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

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

Subject: Adoption of the Kent and Medway Local Growth Plan

Decision no: 26/00050

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: Growth, Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee – 10 November 2026

Future Pathway of Paper: For Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: All KCC electoral divisions

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: This report sets out the rationale for approving the Kent and Medway Local Growth Plan as a long-term, evidence-led, sector-focused growth plan for Kent and Medway and to support its use in informing future economic and sector development activity, investment opportunities and engagement with Government, businesses and partners.

The decision will enable Kent County Council, through its role within the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), to formally support the adoption of the Local Growth Plan and the continued development of associated investment propositions and delivery activity.

Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects is asked to agree the proposed decision to adopt the draft Kent and Medway Local Growth Plan and its future implementation by the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership as shown in Appendix B.

---

1. Introduction

1.1 The English Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024, set out the Government's ambition to transfer greater powers, responsibilities, and funding from Whitehall to local areas, with the development of ambitious Local Growth Plans (LGPs) at the heart of this approach. This commitment to devolution and local decision-making has since been reaffirmed by the new Government, with the Prime Minister stating his intention to *"take power out of Westminster and carry it into every postcode in the country"*.

1.2 Local Growth Plans provide a long-term 10-year strategic framework for economic growth in their region.

1.3 The Government wants Local Growth Plans to be produced and owned by Mayoral Strategic Authorities, focused on the holistic needs and opportunities in their region, and should set out the priorities where the authority will focus its devolved powers and funding to drive productivity and growth. The Government states *'Local Growth Plans should be "the guiding star" that provides strategic direction for other relevant plans and strategies and the wider work of Mayoral Strategic Authorities, their constituent Local Authorities, and local partners'.*

1.4 The Government has published guidance for Mayoral Strategic Authorities on developing Local Growth Plans, and this can be found here.

1.5 In short, Local Growth Plans should at a minimum:

a) be a **single, joined-up vision** for local economic growth in the area, which all interested parties (including business, universities, colleges and local authorities) have been able to contribute to.

b) provide an evidence-based overview and analysis of the region, identifying **distinctive regional sector strengths**, informed by the Government's Industrial Strategy.

c) highlight the areas that will benefit from collaboration and joint working between Mayoral Strategic Authorities and central government, with the plans identifying **"shared priorities"** to underpin joint working.

d) include a **short investment pipeline** of priority projects that have specific significance for enabling growth – the Government has specified between 4 to 10 projects per region.

2. A Kent and Medway Approach

2.1 While there is not yet a mayoral strategic authority in our region, there is a united lobbying effort by all 14 local authorities to see the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Kent and Medway. A Government response to this request is expected shortly.

2.2 This lack of Mayoral Strategic Authority has placed Kent and Medway at a disadvantage because firstly, a significant proportion of national spending is being diverted towards Mayoral Strategic Authorities, and secondly, the Government is engaging with stakeholders and focussing on the delivery of shared ambitions set out in local growth plans.

2.3 The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) is the recognised Local Growth Board for the functional economic area of Kent and Medway. KMEP's mission is *"to drive economic growth and prosperity"*. The partnership was created back in the early 2000s to provide a single forum through which business representatives, all 14 local authority leaders, university and college leaders,

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department of Work and Pensions, could collectively identify economic opportunities, influence investment decisions and advocate for the area's needs. David Wimble sits on the KMEP board representing Kent County Council.

2.4 In late 2025, KMEP agreed that, despite the absence of a Mayoral Strategic Authority, it should be proactive and develop a local growth plan, as many national funding programmes now require places to demonstrate a clear understanding of their distinctive economic strengths and investment priorities. Secondly, a Local Growth Plan provides a stronger basis for engagement with Government, investors and other stakeholders, and there was a hope that some national spending could be diverted towards delivery of LGP priorities. Finally, it provides a clear and shared long-term vision for economic growth that can help align activity across local authorities, businesses, universities, colleges and other partners.

2.5 Following a procurement exercise, consultants (Metro Dynamics) were commissioned to work with KMEP and local partners to develop a local growth plan and evidence base.

2.6 Martyn Saunders and Megan Russell of Metro Dynamics, alongside Sarah Nurden (the KMEP Manager), will attend the Cabinet Committee on 10 November 2026 to present the key findings of the draft Local Growth Plan to the committee.

3. The Local Growth Plan evidence base

3.1 KMEP commissioned Metro Dynamics to undertake a comprehensive evidence-based assessment of the Kent and Medway economy in November 2025. The purpose of the evidence-base was to identify the area's distinctive economic strengths, growth opportunities and competitive advantages, and to assess these against the eight priority sectors identified within the Government's Industrial Strategy. The resulting evidence base provides the analytical foundation for the Local Growth Plan and helps ensure that future interventions are focused on areas where Kent and Medway can make the greatest contribution to local and national economic growth.

3.2 The evidence base assessed the relative scale, concentration, specialisms and growth potential of local economic activity. The analysis identified four economic sectors of particular strategic significance where the county possesses nationally important assets, established business clusters, research and innovation capabilities, and strong alignment with Government priorities. These sectors were identified as offering the greatest opportunity to support both local economic growth and wider UK objectives relating to productivity, resilience, security and innovation.

3.3 The analysis highlighted particular strengths in the following sectors:

- **Agri-tech and Agri-food:** Kent and Medway has one of the UK's most significant concentrations of food production, horticulture and agricultural activity, earning its reputation as the "Garden of England". The sector plays a nationally important role in supporting food security, agricultural innovation,

sustainable food production and the adoption of new technologies. Importantly, the economic impact of the sector extends far beyond farming and food production alone. Kent and Medway's food system underpins activity across manufacturing, packaging, logistics, distribution and trade. For example, packaging manufacturers are located in the area in part because of the strength of the food and drink supply chain, while the region's ports and freight infrastructure play a critical role in importing, exporting and distributing food products across the UK and internationally. The sector therefore acts as a catalyst for growth across multiple parts of the economy, creating a highly integrated food system that supports employment, innovation and investment well beyond the traditional agri-food sector.

- **Energy:** Kent and Medway occupies a strategically important position within the UK's energy infrastructure. The area hosts nationally significant assets, including the Isle of Grain LNG terminal, the UK's largest LNG facility and the key entry point for aviation fuel supplying Heathrow and Gatwick airports. It is also home to major electricity interconnectors linking the UK with continental Europe, alongside substantial offshore renewable energy generation in the Thames Estuary and English Channel. The planned decommissioning of Dungeness, alongside emerging waste-to-hydrogen projects and new energy technologies, presents opportunities for investment, innovation and economic diversification. Together, these assets make Kent and Medway a critical contributor to the UK's energy security and resilience ambitions, while supporting future growth in clean energy generation, storage, transmission and associated supply chains.

- **Digital:** Kent and Medway has a diverse and growing digital economy spanning electronics manufacturing, advanced technology businesses, cyber security, artificial intelligence, data-driven industries and digital creative sectors. The area has particular strengths in electronics and advanced manufacturing, with firms such as BAE Systems in Rochester developing advanced electronic and sensing technologies for defence and security applications. It also benefits from a well-established digital and creative cluster, supported by initiatives such as Create Kent and the South East Creative Economy Network, alongside strong university research capability and a pipeline of skilled talent. Together, these assets create a highly innovative digital ecosystem that is driving the growth of high-value industries and positioning Kent and Medway as an important centre for digital growth.

- **Ports, Transport and Logistics:** Kent and Medway is the UK's principal gateway to continental Europe, handling 59% of the nation's trade flows to the EU. The area hosts internationally significant assets including the Port of Dover, Eurotunnel, Medway and Isle of Sheppey Ports and extensive strategic road and rail connections, creating one of the UK's most specialised logistics and freight economies. These assets support the efficient movement of goods, people and services between the UK and international markets, while playing a vital role in national supply chain resilience and border operations. As a result, the sector makes a major contribution to UK trade, economic security and future growth, while providing opportunities for innovation in logistics, freight and transport technologies.

3.4 It should be noted that agri-tech, energy, ports, and digital sectors align with the Government's Industrial Strategy, either as one of the eight priority sectors, recognised sub-sectors within priority sectors, or as foundational sectors that support wider economic growth.

3.5 The initial evidence base analysis also identified strengths in a number of other important sectors in Kent & Medway, including construction, life-sciences and medtech, and the visitor economy, all of which make significant contributions to employment and economic output across Kent and Medway. These findings are consistent with the recently published Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), which highlights ongoing workforce demand and skills challenges within these sectors. However, while important to the local economy, these sectors do not sufficiently align to the Industrial Strategy's priority sectors or identified sub-sectors and have therefore not been taken forward as priority sectors within the scope of the Local Growth Plan. That being said, there is a page within the draft plan to make clear the ongoing contribution from these sectors to employment, productivity, place-making and economic growth across Kent and Medway.

3.6 The completed evidence base was considered and approved by KMEP earlier in 2026 and is published separately at: Final-Report-revised-.pdf. The evidence base confirms that Kent and Medway's economic significance extends well beyond its local economy, with nationally important contributions to food security, energy security, trade and logistics resilience, and digital innovation.

4. The Local Growth Plan

4.1 Building on the economic evidence base, Metro Dynamics undertook an extensive programme of stakeholder engagement to shape the development of the Local Growth Plan and the shared ambitions to sit within it.

4.2 During May 2026, five workshops were held across Kent and Medway involving local authority officers and elected members, businesses, universities, colleges, infrastructure providers and other key partners. In total, more than 120 stakeholders attended the workshops and in excess of 125 project ideas and investment opportunities were gathered. In September 2026, a further round of engagement took place with a further 100 organisations and individuals consulted.

4.3 This collaborative approach has helped ensure that the Plan reflects the priorities and ambitions of organisations across the functional economic area and aligns with the Government's expectation that Local Growth Plans should be developed in partnership with local stakeholders.

4.4 Alongside the workshops, Metro Dynamics undertook targeted engagement with industry leaders from each of the priority sectors, as well as representatives from universities, colleges and business membership organisations, including the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce. The Kent and Medway Economic Development Officers Group (KEDOG) also supported the process by helping to identify businesses and stakeholders to ensure a broad and representative range of views was captured.

4.5 Furthermore, the KMEP Manager met with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) devolution team, the MHCLG area representative, and the Department of Business, Innovation, Science and Trade representative, to brief them on the creation of the Local Growth Plan and request their feedback.

4.6 This engagement identified a series of cross-cutting opportunities and barriers affecting economic growth across Kent and Medway, as well as the sector opportunities. These findings have informed five strategic priorities that underpin the draft Local Growth Plan:

- **Strengthening collaboration and coordination** across sectors and organisations to improve connectivity, amplify the area's economic voice and simplify access to support and opportunities.
- **Developing a business-focused innovation ecosystem** that enables businesses to access expertise, facilities, research and investment to accelerate innovation and growth.
- **Building a future-ready workforce** with the skills, talent and employment pathways required to support long-term economic competitiveness.
- **Investing in enabling infrastructure**, ensuring that transport, utilities, digital networks and strategic assets support future economic growth and investment.
- **Creating the conditions for business growth**, helping businesses to start, scale and access new markets through improved support, investment and opportunities.

4.7 The latest draft Local Growth Plan is attached at **Appendix A**. This document will be considered by the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership on 4 November 2026, and verbal feedback from KMEP will be provided at the Cabinet Committee meeting.

4.8 The purpose of presenting the draft Plan to the Cabinet Committee is to seek Members' views and comments on the proposed vision, priorities and opportunities identified within the document. Feedback received will be shared with KMEP to inform consideration of the final version of the Plan.

4.9 Subject to any feedback received today, it is hoped to formally publish the LGP in December 2026.

5. Investment pipeline of opportunities

5.1 In 2025, KMEP undertook a comprehensive public call for capital investment projects across Kent and Medway, inviting proposals from businesses, further and higher education institutions, local authorities and other partners seeking Government capital funding support. More than 80 project submissions were subsequently put forward to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for consideration, underpinned by significant partnership engagement and project development work to establish a robust regional investment pipeline.

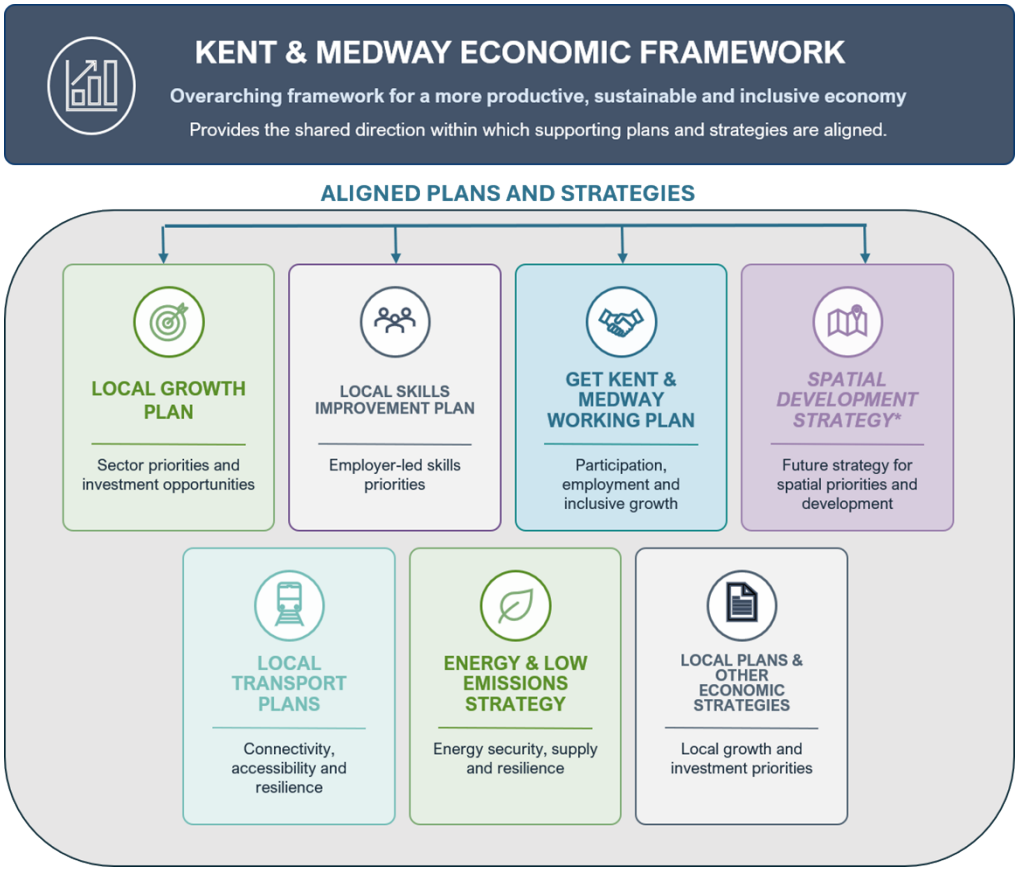
5.2 As part of the Local Growth Plan process in 2026, stakeholders were again invited through workshops and engagement meetings to identify strategic capital investment priorities. These proposals were combined with the 2025 investment pipeline to create a long list of potential projects.

5.3 In assessing this long list, priority was given to projects that would support the growth of the Local Growth Plan's priority sectors and deliver benefits across Kent and Medway as a whole, rather than addressing the needs of a single business, town or locality. Consideration was also given to the extent to which projects could unlock transformational economic growth, demonstrate deliverability and readiness, leverage private sector investment, and generate significant economic returns. This process enabled the identification of a smaller number of strategically important projects with the greatest potential to accelerate sustainable growth across the Kent and Medway economy.

6. Wider Strategic Fit

6.1 The Local Growth Plan complements, rather than replaces, existing economic strategies and plans for Kent and Medway. It forms part of a broader strategic framework overseen by KMEP, with each document serving a distinct but complementary purpose.

6.2 The diagram below illustrates how these strategies and plans align and support one another:



6.3 The **Kent and Medway Economic Framework (KMEF)**, approved by KMEP in March 2024, provides the overarching strategic framework for economic development across Kent and Medway. It sets out a programme of actions across five ambitions: business growth, skills, infrastructure, economic opportunity, and place. Progress updates on delivery of the KMEF were shared with this committee through a series of five papers, concluding in July 2026..

6.4 The **Local Growth Plan** sits beneath the KMEF and adopts a sector-based approach aligned to the Government's Industrial Strategy. It focuses on those sectors where Kent and Medway has the strongest competitive advantages and greatest potential to contribute to national growth ambitions.

6.5 The **Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan** sets out the skills priorities that will help shape the future workforce of Kent and Medway over the next three years.

6.6 KMEP also supports the delivery of the **Get Kent & Medway Working Plan**, which focuses on increasing labour market participation, addressing barriers to employment and supporting residents into good-quality work.

6.7 The KMEP Manager is working with colleagues from both Kent County Council and Medway Council to support the development of the forthcoming **Spatial Development Strategy** – which is the subject of a separate report elsewhere on today's GET Cabinet Committee agenda. It should be noted that the Local Growth Plan and Spatial Development Strategy are complementary documents. The Local Growth Plan provides the economic rationale for growth, identifying priority sectors, investment opportunities and economic outcomes. The Spatial Development Strategy translates these ambitions into a spatial framework, identifying the locations, infrastructure and land requirements needed to support business growth, housing delivery, skills provision and strategic investment.

6.8 Transport planning is a key component of the strategic framework and a core function of any future Mayoral Strategic Authority. Kent County Council adopted **Local Transport Plan (5)** in December 2024, while Medway Council is developing a replacement for its current plan, which concludes in December 2026. In the event of devolution, these plans would need to be brought together within a single strategic transport framework.

6.9 Energy and environmental planning is another important component of the strategic framework and a core policy area for any future Mayoral Strategic Authority. A separate report on the development of a new Kent Energy Strategy is also being considered by the GET Cabinet Committee today. Should a Mayoral Strategic Authority be established, it would be expected to develop a strategic approach to energy and the environment across Kent and Medway.

6.10 Collectively, this suite of documents provide a coordinated approach to driving economic growth, improving productivity, strengthening infrastructure, developing the workforce, and creating the conditions for long-term prosperity across Kent and Medway.

6.11 Further information on these KMEP strategies and activities can be found on the KMEP website (https://www.kmep.org.uk/).

7. Future Governance and Delivery

7.1 The Local Growth Plan is intended to be a long-term strategic document that can evolve alongside changes in governance arrangements.

7.2 Should a Mayoral Strategic Authority be established for Kent and Medway in the future, KMEP envisages that responsibility for the Local Growth Plan would transition into the new governance arrangements, enabling the Plan to become the strategic sector-led economic framework for the authority and supporting the delivery of devolved powers and funding across Kent and Medway.

7.3 In the meanwhile, KMEP will seek the delivery of the actions within the local growth plan. These areas for action apply across Kent and Medway and they are intended to have county-wide significance. The proposed actions do not imply a funding commitment from Kent County Council. In some cases, Kent County Council may have a leading role. But others will be led by KCC's partners, such as higher and further education, businesses, Kent districts and others, with KCC in a supporting role.

6.4 7he Local Growth Plan will provide a material support for proposals for external funding and for new powers where appropriate. It is anticipated that KMEP will have the significant role in overseeing delivery of the Plan.

8. Implications

8.1 *Financial* - There are no direct financial implications for KCC arising from adoption of the Local Growth Plan. The Plan may, however, influence future priorities for economic development activity across Kent and Medway, including areas where KCC has a strategic role. Any future funding commitments or resource implications arising from the Plan would be subject to separate business cases and the Council's standard governance and approval processes.

8.2 *Legal* – The Plan does not impose new legal obligations on KCC.

8.3 *Equalities* - An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared and is attached at Appendix C. This has not identified any negative equalities impacts at strategic level (although individual initiatives taken forward with reference to the Local Growth Plan will be subject to further impact assessments).

8.4 *Data protection* - There are no data protection implications.

9. Next steps

9.1 Following the incorporation of any agreed feedback from today and the final endorsement by KMEP it is anticipated that the Local Growth Plan will be launched later this year.

10. Recommendations

10.1 The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects is asked to agree the proposed decision to adopt the draft Kent and Medway Local Growth Plan and its future implementation by the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership as shown in Appendix B.

11. Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Local Growth Plan
Appendix B - Proposed Record of Decision
Appendix C - Equality Impact Assessment

12. Contact details

Report Author: Sarah Nurden Job Title: KMEP & BAB Manager Email : sarah.nurden@kent.gov.uk	Director: Stephanie Holt-Castle Job title: Director of Growth & Communities Email address: stephanie.holt-castle@kent.gov.uk