

**By:** Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Economic Development  
Theresa Bruton, Head of Regeneration Projects

**To:** Economic Development Cabinet Committee  
8<sup>th</sup> November 2012

**Subject:** Visit Kent – Feedback from Presentation and Member Visits

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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## **Summary**

This report sets out consideration currently being given by this committee to the existing activity of Visit Kent Ltd through a recent programme of presentations and visits by Committee members and will inform its consideration of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between KCC and Visit Kent for the period 2013 – 2016 referred to in a separate report.

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## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Visit Kent Ltd is a private /public sector organisation originally established 10 years ago by KCC to take forward tourism marketing for the Kent tourism sector working in close association with the research, product development and quality assurance/training functions that were then led by a team within KCC. The company has continued to expand its operation and three years ago it was agreed that the two teams would work more closely together under a single business plan overseen by the Visit Kent Ltd Board. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Economic Development and the Head of Regeneration Projects are KCC's representatives on the private sector led Board.
- 1.2 Members of the new Committee requested an opportunity to acquaint themselves more closely with the activity of Visit Kent in advance of considering the new SLA.

## **2. Presentation / Visits**

- 2.1 On 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012, Sandra Matthews Marsh, CEO from Visit Kent, presented to the Economic Development Cabinet Committee providing background on the volume and value of tourism in Kent as well as Visit Kent's key achievements over the last 10 years since its inception by Kent County Council. This included the major Kent Contemporary campaign, the award winning Greeters programme, the Big Weekend, the current extent of private and public sector

partnership support and external funding. It is summarised in the meeting minutes as presented in this meeting's agenda.

2.2 This was followed on 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> October with two fact finding tours arranged by the Visit Kent team so that Members of the Committee could meet a range of tourism businesses and stakeholders to help them understand the breadth and depth of the sector and their contributions to the local economy.

2.3 The visit programmes and attendees lists are attached at Appendix 1

### **3. Feedback from Visits**

3.1 Members were able to learn more about the opportunities and challenges facing the tourism industry and its potential for growth by directly experiencing a number of Kent tourism destinations and through presentation and discussion with a range of tourism business representatives.

3.2 Headline messages and understanding included:

#### **General:**

- Tourism businesses benefit from Visit Kent in terms of significantly enhancing their collective marketing and PR compared to what they could achieve alone or in smaller groupings
- National bodies including English Heritage are able to maximise their marketing and PR budgets for their Kent attractions by working closely with Visit Kent.
- Visit Kent provides valuable access to / representation at national and international events, trade fairs, exhibitions and conferences.
- Visit Kent viewed as being there for the long term, continually building and adapting and providing certainty for its investors. This is important for local businesses and external clients, for example, when it can take 2-3 years to secure an overnight tour operator to Kent.
- Pivotal role Visit Kent plays in linking businesses together to ensure sum of the parts contributes to the greater whole e/g linking a hotel with an attraction when they have a large event
- KCC's involvement as a key stakeholder in Visit Kent giving businesses confidence to invest themselves

**Opportunities:**

- Building upon the customer in-sight (e.g. MyKent) and business intelligence (e.g. Business Barometer) to forward plan and build upon best practice.
- Improving infrastructure such as HS1
- Legacy of the London Olympics and the Greeters initiative
- Greater potential in the Cruise market and Coach market
- Shared ambition to be brand leaders and close association with Visit England
- Ongoing success of EU funding programmes to develop work streams.

**Challenges:**

- Cost pressures for tourism businesses in terms of fuel, food etc.
- Importance of developing and maintaining the quality of the welcome to Kent
- Brown tourism signs out of date, damaged, missing and difficult to arrange.
- Need for better and consistent High Speed Broadband and mobile phone coverage
- Need for well educated/skilled staff
- District Councils failing to zone land for Hotel and Tourism development in their plans.
- Need for more quality hotels especially in East Kent
- Too much regulation and bureaucracy

3.3 Members are invited to feedback their experience and thoughts following the visits

3.4 In feeding back Members are also invited to identify how they would like to hear about Visit Kent activity in the future and measure its progress and success which could include future presentations at Committee.

#### **4. Recommendation:**

4.1 Members of the Cabinet Committee are asked to:

- a) To discuss key perceptions and outcomes of the fact finding tours; and
- b) Invite Sandra Matthews-Marsh, Chief Executive, Visit Kent, to provide an update to the committee during the 2013/14 year.

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#### **Background documents:**

Appendix 1: Visit programme and attendances lists