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To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee - 15 April 2014

Subject: Establishing a 'Kent Tourism & Hospitality Guild'

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Divisions: All

Summary

This report provides details of the ambition for, and progress towards, the establishment of a Kent Tourism & Hospitality Guild following the initial public proposal at the 'Kent Tourism Conference 2013' at the end of March last year.

Recommendation

Members of Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee are asked to **NOTE** the report and **ENDORSE** plans to further progress the initiative with partners and stakeholders.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The tourism and hospitality sector provides 64,000 jobs in Kent and is worth £3.4bn to the local economy annually. It has the potential to grow and offer even more jobs and economic benefit in the future, indeed, tourism is forecast to grow by at least 3% per annum over the coming five years and Kent is performing above average in the sector when compared to the national average. The Paramount proposal for the Swanscombe Peninsula is a prime example of future opportunity that will demand a high number of skilled staff that we would ideally want to see recruited from within the County.
- 1.2 Businesses in Kent's hospitality sector have a recognised skills gap, general recruitment and retention challenges and a strong desire to simplify paths of entry to its many and varied businesses that would promote sustainable, professional career development.
- 1.3 Latest published figures show that whilst unemployment, at 2.5%, is below the national average of 3.0%, over 4.7% of all 18-24 year olds in the county are unemployed. Five Kent districts have youth unemployment rates higher than the national average of 5.1% and that includes Thanet at 10.3% which is the highest in the South East Region. The need to focus on career pathways for this group is critical.
- 1.4 There is a range of education provision in schools and FE colleges across Kent that could lead to careers in the tourism and hospitality

sector but it is often isolated, varied in the skills developed and lacking in practical connections with the industry.

1.5 The primary challenges for the tourism and hospitality sector in Kent are recognised as being:

- low awareness of the sector as a route to sustainable, professional jobs
- poor perception of the sector as a career choice for young people
- confusing qualification entry pathways into the sector
- limited linkages and collaboration between businesses and the education sector
- a very fragmented employment base comprising many small and medium sized businesses

2.The Ambition for a Kent Guild

2.1 The emerging ambition for KCC, Visit Kent and local industry representatives is to establish a Kent Guild to shine a spotlight on this sector with a view to raising its positive profile as an attractive and sustainable career option especially for young people. At the same time there is a need to focus minds and activity on what is necessary to develop and streamline entry and progression pathways for students from the age of 14 onwards. In particular, there is a desire to focus on the practical skills developed. As such, there will be a strong private sector influence that will provide clear guidance into the needs of local businesses and to determine the overall image the sector wishes to convey to visitors, customers, stakeholders and especially to prospective employees.

2.2 Businesses will also give practical support from the early stages as providers of essential work experience and similar opportunities as well as performing strong advocacy roles for the sector.

2.3 A fully developed Kent Guild would encompass key stakeholders and provide a single focus for:

- promoting/marketing a positive image of the sector;
- operating and working within the sector in Kent for employers;
- working with the sector for education and skills providers;
- supporting young people looking to embark on a career; and
- supporting businesses to develop, grow and to recruit and develop young people into sustainable jobs.

3.Progress To-Date

- 3.1 The idea was first publicly mooted at the 'Kent Tourism Conference 2013' held at the Dover Cruise Terminal in March where it was welcomed by international, national and local sector representatives as much needed and a move that would reflect the value already attached to professional careers in the tourism and hospitality sector in other parts of the world.
- 3.2 Representatives from our Regeneration and Economy team and Skills and Employability Service have been working closely with Visit Kent Ltd to develop the concept for a Guild along with education providers and employers.
- 3.3 Nationally, People 1st, the Sector Skills Council for Hospitality, Passenger Transport, Travel and Tourism are working to transform skills in the sector, particularly in the areas of management and leadership, customer service and craft/technical skills. It has more recently created a National Hospitality Guild to 'address the industry's overwhelming desire to simplify professional development, help the hospitality sector address its skills gaps, and to train and retain the best staff.' People 1st presented their 'annual state of the nation' report at last year's Tourism Conference in Kent which highlighted the low perception of the sector as a career pathway choice and the general recruitment and retention issues experienced across the sector.
- 3.4 Visit Kent colleagues have been working closely with People 1st, This is proving to be a valuable liaison where there is potential to draw upon existing practice, materials, accreditation and kite-marking expertise as we develop a Kent focused Guild..
- 3.5 Business representatives are already lending active support to the initiative including hosting a number of workshops bringing together Education providers from schools and colleges across the county to consider and progress the idea.
- 3.6 The first workshop involved over 40 professionals from 33 schools and colleges. The delegates welcomed information about the potential for growth and jobs within the sector, acknowledged the challenges faced by businesses in recruiting and retaining staff at all levels and shared experience and concerns about the changing education, qualification and funding landscape in schools and colleges. Key issues identified included:
 - acknowledged that poor perception was a key barrier to careers in the sector for the need to address this under the general banner of 'Aspiration, Attitude and Achievement';
 - a desire for a local, Kent based solution;
 - the recognition of, and commitment to, securing more opportunities in the hospitality and tourism sector for their

students;

- an expressed desire for greater linkage with representatives from the all levels of the business community to inform and enthuse students as well as provide practical work experience and apprenticeship opportunities across the piece as well as real part time job opportunities to complement FE based training;
- the wish to be better connected amongst themselves where they could continue to build upon the shared experience and best practice begun at the workshop;
- an understanding that the qualifications landscape and funding is complex and changing but that it should not inhibit the ambition to develop the Guild for Kent idea;
- acknowledgement that raising awareness and developing a positive profile of the sector needed to be aimed at parents and carers as well as the students;
- the potential of KCC's Kent Choices 4U portal to be developed to provide a sector specific response; and
- beacons of excellence in terms of some existing links between schools, colleges and local businesses to be shared.

3.7 Further meetings of a representative group have resulted in a more detailed proposal for a pilot initiative is now being worked up with four core providers from which the initiative can now grow.

3.8 A further initiative by Visit Kent and business leaders is being rolled out and involves a programme of visiting schools and raising the profile of opportunities in the Hotel/hospitality sector in Kent and enthusing students to this sector for wide ranging career options. This has been well received to-date by students and teachers alike and is a sound foundation upon which to continue to build the advocacy and changing perceptions aspects of the Guild proposal.

3.9 Finally, the recent success of East Kent College in attracting £7m+ to convert one of their iconic buildings to a 4* training hotel reinforces the need for, and benefit of, Kent specifically focussing on the development of the tourism and hospitality sector through such a mechanism as the Guild.

4.Next Steps

4.1 Steering Group

A private/public/academic sector steering group has been established to inform, drive and support plans for the emerging Guild. The group is being co-ordinated by Visit Kent, and is well placed to assist the development of this initiative including providing the links to its extensive network of employers. Initial conclusions that will guide future activity include:

- Recognition of the need to build and maintain momentum

and therefore an initial focus on what can be achieved quickly;

- Agreement to the development of a detailed proposition providing the basis for a bigger launch/call to action with businesses early in 2014;
- Commitment to a detailed analysis of best options for an interactive web-based portal that promotes the Kent tourism and hospitality industry, bringing together employers, training providers and individuals as well as including guidance on simplified learning and qualification pathways that can lead to jobs;
- Linking of the portal with KCC's Kent Choices 4U site; and
- The need for options to be costed and funding opportunities to be identified and secured with the ambition that it becomes a fully sustainable Guild.

4.2 **A 'Kent Passport'**

Proposals are being considered by the key stakeholders for the introduction of a 'Kent Passport' as a mechanism for bringing parties together and providing a unique offer for the sector in Kent. It would be a demonstration of the skills and experience achieved for those looking to enter and progress within the sector, for education and skills providers and for employers wishing to actively support work experience, apprenticeships, professional development and local recruitment. Importantly, there is already significant commitment from Kent businesses to support a managed programme of work experience placements deemed essential by school and training providers.

The aim would be to build prestige, value, respect and recognition for the quality of tourism and hospitality services delivered under the 'Kent Passport' and the jobs and staff therein. It would not seek to create a locally devised 'qualification' which would be costly and hold little value but instead to draw upon the best and most appropriate qualifications, evaluation, experience, guidance and support for local access. Very importantly, it would be a demonstration of practical skills acquired for specific deployment with the sector.

4.3 **A Digital Portal**

As well as maintaining momentum with current activity the steering group has identified the quickest and most practical way forward in the first instance is the development of a dedicated digital portal. The site would explain and advocate the breadth of benefits, opportunities and wide career choices available in this sector in Kent raising its profile and hopefully changing poor perceptions.

It would also provide a comprehensive vehicle for people searching for training and skills information in Kent, for advice and guidance about entry paths into the sector and for employers looking to offer work experience, apprenticeships, part and full time work and professional career opportunities. In time, it would also underpin the

Kent Passport as a symbol of personal progress and achievement and quality service delivery. The portal would link with KCC's Kent Choices 4U careers site and the potential to develop it, in due course, with relevant advertising income and sponsorship would be pursued.

4.4 **Resourcing**

Identifying the necessary resources to develop and maintain the Guild including the portal and the associated services to business includes Government and EU programmes. The impact envisaged will require pump priming funds to get the Guild off the ground. Once operational, it is envisaged that it could be further developed on a more commercial basis. At this stage, it is estimated that set-up, development and operation of the Guild, and in particular, the digital portal, marketing campaign and curriculum development elements would be in the region of £80,000 over three years. £30,000 has been committed from the Regeneration Fund and Education Learning and Skills has committed a further £10,000 along with specific activity to support the curriculum/skills framework pilots starting this year. The remaining funding needed will be sought from external funding sources, private sector partners and through more commercial activity linked to the portal.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The plans to develop a Kent Tourism & Hospitality Guild are well underway and have already gained active support from a range of key stakeholders as well as wider industry interest.
- 5.2 Funding of £10,000 has been committed by ELS, a further £30,000 committed from the Regeneration Fund to develop the wider Guild initiative in advance of activity to raise additional funding from other sources to achieve a fully operational Guild and then move it to a self-sustaining model.
- 5.3 The private sector led Steering Group being co-ordinated by Visit Kent will guide and oversee continued progress. This will include the identification of funding streams which will be essential to support development of next steps including the digital portal, work experience programme, Kent Passport and marketing and promotion of the sector.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Members are asked to **NOTE** the report and **ENDORSE** plans to further progress the establishment of a Kent Tourism & Hospitality Guild

Background Documents: None

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