

Appendix 1 – Draft International Strategy



KENT – GLOBAL REACH, LOCAL BENEFIT

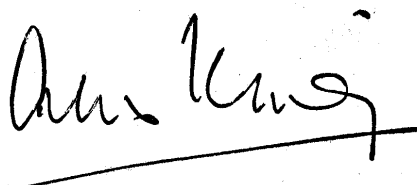
I have commissioned this Strategy because I strongly believe that Kent and KCC must be firm in our understanding of, and commitment to, international activity, and its relevance and benefits to our work for the people of this County.

The value to successful cities and regions across the world of an effective international engagement has been increasingly recognised in recent years. In this global economy, where cities are often seen as the drivers, regions which do not effectively engage now will find themselves less able to do so in the future. Our strategy will allow us to build on the robust, effective relationships that already exist between Kent and our current international partners, as well as to foster new links and secure added value for the people of Kent.

We must make use of Kent's prime location, situated between London and Europe, to take advantage of the huge potential benefits of inward investment to improve our economic performance.

Kent has always looked outwards and a good measure of its prosperity has been derived from its geographical situation – but this factor alone is no longer enough to ensure competitiveness. As the world grows ever smaller and more inter-dependent, it is vital that we keep pace with change to allow us to benefit from future opportunities. To compete effectively, we must be prepared to foster an entrepreneurial spirit, and to collaborate and connect with partners. To nurture such relationships can be mutually beneficial, and we must be sure of our key strengths and our capacity to change.

I believe that this strategy will clarify the importance of taking an international perspective and placing international considerations at the heart of policy and action.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex King', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Alex King MBE

Deputy Leader, Kent County Council

MANAGING INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY

As an excellent local authority, Kent County Council has a strong reputation for adding value to our core business through international work. I am proud of this reputation, and keen that we should build on it as an organisation, whilst continuing to offer measurable value for money in everything we do. We already work closely with a wide variety of partners within the UK and beyond. The long term goal of this strategy and its associated work is to ensure an ever-improving quality of life for Kent's residents by engaging with relevant partners, wherever they may be in the world.

To do this, it is vital that we promote an effective and co-ordinated approach, building on the strong relationships we already have with partners such as Virginia and Seattle in the USA, and our immediate neighbours in North West Europe. Relationships can only be truly useful where they are mutually beneficial. To ensure this, we must be proactive in seeking potential partners based on their experience, and also be sure of our own key strengths and competences.

There are many tangible benefits to be gained from international work. Best practice sharing and benchmarking, an integral component in the development of successful services, is greatly enhanced by strong international partnerships. These also allow us to maximise benefits by sharing experience in the long-term and keeping Kent at the cutting edge of innovation.

An example of the types of benefit we can gain can be seen in the operation of international staff exchanges. These allow us not only to share valuable best practice, but also to aid staff retention by increasing motivation and professional development. This directly benefits services and by extension, the people of Kent.

As a practical concern, 70% to 80% of European legislation can be said to directly impact on the work of local authorities. With the expansion of the Union, there is increased competition for funding. It is therefore vital that we have strong relations with the EU institutions, and other European partners, in order to influence policy and access funding for the benefit of Kent.

This strategy makes the County Council's commitment to international work clear. As Chief Executive, I fully support its direction, and encourage its dissemination and use throughout the organisation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Gilroy', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Peter Gilroy OBE
Chief Executive, Kent County Council

WHY MUST KENT WORK INTERNATIONALLY?

1. THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Kent is geographically well-placed to benefit from trade and inward investment, and as a strategic local authority, we have a duty to maximise the benefit to local business from this potential market advantage.

We must provide the right environment for Kent businesses, especially SMEs, to develop internationally in support of their prosperity and sustainability. Kent County Council's links can help ensure opportunities for international trade and co-operation are explored and best practice models identified, to aid competitiveness and support innovation.

Inward investment is crucial to Kent's economy, given the ever more competitive international market driven by the likes of the United States, China and other Asian economies. High quality investment in Kent will attract people from across the world to visit, work, invest and study here, whilst retaining their international connections.

Realising the potential of Kent's unique tourism offer can make a significant contribution to local economic development too, with knock-on benefits in terms of environmental improvements and community development. Raising Kent's profile through tourism, by attracting major events and maximising benefits from the likes of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, contributes to the image of Kent as a place to live and do business.

2. DEVELOPING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Increased understanding between and within communities leads to better social cohesion and improved community engagement – and a greater awareness and understanding of the wider world is key to achieving this. We must mobilise our social and cultural resources to encourage a meaningful international perspective amongst the people of Kent, including our institutions and community partnerships.

International activity provides opportunities for young people to broaden their horizons, and can break down barriers to combat stereotypes, racism and xenophobia. Integrating the global dimension into education can raise standards of learning and boost key skills such as communication and organisation, as well as supporting an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of global citizenship.

Getting involved with partners in other countries can act as a motivating factor for the wider community, in particular disadvantaged groups and those who might not normally engage with their local authority. It can promote a better appreciation of others, deepen confidence and awareness of the wider world, and help them look at their own environments and explore social and political issues.

The most successful cities and regions in the world acknowledge their diversity, and seek to encourage mobility. Contact between communities across the world can bring communities in Kent closer together, through enhanced cross-cultural understanding.

3. ENSURING WORLD-CLASS SERVICES

As one of the United Kingdom's leading local authorities, Kent County Council's key motivation is improving the quality and delivery of our services to the people of Kent. Best Value legislation, and the expectations of local residents require cost-effective, quality services. International partnerships offer the opportunity to benchmark our services against the best in the world, share information and expertise, and learn how to improve our core business.

By extension, research and development can be more wide-ranging and effective when carried out in conjunction with the most appropriate partners, wherever they may be located – and of course the use of modern technology means much of the relationship can be conducted at a distance.

Staff exchange is a cost-effective, sustainable means of learning from good practice and carrying out in-depth problem-solving. Officers and Members can better understand emerging trends and new issues likely to affect the County, and ensure Kent can adapt and be proactive in its response.

International work can provide an innovative development opportunity for staff, enhancing their ability to work in their own communities. Sharing lessons from around the globe develops our collective expertise. Our international profile can enhance Kent's reputation as an exciting choice for the best staff in their field.

Experience shows that participation in international networks and partnerships can build networks more locally, within Kent and the UK, by bringing colleagues together across sectors and departments, supporting the development of partnerships beyond local government.

A proportion of Kent's initiatives may attract funding support from the EU and other sources – and our positive, broad international profile enhances our ability to shape the future of European policies and programmes.

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

Kent's international relationships have developed out of nearly two decades of close joint working with northern France, and of experience gained through our dedicated presence in Brussels, in response to European funded opportunities, or in order to exchange staff and good practice.

The following links have strategic, long-term value, and should therefore be maintained. Whilst the list is not exhaustive, additional relationships should only be sought where they provide demonstrable benefits with appropriate and minimal resource commitment, in line with the Principles below.

EUROPE

Some European connections are underpinned by top-level Member commitments, and cover, or may include, a wide range of our services:

- | | |
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| Finland | - Provincial State Office of Southern Finland |
| France | - Conseil Régional du Nord Pas de Calais |

Hungary - Conseil Général du Pas de Calais
- County of Bács-Kiskun

Additionally, we have some close ties based on specific funding or projects:

Belgium - Province of West Flanders
Netherlands - Cities of Utrecht and Rotterdam
- Province of Zeeland
Sweden - Commune of Svalöv

Finally, we are exploring the potential of more active engagement with:

Bulgaria - Province of Lovech
Slovakia - Region of Košice
Sweden - Regional Council of Skåne

TO THE WEST

Kent's relationship with the Commonwealth of Virginia was formalised by a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2006, which identified areas where co-operation was believed to be of mutual benefit. The areas being explored cover all Directorates as well as public and private sector partners, and include inward investment, trade/business, tourism, land-based economies, education and culture, economic and commercial presence, and general sharing of experience and good practice.

Our relationship with Seattle/King County stemmed from the successful Social Care Exchange Programme with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and has broadened to include partners in the public and voluntary sector relevant to a wider range of our social and community services.

TO THE EAST

It is widely recognised that the growing strategic importance - in economic, environmental and cultural terms - of China demands a considered approach. Kent County Council has engaged a range of partners at a local and national level, including UK Trade & Investment and the Local Government Association, to look collectively at how we can approach the challenge this represents, in order to maximise the opportunities and benefits associated with China, for the people of Kent.

PRINCIPLES

WE SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES WHICH BRING BEST VALUE IN TERMS OF MEETING THE COUNTY'S NEEDS

Our international activities should, without exception, support core business and link clearly to Kent County Council's key priorities as expressed in our policy documents. We must be clear about the purpose of any and all international work we undertake, giving it a long-term strategic framework.

Partnerships and other international relationships must be of mutual benefit, and should be viewed by both parties as permanent/long-term, with the level of activity fluctuating naturally to reflect opportunities available. They will be subject to annual review, to ensure focus, respond to changes, and avoid drift.

Unless there is clear logic for an exchange to be thematically limited, relationships should be accessible to the organisation as a whole, and to businesses, groups and individuals more widely in Kent, rather than limited in scope to one area of interest.

Enabling individual Directorates and service areas to pursue relevant interests complementary to the corporate picture is to be supported, provided it fits with the overall international strategy and their own identified priorities.

WE MUST CAPITALISE ON EXISTING LINKS

Once a key partnership has been recognised and supported by the Council, internal resources should be made available to promote and strengthen the relationship, and support the activities flowing from it, both within international functions, and within relevant Directorates and their services.

Wherever possible, such links should be underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding or similar document, to ensure buy-in from the highest levels in both organisations. Such strategic alliances not only help to ensure genuine meaningful benefits to both sides, but they also assist in profile-raising.

Existing relationships should be re-examined at regular intervals, with a view to redefining common areas of activity, expanding links beyond the initial focus, and ensuring the focus is on practical co-operation projects and exchange.

In certain circumstances, it may be worth exploring multilateral links, adding value to our and our partners' work by linking two or more of our international partners, or by forming a thematic network.

WE SHOULD ONLY CONSIDER NEW LINKS WHERE THEY DEMONSTRATE CLEAR AND QUANTIFIED ADDED VALUE

When considering new partnerships, we must not lose focus, and should only pursue activity with a limited number of partner regions that most closely meet a set of defined and understood criteria. New partners must:

1. Share broadly similar social and economic characteristics
2. Provide similar opportunities, priorities and challenges
3. Be reasonably accessible at reasonable cost
4. Provide linkages of relevance to local communities on both sides

Additionally, strong funding may justify the establishment of a new link.

This does not mean we should reject other opportunities where there is real value in a specific activity – but such links must have the full knowledge and support of lead officers/Members. Indeed, it is clear that we would benefit from stronger links with emerging economic markets, and countries in Central and Eastern Europe. This strategy can act as a catalyst for partnerships of mutual benefit in themes not adequately catered for by our existing connections, including where such new links directly involve groups beyond the Council itself. Where new links are seen to have potential, appropriate resources should be made available for exploration and pilot projects.

We should bear in mind alternatives to partnership commitments, and avoid the assumption that all relationships necessitate significant travel. Delegation visits to Kent and small-scale study visits abroad may fulfil some requirements. Network involvement should be developed, with officer/Member representation co-ordinated corporately, and we should evaluate the potential for Kent of emerging networks.

WE MUST MAXIMISE THE BENEFITS TO KENT OF INCOME GENERATION OPPORTUNITIES

In recent years, KCC has been extremely successful in securing European funding. Given that the funds which we can access are now somewhat reduced, we will need to be much more focussed in our bidding activity, and reduce our reliance on EU funds to support key projects. There remains considerable potential in EU funding for cross-border projects of mutual benefit. Beyond Europe, transnational partnerships with countries such as the USA can be used as a means of attracting investment.

High profile events, such as the 2012 Olympics, must be used as catalysts to attract inward investment. The organisation should develop a unified approach to such key events, to minimise duplication and maximise benefit.

As a large organisation, we have the resources and reputation necessary to develop international links. Where appropriate we should open these links to the private sector, to allow local businesses real opportunities to engage and foster trade and inward investment. Kent's expanding film and television industry is one that could specifically benefit from an increased international dimension.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Careful monitoring and evaluation is critical to the success of our international activity. Corporate responsibility lies with the Chief Executive, assisted by the International Affairs Board (IAB) and accountable in Member terms to the Deputy Leader, who drives policy and sets the political context.

International activity must not be seen as the exclusive preserve of international teams - there needs to be a balance between their expertise and meaningful input from service units. It is vital that officers and teams responsible for co-ordinating international work commit to working together to achieve the outcomes of the strategy.

IAB will be reconstituted to be a more focussed and coordinated group, a means of ensuring that the main parties involved in international work, members and officers, share information on a regular basis. We will institute a wider, parallel International Forum, chaired by KCC's Chief Executive, to include key, like-minded external partners to aid the further dissemination of information and to enable greater partnership working.

There are a number of areas that need to be strengthened in relation to international partnerships:

- Memoranda of Understanding, or similar agreements, should exist for all links of a scale greater than informal networking, to demonstrate political support
- All links must have clear objectives to demonstrate links to existing policies and core business
- To allow for meaningful evaluation of international activity, and to demonstrate added value, emphasis must be placed on documenting, reflecting on and sharing outcomes, including those less easy to quantify

Evaluation of individual links and partnerships plays an important role in deciding the most appropriate level of implementation. Although it is often true that the relevant international team has the skills and experience necessary to establish and maintain links, this should not be automatically assumed, and it is often important that this work is carried out by professional units, which can benefit more directly from their close involvement.

It will be necessary to develop a transparent framework by which to progress this strategy and evaluate outcomes, including formal overview by Cabinet. This will consist of:

- Four-year strategic objectives
- Annual action plans
- Annual evaluation of activity, to review progress against action plans
- Full evaluation of the success of the strategy at the end of the four year period

COMMUNICATION

International activity is a highly valuable area for Kent County Council, and the way it is viewed is critical. Awareness of this strategy, as well as future priorities and targets, will help embed an understanding and active acceptance of the need to look outwards in order to drive innovation and change. Members are central to this process of communication and it is crucial that they are fully informed about international work in Kent, and feel able to engage with the agenda.

As part of our evaluation and monitoring, an annual matrix of international activity should be made available so that Members and officers from all parts of the organisation have an awareness of what has taken place and where there may be opportunities for further engagement. Units should be encouraged to consider the international perspective more frequently so that opportunities are not missed. Negative perceptions and real barriers must be broken down.

With regard to wider audiences, it is important that we take a proactive approach to disseminating information, placing emphasis on added value and value for money. We need to foster a wider recognition of the legitimate leadership role of the County Council in positioning Kent as a forward-looking, cosmopolitan place embracing opportunity. Nevertheless, we need to be aware of the potential for misinterpretation

of information, and should ensure our web-based and other communications support this strategy. There should be a focus on the proactive involvement of Kent's residents and businesses.