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To: Economic Development Cabinet Committee, 6<sup>th</sup> March

Subject: Unlocking Kent's Potential – Kent's Strategy for Growth

Classification: Unrestricted

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## Summary

In November, the Kent Leaders agreed that further work should be done to develop a new county-wide growth strategy, refreshing *Unlocking Kent's Potential*, the regeneration framework produced in 2009.

This paper outlines the general brief for the preparation of the new document and the timescales for its production. It also seeks views on the priorities that should be highlighted and how these priorities can also be reinforced in the development of other strategies likely to emerge over the coming year.

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## 1. The need for a new Kent Growth Strategy

- 1.1. A number of economic strategies already exist across Kent. In the past year, sub-county 'Growth Plans' have been approved for North and East Kent. At district level, Local Development Frameworks play a central role in supporting economic growth, and many of these are supplemented with local economic development strategies. Across the county, the 2009 Regeneration Framework set out Kent's major challenges and opportunities and led to the preparation of a series of delivery plans and strategies, including *Growth without Gridlock* and *Better Homes*.
- 1.2. However, since the Regeneration Framework was produced, there have been major changes in the policy context: many of the strategies and plans that were developed with Government at the time (such as the Local Investment Plans and the Regional Economic Strategy) are no longer extant, while new sources of investment have emerged. At the same time, the economic context has also changed radically, with much of the work on the Regeneration Framework completed before the 2008 financial crisis.
- 1.3. It is also important for Kent to have an up to date growth strategy given the opportunities that may emerge to make a case for greater devolution of economic resources to local level. Despite the cautious Government response to the recent Heseltine Review, the Autumn Statement set out an intention to establish 'single pots' of funding for economic growth from 2015 based around local priorities. To support this Local Enterprise Partnerships have been asked

by Government to prepare regional growth plans, and it will be important that any plan produced by the South East LEP is based on clear county strategies and reflects Kent's priorities.

## **2. Potential contents and focus**

2.1. The Leaders' meeting in November envisaged that the refreshed *Unlocking Kent's Potential* will be a short, sharp document accompanied by an analysis of the county's economy, setting out the challenges and opportunities for growth over the next 5-10 years, and outlining key priorities, including:

- Business and employment – supporting business growth through access to finance, reducing the regulatory burden, backing firms and sectors with growth potential and opening up major employment opportunities.
- Homes and communities – delivering the strategy set out in *Better Homes* and developing solutions to unlock major sites.
- Skills and opportunities – linking the county's skills offer with current and future employer demand.
- Transport and infrastructure – delivering the big transport priorities for Kent set out in *Growth without Gridlock*

2.2. It will also focus on meeting the financial challenge presented by the need to invest in infrastructure, highlighting the opportunities presented by new forms of private sector investment in infrastructure.

2.3. The strategy is not a substitute for the detailed strategies that already exist at local level, so it is not proposed to create an extensive document focused on individual sites and projects – and Leaders were keen to ensure that the new document remains 'light touch'. Instead, the new document aims to create an overarching statement of Kent's big priorities, and a strategy for delivering them.

## **3. Consultation and timescales**

3.1. Following the Leaders' meeting, discussions have taken place with Thames Gateway Kent Partnership Board and Business Advisory Board, both of which endorsed the general approach. In addition, Chris Garland, Leader of Maidstone, has agreed to act as the lead District Leader in contributing to the strategy.

3.2. A first draft of the strategy document is currently being prepared, for completion by the end of February and discussion by Leaders on 21 March. This timescale will provide plenty of time for the strategy to influence the development of any growth plan prepared by the LEP.

3.3. The formal status of *Unlocking Kent's Potential* has yet to be determined. However, if it is to be adopted as County Council policy (as well as an

informal Kent Leaders' document), formal public consultation will need to take place over the summer for adoption in the autumn.

#### **4. Recommendations**

- 4.1. The Economic Development Cabinet Committee is recommended to note the work underway to prepare *Unlocking Kent's Potential* and its links with the development of the growth strategy being taken forward by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership; and to consider the major themes that the revised strategy should contain.

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