Kent Coast: More Than You've Heard") has been launched with 1.6m impressions across digital platforms during the first month and a 'Kent Rediscovered' campaign in nearby counties leading to 2.8m impressions. Such campaigns result in increased visitor number and spend.
 - 2.4.5 The team has also facilitated several journalist and influencer visits and has been working with industry body 'UK Inbound' to raise the profile of the county's tourism offer to a wide range of international audiences.
 - 2.4.6 For inward investment, the Invest Kent function has been re-established with a renewed focus on pipeline development (currently some 200 business leads), investor engagement and the promotion of strategic opportunities across the county. This has included the launch of a new Invest Kent website, providing a single, coherent entry point for investors and bringing together priority sectors, commercial property and development opportunities.
 - 2.4.7 The service has also re-established Kent's presence at national investment events, including participation in UKREiiF (The UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum), where activity included hosting dedicated networking events and engaging with investors, developers and national partners as well as showcasing an investment prospectus. This has supported the generation of new commercial leads and strengthened relationships with key national organisations.
 - 2.4.8 Plans are also underway for a new corporate partnership programme.
- 2.5 Looking ahead, the service will build on this initial delivery phase through a continued programme of marketing campaigns, partner engagement and investment promotion activity. This includes further development of the Visit Kent destination management approach, ongoing campaign activity to drive visitor numbers and spend, and the continued strengthening of the Invest Kent pipeline through targeted sector engagement and promotion of investible opportunities. Alongside this, the service will continue to develop its

partnership and governance arrangements, including the establishment of an oversight board and expansion of commercial partnerships, in order to enhance sustainability and impact.

3. Continuing the Service

- 3.1 The progress achieved to date is contingent on maintaining continuity of delivery, capability and market presence. The services operate in highly competitive national and international environments, where visibility, relationships and pipeline development are built incrementally over time. Any interruption to KCC and Medway Council investment at this stage would risk undermining recent progress, including the loss of momentum following the relaunch of Visit Kent and Invest Kent, disruption to campaign activity and stakeholder engagement, and a reduction in Kent and Medway's ability to compete effectively for visitors and investment.
- 3.2 Any interruption at this stage would also negatively impact business and stakeholder confidence, particularly given the recent transition from previous delivery arrangements. The service is reliant on a combination of specialist expertise, established relationships and coordinated activity across partners, all of which would be difficult to re-establish if lost. Interruption of service would diminish the effectiveness of destination marketing and inward investment promotion, weaken the pipeline of opportunities, and reduce the overall economic impact achieved through these functions.
- 3.3 Maintaining the current model therefore provides stability at a critical point in the service's (re)development, enabling Kent County Council and partners to build on early delivery, embed recent gains and continue strengthening Kent and Medway's position as a competitive location to visit, invest and do business. This is particularly important in the context of evolving national policy, Local Government Reorganisation and devolution, where maintaining a coherent, county-wide approach to economic development at a Government-defined 'functional economic authority' level remains a key consideration.

4. Options considered

Option 1: Cease provision of the service (Do nothing) – Option discounted

- 4.1 This option would result in the removal of any coordinated visitor economy or inward investment function across Kent and Medway.
- 4.2 It would lead to loss of strategic leadership, reduced ability to attract investment, loss of destination marketing capability, and a decline in competitiveness relative to other areas. It would also risk reputational damage and reduced economic activity. This option would reverse recent progress and the Key Decision made by Kent County Council and is not considered viable.
([KENT COUNTY COUNCIL](#))

Option 2: Scale back the current service – Option discounted

- 4.3 This option would retain a limited service focused on core functions but significantly reduce scope and impact. The in-house service is already

operating at capacity. The in-house service is already a slimmed down version of the previous two organisations, as noted at 2.1 above.

- 4.4 This option would constrain the ability to deliver strategic priorities, weaken market presence, and reduce the effectiveness of investment attraction and destination marketing activity. It would also risk loss of momentum following the recent relaunch of the service.
- 4.5 This option would also lead to significant reputational damage with paid partners who have contributed financially to the service, with the expectation that there is a stable and suitably resourced operation to deliver the expected outputs.
- 4.6 While less disruptive than full cessation, this option would not deliver the required economic or strategic outcomes.

Option 3: Continue the current in-house delivery model – Recommended

- 4.7 This option proposes continuing the current in-house delivery model for the Visitor Economy (Visit Kent) and Inward Investment (Invest Kent) service until such time that the successor local government arrangements are implemented through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution arrangements. The service will transfer to the successor authority/ies in accordance with statutory arrangements, thus ensuring continuity of delivery. The detailed future operating model will be determined by the successor body/ies.
- 4.8 It maintains continuity of delivery, protects recent investment in the service, and supports ongoing economic impact through inward investment and visitor activity. It also ensures stability during a period of structural change and allows time to design a long-term post-LGR successor model.
- 4.9 This option provides the best balance of impact, value for money and strategic alignment and is therefore recommended.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 KCC has supported Visit Kent and (formerly) Locate in Kent services for around 25 years but its contribution has reduced significantly over the years. Support peaked some 10 years ago when KCC contributed £1.27m to these services which also received significant amounts of EU funding in addition.
- 5.2 The core, minimal viable service is currently funded through a combination of contributions from Kent County Council (£405,000 per annum) and Medway Council (£71,000 per annum). Alongside this, £140,000 of external income from industry stakeholders is supporting additional activity above the core service to enhance business support and promotional activity. This contribution also reflects industry confidence and support for the core service offer and industry would not invest without the core service being supported by KCC and Medway.

- 5.3 The continuation of the service represents a continuation of the existing funding approach. The core funding supports the minimum viable service, while stakeholder contributions enable enhanced delivery.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the continuation of the in-house service model.
- 6.2 Implementation of the decision, including any contractual extensions, will be undertaken in accordance with Kent County Council's standard operational requirements and processes.

7. Equalities implications

- 7.1 The continuation of the service is expected to have a positive impact on equalities by supporting job creation, promoting inclusive economic growth and increasing access to employment and business opportunities across Kent and Medway for all groups of people.
- 7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken, and no adverse impacts have been identified.

8. Data Protection Implications

- 8.1 The service requires the collection and management of data relating to businesses, stakeholders, partners and consumers (visitors and residents).
- 8.2 All activity will be undertaken in compliance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Appropriate data governance, security measures and protocols are in place.
- 8.3 No significant data protection risks have been identified.

9. Other corporate implications

- 9.1 The proposal supports a range of corporate priorities, including economic growth, job creation, place shaping and community development.
- 9.2 It aligns with the Council's Strategic Statement by supporting residents, strengthening the local economy, and promoting efficient and effective service delivery. The proposal supports the Kent and Medway Economic Framework, which the County Council has adopted, which sets out ambitions to promote a more productive, sustainable and inclusive economy, including attracting investment and strengthening place-based growth.
- 9.3 The service also supports partnership working across local authorities and with the private sector, reinforcing a coordinated approach to growth.

10. Governance

- 10.1 The decision will be taken by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects, following consideration of the proposal by the Growth, Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee, which will be asked to endorse or make recommendations on the proposed decision. A separate process will take place within Medway Council in relation to its financial contribution
- 10.2 The Director of Growth & Communities will be responsible for implementing the decision and overseeing delivery of the service.
- 10.3 The service will continue to be supported by partnership governance arrangements, including strategic oversight from industry representatives and stakeholders.

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 The in-house Grow in Kent service was established to ensure continuity of critical economic functions following the cessation of previous independent delivery arrangements. The current model has successfully stabilised and re-established visitor economy and inward investment activity for Kent and Medway, in a matter of months, which is credit to the team and the many Kent and Medway stakeholders who have engaged with the team's successful (re)establishment.
- 11.2 Enabling the service to continue beyond 31 March 2027 will build on progress to date, maintain delivery capacity, and support Kent and Medway's competitiveness regionally, nationally and internationally.
- 11.3 The proposed approach provides stability, supports economic growth, and enables a planned transition to future governance arrangements.

12. Recommendation(s):

- 12.1 The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects is asked to endorse the decision to make permanent the operating model for the recently established in-house Visitor Economy (Visit Kent) and Inward Investment (Invest Kent) Service for Kent & Medway as shown at Appendix A.

13. Appendices

Appendix A – Proposed Record of Decision
Appendix B - Equality Impact Assessment

14. Contact details

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