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To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee 6 March 2025

Subject: Implementation of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: All KCC electoral divisions

Summary: This report provides an overview of the progress in implementing the Kent and Medway Economic Framework. It sets out the high-level key actions that have taken place to date and the future activity planned to support sustainable growth of Kent & Medway's economy, through to 2030.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Committee is asked to note, consider and endorse the report.

1. Background

1.1 In April 2024, the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership¹ (KMEP) approved the publication of the *Kent and Medway Economic Framework (KMEF)*². This a medium-term strategy that looks to guide actions that support the growth and prosperity of the region through to 2030.

1.2 The Framework focuses on three overarching objectives (Productivity, Sustainability and Inclusivity) which sit above five ambitions for delivery, these being:

- Enable innovative, productive and creative businesses
- Widen opportunities and unlock talent
- Secure resilient infrastructure for planned sustainable growth
- Place economic opportunity at the centre of community wellbeing and prosperity
- Create diverse, distinctive and vibrant places.

¹ KMEP is the local growth board for this area, and its membership includes Kent County Council, Medway Council, all district councils' leaders, businesses, universities and colleges. Its website is www.kmep.org.uk

² KMEF can be read at: [Kent & Medway Economic Framework](#)

1.3 These key elements of the KMEF are underpinned by the cross-cutting commitment to decarbonisation and reaching net zero in the county by 2050.

2. Implementation

2.1 Since publication, the KCC Economy Team (which acts as the KMEP Secretariat) has been working to implement the KMEF ambitions in partnership with the KMEP Board Members, the Business Advisory Board (BAB), and partners. The KCC Economy team works closely with the Medway Council Economy team in this.

2.2 For each of the five ambitions, a private sector board member and a local authority officer have been appointed to act as a Thematic Lead for the ambition, helping to oversee the implementation of the KMEF and direct the team’s activities. These thematic leads are as follows:

Ambition	Private sector lead	Local Authority lead
Enable innovative, productive and creative businesses	Tudor Price – CEO, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	Steve Samson – KCC Head of Economy
Widen opportunities and unlock talent	Simon Cook - Mid-Kent College Principal	Dan Ratcliff, Medway Council’s Head of Skills, Employment and Adult Education
Secure resilient infrastructure for planned sustainable growth	Vince Lucas - Director, VA Rail	Tom Marchant, KCC Head of Strategic Development & Place
Place economic opportunity at the centre of community renewal and prosperity	Nick Fenton, Locate in Kent & Kent Developers’ Group	Andrew Osborne, Ashford BC’s Head of Economic Development
Create diverse, distinctive and vibrant places	Miranda Chapman - MD, Pillory Barn	Adam Bryan, Medway Council’s Director of Place

2.3 The information below outlines the focus of the work to date against the five ambitions of KMEF.

3. Ambition 1: Enable innovative, productive and creative businesses

3.1 This first ambition focuses on increasing business investment and growing innovative capacity and resilience – both at the ‘leading edge’ of technology and across the economy.

3.2 There are four action areas that fit within this ambition. These are:

- Developing an enhanced place-based innovation partnership
 - Focusing support to business on measures that will increase long-term productivity resilience and the adoption of new ideas
 - Attracting and welcoming investors to Kent and Medway
 - Supporting the conditions for growth
- 3.3 Work since April 24, undertaken by the KMEP Board Members and the KMEP Secretariat, has focussed primarily on:
- Establishing a Kent & Medway Innovation Partnership (KMIP)
 - Exploring opportunities related to investor funding
 - Agreeing a new call for Growing Places Funding (GPF)
 - Responding to the Industrial Strategy consultation
 - Confirming new contractual arrangements with Locate in Kent
 - Accessing new data sets to enable evidence-based decision making.

Kent & Medway Innovation Partnership

- 3.4 The Kent & Medway Innovation Partnership (KMIP) has been established. This partnership works with the University of Kent, the University of Greenwich and Canterbury Christ Church University, as well as research institutions such as NIAB, to increase innovation activity across Kent and Medway. Innovate UK, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, and the British Business Bank are also engaged as observers on the KMIP Board.
- 3.5 KMIP aims to increase R&D spend and innovation, particularly for SMEs, across the county. It also aims to encourage the increased commercialisation of innovation – both the commercialisation of academic intellectual property and the adoption and diffusion of new technology.
- 3.6 In February 2025, the KMIP Board agreed a Year One plan for the Innovation Partnership that would see the establishment of five high-growth cluster groups co-led by business and academia and supported by KCC Economy colleagues. These high-growth cluster groups will be focused on the following sectors:
- Food, Drink & Agri-Tech
 - Life-Science & Med-Tech
 - Clean Energy
 - Creative and Digital
 - Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering
- 3.7 The KMIP Board will regularly report back up to the KMEP Board on strategic activity and progress against its stated objectives.
- 3.8 The current terms of reference for the Kent & Medway Innovation Partnership are included in **APPENDIX A**.

Exploring opportunities related to investor funding

- 3.9 Alongside the development of KMIP, work has been ongoing to consider and understand the future of business support and access to finance across the county.
- 3.10 Initial discussions have taken place with angel funds, large institutional investors and regional funders on the accessibility of seed and growth funding for Kent & Medway businesses. This engagement has thus far been led by Tudor Price as the Thematic Lead. Work will continue this year, particularly with the British Business Bank and Innovate UK, to make capital more easily accessible to companies across the county that are looking to accelerate their growth.

Growing Places Fund

- 3.11 As the Cabinet Committee will recall from their last meeting, progress has been made on launching a new call for the Growing Places Fund (GPF) to help create the conditions for growth.
- 3.12 The GPF is a revolving capital loan-based funding programme for Kent. The capital loans are used to support project proposals that would deliver new or safeguard existing jobs, support learners with upskilling and unlock housing and/or commercial floorspace.
- 3.13 It is expected that a maximum of £6,470,000 could be available for reinvestment in a new round of funding from 2025/26.
- 3.14 The GPF eligibility criteria have been agreed both by KMEP (the local growth board) and KCC (as the Accountable Body). Projects put forward for GPF funding would have to demonstrate positive impact against the KMEF ambitions during assessment and prioritisation. Full details on these criteria are available at: [Executive Decision](#)
- 3.15 The call for new projects is expected to be launched in April, once the repayment of previous GPF loans has been confirmed. The call will be seeking loan applications wanting a GPF contribution between £300k and £2million.

Industrial Strategy consultation

- 3.16 It is important that our business growth work responds to central Government's economic growth agenda, so Kent & Medway are best placed to benefit from any programme initiatives that may be forthcoming.
- 3.17 [Invest 2035: The UK's Industrial Strategy green paper](#) was published in October 2024. The final Industrial Strategy is due to be published, alongside the eight high-growth sector plans and phase 2 of the Spending Review, later this year.

- 3.18 To respond to the Invest 2035 consultation, the KMEP Secretariat spoke to a plethora of business organisations, universities, colleges, local authority partners and other key local institutions, such as Locate in Kent. Consultation responses were created for KMEP and for KCC.
- 3.19 Both the KCC and KMEP consultation responses emphasised Kent and Medway's sector strengths in life sciences, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and creative industries, alongside the importance of growth in the foundational sector of food, drink & Agri-Tech. Funding opportunities and activities associated with stimulating growth in these sectors will take a priority in delivery of this ambition.
- 3.20 In alignment with this approach, the cluster groups being developed under KMIP aim to be particularly responsive to any funding opportunities that are expected to arise from this policy.

Confirming new contractual arrangements with Locate in Kent

- 3.21 KCC (with support from Medway Council) has ensured that new contractual arrangements are in place for Inward Investment services. Locate in Kent is now supporting this action area by promoting the county's inward investment opportunities and attracting new businesses to the county leading to job creation and economic growth.
- 3.22 An update on progress with the inward investment commissioned activity is due to be presented to GEDCCC at the March 2025 meeting.

Accessing new data sets

- 3.23 Data-driven policy-making that is informed by evidence is a goal of KMEP. The data available from the Office for National Statistics and other publicly available data sets often are formed using 'standard industrial classification of economic activities (SIC)' codes. SIC codes have not been updated since 2007, meaning that it is difficult to plan economic growth and sector support in the county, as many new types of businesses have come into existence over the last 18 years.
- 3.24 As part of the KMEP, and using a small amount of SELEP legacy funding, the KMEP secretariat has secured access to 'Data City', which has devised a way to get more up-to-date information about companies and which sectors they operate in – by using AI to analyse company websites. It has also secured Data City access for the KCC's data analytics team. Training has recently been undertaken, and this information is being used to produce new data dashboards for the KMEP Board showing our relative sector strengths. This data is also being analysed to see which employers should be approached to be involved in the Kent & Medway Innovation Partnership mentioned earlier.

4. Ambition 2: Widen opportunities and unlock talent

- 4.1 The second ambition of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework focuses on the skills and talent of the workforce – supporting greater employer engagement and leadership in the skills system, joining up the offer and ensuring continued investment in the skills that are needed to respond to long-term structural change.
- 4.2 There are four action areas that fit within this ambition. These are:
- Embedding the Local Skills Improvement Plan at the heart of a closer relationship between employers, further education and other skills providers to meet current and future skills needs.
 - Investing in Kent and Medway’s skills infrastructure to harness the potential of the long-term transformational trends we have identified and support the growth of our sectoral strengths.
 - Collaborating to make the most effective use of skills budgets, focused on Kent and Medway’s shared priorities.
 - Flexibility to focus on Kent and Medway’s shared priorities.
- 4.3 This ambition is overseen primarily by the Kent & Medway Employment Task Force, which provides updates to the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership.
- 4.4 Work since April 24 by the KMEP Board Members, the KMEP Secretariat and Employment Task Force colleagues has focussed primarily on:
- Local Skills Improvement Plan
 - Informing colleges and universities of employers’ skill needs
 - Connect To Work
 - Skills 25.

Local Skills Improvement Plan

- 4.5 A Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is a plan developed by an employer representative body for a specified area. It summarises the skills, capabilities, or expertise required in the specified area and identifies actions that relevant providers can take to address these requirements. LSIPs are a tool being produced on a locality-by-locality basis to help educators better respond to the needs of local businesses. They are funded by the Department for Education and aim to put employers more firmly at the heart of the skills system.
- 4.6 In Kent and Medway, the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce acts as the employer representative body, leading on this work in partnership with Mid-Kent College and other stakeholders.
- 4.7 A [LSIP Progress Report](#) was published in June 24, to which the KMEF team helped contribute.

Informing colleges and universities of employers’ skill needs

- 4.8 In addition to supporting the work of the LSIP, the KMEP Secretariat has sought to improve the communication of employers’ skills challenges through changes

to the membership of the Business Advisory Board, which is a KMEP sub-group, supported by the secretariat.

- 4.9 The Business Advisory Board (BAB) is a business-led forum which was established in January 2009, to provide a 'sounding board' with the business community to review and reflect on economic strategy. The BAB is made up of representatives from key sectors of the local economy. It meets bi-monthly and each meeting provides an insight from the business community in Kent and Medway on current trading conditions and experience of the local economy, on a sector by sector basis.
- 4.10 During the Business Advisory Board meetings, the employers are asked to give a brief commentary reflecting on the following points:
- A current challenge for your business / sector
 - A good news story for your business / sector
 - Any particular skills/recruitment challenge
- 4.11 Over the course of the last year, Simon Cook of Mid-Kent College has joined this group, which has also been supported by Simon Barnes of the University of Kent. The addition of these BAB members means that there is a forum where they can hear directly from employers about the most up-to-date challenges that are affecting their market performance. The recent access to Data City also enables the team to see live recruitment data, and be aware of which skills are most sought after at the present time. This high-level data is also being reported to our educational contacts at BAB, and the ambition is to share this information with the Employment Task Force in short order.

Connect to Work

- 4.12 Connect to Work is a programme in England and Wales to help target participant groups find employment and sustainable work. It is a key part of the Government's new Get Britain Working Strategy and is overseen by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 4.13 The primary focus is on supporting people who are economically inactive (85% of programme) but the programme will also provide some support people who are at high risk of falling out of work (15% of programme).
- 4.14 The target participant groups set out in the DWP guidance are as follows:
- People with a disability or long-term health condition
 - Specified disadvantaged groups:
 - Offenders / ex-offenders
 - Carers / ex-carers
 - Homeless people
 - Armed Forces (AF) veterans / current AF personnel
 - People with drug or alcohol dependencies
 - Care experienced young people / care leavers
 - Refugees (resettled Afghans) / people on the Ukrainian scheme
 - Victims / survivors of domestic abuse
 - Young people (19+) involved in or at risk of serious violence
 - Victims of modern slavery

- 4.15 KCC has been asked by DWP to become the Accountable Body for the Connect to Work programme in Kent & Medway. As such KCC are responsible for management and oversight of the local programme, commissioning a range of service providers to deliver programme activity and reporting back to DWP on progress and outcomes.
- 4.16 The programme will run until 31 March 2030 and indicative annual 'programme starts' in Kent & Medway should reach 2,900 participants per year (2,500 Kent, 400 Medway) at peak delivery. Support to assist people into work lasts for up to a year, while support to help people remain in work can run for up to four months.
- 4.17 This programme, which is led by Steve Samson, Head of the Economy Team, has an associated delivery plan, and recently a questionnaire was listed on KCC's procurement portal seeking expressions of interest from training providers that may be interested in part-delivering the services. Market engagement sessions for these providers will take place in March, supported by KCC, Medway Council and DWP.

Skills 25

- 4.18 An upcoming event (on 18th March 2025) is Skills 25, a cross-sector skills summit with ambitions to serve as a dynamic platform for exploring and advancing essential skills driving Kent and Medway's future. Skills 25 will focus on identifying challenges and opportunities related to the skills needed for success across industries and sectors in our evolving economic landscape.
- 4.19 The event is aimed at Managing Directors, Business Owners, Senior Leaders, and Learning and Development teams from Construction, Manufacturing, Engineering, Food and Food Production, Social Care, Education and the Creative sector.
- 4.20 Led by the Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and funded by UK Government, the KMEF team have been invited to speak at the event.

5. Ambition 3: Secure resilient infrastructure for planned sustainable growth

- 5.1 The third ambition of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework focuses on securing the infrastructure that Kent and Medway need to support long-term sustainable growth. This will include action at national as well as local level, recognising the county's stock of nationally important infrastructure assets.
- 5.2 There are four action areas that fit within this ambition. These are:
- Maximising the benefit of international connectivity
 - Understanding our infrastructure needs and developing new solutions
 - Ensuring that Kent and Medway's digital infrastructure meets the dynamic evolution of business need and technology development
 - Supporting Kent and Medway's energy potential

- 5.3 Work since April 24 by the KMEP Board Members and the KMEP Secretariat has focussed primarily on:
- Bringing Back Eurostar Services to Ashford and Ebbsfleet International railway stations
 - Lobbying for the Lower Thames Crossing, Brenley Corner upgrade, and the Dover Access Improvements (Outbound Controls) project to proceed.
 - Creating an infrastructure pipeline, aligned to MHCLG needs.
 - Liaising with the University of Kent on major potential energy projects
 - Creating a Kent energy survey aimed at gathering feedback from local businesses.

Bringing Back Eurostar Services to Ashford and Ebbsfleet International railway stations

- 5.3 Kent and Medway have benefited from international rail services for 24 years from 1996 through to 2020; these were paused by Eurostar as a result of the pandemic but are woven into the local economy with businesses having located to the area and built European customers and connections following decades of use. A key priority for KMEP is to see these services return.
- 5.4 KMEP partners have sought the resumption of Eurostar services to Ashford International and Ebbsfleet International, as a partner within the Bring Back Eurostar Group. Meetings have been held with Eurostar's General Secretary & Chief Strategic Partnerships Officer to seek the resumption of these services. KMEP has also sent letters to the Secretary of State, and this has resulted in senior DfT civil servants meeting with the KMEP Chairman, Thematic Lead, Secretariat, alongside some Bring Back Eurostar Group representatives.
- 5.5 Correspondence has been sent by KMEP to local MPs requesting their support in raising this matter. This has resulted in Ministerial statements to the House of Commons, the most recent taking place in January, where Sir Keir Starmer responded to Sojan Joesph's question saying: *'I know this is an issue of considerable frustration to his constituents. The decision in question is ultimately for Eurostar, but we are keen to see international services reinstated to Ashford as soon as possible and I will be happy for the Rail Minister to update him on the latest discussions.'*
- 5.6 Lauren Edwards MP is meeting with the Rail Minister in February, and has been briefed by the KMEP Thematic Lead. A public interest case, written by Mark Welch (KCC Transport Planner) with contributions from other partners, has been sent by KMEP to the Ministerial Team and the local MPs. A media campaign is also being coordinated by the Bring Back Eurostar Group. The return of Eurostar stopping services is an issue we will continue to lobby for.

Lobbying for the Lower Thames Crossing, Brenley Corner upgrade, and the Dover Access Improvements (Outbound Controls) project to proceed

- 5.7 On the roads network, KMEP recognises the importance of the international trade corridor between the continent and the Midlands and the North. Keeping the M2, M20, and A282/M25 running smoothly, and minimising the use of Operation Brock doesn't only assist international trade, but also enables

residents and businesses to move freely around the county and unlocks local economic growth. Consequently, KMEP has been lobbying for the Lower Thames Crossing, Brenley Corner upgrade, and the Dover Access Improvements (Outbound Controls) project to proceed. This lobbying has been in the form of letters and emails sent to the Government and National Highways, and liaising with the Port of Dover.

- 5.8 These topics have also been raised with the Business Advisory Board (BAB). For example, the businesses were asked to register their support on National Highways' [interactive map of support](#).
- 5.9 KMEP is cautiously optimistic that the Chancellor's recent announcement that the Lower Thames Crossing is an "important project" and that the Treasury is "exploring options" for it to be privately financed, indicates that the Transport Secretary will make a final decision to approve National Highways' application for a development consent order to build the Lower Thames Crossing scheme by May 25.

Liaising with the University of Kent on major potential energy projects

- 5.10 The University of Kent's Operation Research team has been working over the past 12 months on modelling two potential projects. One could see a private wire being laid alongside the High Speed 1's track, allowing energy to be transmitted from areas of high supply to areas of high demand; the second focuses on industrial symbiosis at Kemsley in Swale. This is where industrial partners share waste products that can be used as fuel by other industrial partners in the cluster.
- 5.11 Both of these interesting projects could greatly benefit Kent – for example, if the industrial symbiosis project were to proceed, it could see carbon emissions fall, and Swale becoming net zero by 2035.
- 5.12 The KMEP Secretariat has sent a representative to the workshops undertaken by the University of Kent and is assisting these companies in making the connections they require in order to progress their plans (for example, linking the Kemsley cluster of businesses with the LSIP team, as people with the specialised skills sets required for the project will need to be recruited).

Creating a Kent energy survey

- 5.13 Working with KCC's Strategic Energy Lead Officer and the Chamber of Commerce, the KMEP Secretariat has devised an energy survey, which will shortly be issued to businesses. The survey will help inform the work to create a Regional Energy Strategic Plan (RESP). Furthermore, KMEP did respond to Ofgem's consultation on the RESP that took place in 2024.

6. Ambition 4: Place economic opportunity at the centre of community wellbeing and prosperity

- 6.1 The fourth ambition focuses on ensuring that people are able to contribute to Kent and Medway's growth potential and that the benefits of that growth are

widely shared, are visible across the county, and contribute to overall quality of life.

- 6.2 There are four action areas that fit within this ambition. These are:
- Ensuring that everyone who wants a job can find work
 - Developing a strategic partnership for health and the economy
 - Building links between anchors of growth, key investments and community opportunity
 - Embedding economic opportunity at the centre of local regeneration
- 6.3 Work since April 24 by the KMEP Board Members and the KMEP Secretariat has focussed primarily on:
- Producing the draft integrated work and health strategy for Kent and Medway
 - Preparing for the Get Britain Working Plans
 - Liaising with Business Improvement Districts to understand how best to support town centre place-making.

Producing the draft integrated work and health strategy for Kent and Medway

- 6.4 As the Cabinet Committee may recall from the November 2024 meeting, the KCC Economy Team/KMEP Secretariat has been working with health colleagues on the establishment of a new Strategic Partnership for Health and the Economy, which will oversee the creation of a new Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent & Medway. The paper with full details can be found [here](#).
- 6.5 The draft strategy was published at the beginning of this year, and the consultation to have your say can be found at [Kent and Medway Work and Health Strategy 2025-2030 | Have Your Say In Kent and Medway](#). The deadline for submitting comments is 20th March 2025.
- 6.6 The diagram on the next page shows the draft strategy's aim and the four aspirations. Work is now commencing on the production of an implementation plan, and the creation of case studies to show where employers have recruited people with health conditions successfully.

Strategy Aim

The **Kent & Medway Integrated Work & Health Strategy** has the aim of integrating and improving support for people and employers with the goal of helping people with long-term health conditions and disabilities to start, stay and succeed in work.

Aspiration A: Build Employer Confidence

Commitments

1. Build employer confidence in the ways they support employees and access to relevant support.
2. Build strong working relationships between employers and employees and a culture of a collaborative approach to achieving business and employee needs.

Aspiration B: Development, Skills and Training

Commitments

1. Create the environment that supports people to undertake meaningful work.
2. Provide career guidance and opportunities, values and ambitions.
3. Provide employers access to system-wide knowledge to enhance their offerings and help employees reach their potential.

Aspiration C: Person-Centred Approach

Commitments

1. Promote a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to address work and health needs.
2. Promote flexible working and reasonable adjustments.
3. Build current and prospective employee confidence and motivation to engage in meaningful work.

Aspiration D: Healthy, Thriving Workforce

Commitments

1. Engender a culture where employers proactively promote physical and mental wellbeing at work.
2. Collaborate within and beyond organisations to mitigate the wider determinants of health and inequalities.
3. A life stage approach to consider the impact of different phases at work.

Implementation Plan

There will be targeted action plans with the activities which will be undertaken to meet our commitments.

Preparing for the Get Britain Working Plans

- 6.7 In November 24, the Government published their Get Britain Working white paper. This is one of the Government's three strands to achieve their long-term ambition of a 80% employment rate. For reference, these strands are:
- Industrial Strategy – This aims to *“create more good jobs in every part of the country”*.
 - Employment Rights Bill – This aims to *“improve the quality and security of work”*.
 - Get Britain Working – This aims to *“bring skills and health together to get more people into work and to get them on in work.”*
- 6.8 The Get Britain white paper sets six key issues it wants to tackle:
- Too many people are excluded from the labour market, especially those with health conditions, caring responsibilities or lower skills levels.
 - Too many young people leave school without essential skills or access to high-quality further learning, an apprenticeship or support to work.
 - Too many people are stuck in insecure, poor quality and low-paying work, which contributes to a weaker economy.
 - Too many women who care for their families still experience challenges staying in and progressing in work.
 - Too many employers cannot fill their vacancies due to labour and skills shortages, holding back economic growth.
 - There is too great a disparity in labour market outcomes between different places and for different groups of people (e.g. in some coastal regions).
- 6.9 The DWP has made initial contact with the team to say that local areas will be asked to produce local Get Britain Working Plans, probably by autumn 2025. The local plans will set out an analysis of the economic inactivity challenge in each area and the actions that will be taken to improve outcomes for the local population. We are awaiting some further details about the expected nature of these plans from our DWP contacts and then will commence this work in earnest.

Liaising with Business Improvement Districts to understand how best to support town centre place-making

- 6.10 The KMEP Secretariat are convening the Business Improvement Districts and local economic development officers across the county to understand the shared opportunities and challenges of our diverse places, recognising the importance of supporting regeneration and growth in our town centres. This will also support a broader ambition to understand our town centre unique selling points and any ‘golden threads’ that can be supported at the strategic level.

7. Ambition 5: Create diverse, distinctive and vibrant places

- 7.1 The fifth ambition focuses on identifying Kent & Medway’s diversity, ‘polycentricity’ and rural environment as a key strength and promoting investment through locally led strategies across the county.

- 7.2 There are five action areas that fit within this ambition. These are:
- Growing Kent & Medway's dynamic creative and cultural economy.
 - Supporting our network of innovative and creative places.
 - Developing Kent's rural economy.
 - Valuing the natural, coastal and historic environment.
 - Developing the visitor economy.
- 7.3 Work since April 24, undertaken by the KMEP Board Members and the KMEP Secretariat, has focussed primarily on:
- Supporting the action plans and priorities of our creative & cultural networks
 - Delivering the Create South East programme
 - Developing the 'Grow in Kent' brand
 - Convening the Kent Rural Partnership to promote its ambitions
 - Funding Visit Kent to support growth in the visitor economy.

Supporting the action plans and priorities of our creative & cultural networks

- 7.4 There has been significant strategic engagement with creative & cultural sector networks on delivering this ambition over the past year. Most notably, with Creative Kent, Creative Medway and the South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN).
- 7.5 SECEN, which is a regional creative network that covers Greater Essex, East Sussex, Kent & Medway, supported by the KCC Economy Team has been developing its Creative Opportunity Zones (COZ) concept which seeks to promote cluster growth in the creative & cultural sectors. The concept focuses on prioritising investment in affordable creative infrastructure to stimulate innovation and economic activity. The first COZ has been approved for Newhaven in East Sussex and this will provide a good case study for further potential locations, including across Kent & Medway.

Delivering the Create South East programme

- 7.6 Create South East, which is a member of the Department of Media, Culture and Sports' (DCMS) Create Growth Programme, is a project which brings together businesses, agencies and local government to support high-growth potential creative businesses. This is done through mentoring, peer-to-peer cohorts, tailored workshops and access to investment opportunities. The geography covered includes Greater Essex, East Sussex, West Sussex, Brighton & Hove, and Kent & Medway.
- 7.7 The Create South East programme was oversubscribed and Kent & Medway was fairly represented in the cohort groups – with 41 businesses from Kent & Medway against a total cohort figure of 123.
- 7.8 Due to the success of Create South East, DCMS has funded the programme for a further year. Work has begun on establishing legacy activity for the programme and it is envisaged that this approach will inform further activity for high growth potential companies across our other focus sectors.

Developing the 'Grow in Kent' brand

- 7.9 Work is underway on establishing a growth brand for Kent & Medway. This brand will be 'Grow in Kent' and will underpin much of the work being delivered under Ambition 5, as well as support the Brand Kent activities which deliver inward investment and visitor economy services across the county.
- 7.10 Stakeholders are being engaged on the Grow in Kent brand and its four pillars of focus: the visitor economy, attracting & retaining skilled residents, trade & investment, and supporting our high-growth sectors. It is expected that the brand will formally launch during the first quarter of FY 2025-26.

Convening the Kent Rural Partnership to promote its ambitions

- 7.11 The Kent Rural Partnership remains the main forum for rural economic activity in the county. It unites key stakeholders to tackle rural challenges and opportunities. Recently, it has focused on land use, food and drink, diversification, employment and skills, and transport and connectivity. This effort aligns with the KMEF priority to support rural economic growth.
- 7.12 With districts and boroughs across Kent & Medway, work will continue to develop the viticulture sector, supporting growth within the subsector and increasing visitor numbers. This will focus on evidencing the impact of viticulture on the economy and determining if the sector has interest in pursuing a Protected Designation of Origin status.

Funding Visit Kent to support growth in the visitor economy

- 7.12 Visit Kent has received funding to enhance the visitor economy throughout Kent and Medway. The objectives include achieving a 5% growth in visitor numbers and spending, a 5% increase in annual overnight stays, supporting and promoting 400 businesses within the visitor economy sector. Additionally, there is an ambition to attract new travel trade and tour operator itineraries from outside the county and to achieve a 5% rise in employment within the visitor economy sector during the contract period.

8. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- 8.1 By measuring key metrics and quantifying progress, KPIs give teams a clear understanding of KMEF's status and help identify areas that need improvement. This allows KMEP and partners to make necessary adjustments and course corrections to ensure they are moving in the right direction.
- 8.2 A KCC Project Officer, in liaison with Kent Data Analytics, produces a data dashboard for each KMEP meeting, looking at the key economic measures, such as:
- Gross Value Added (GVA)
 - Number & Size of Enterprises
 - Value of Exports and Imports
 - Business Births and Deaths
 - Employment & Unemployment Rates

- Universal Credit Claimants
- Qualifications of the population aged 16-64
- Number of apprenticeship starts
- 16-18 destination measures
- Broadband availability
- EV charging devices per 100,000 population
- Dwelling Stock
- Economic Activity (aged 16-64)
- Resident and workplace weekly earnings
- Number of Accommodation & Food Services Enterprises in Kent & Medway
- Number of Arts, Entertainment, Recreation & other services enterprises in Kent and Medway.

8.3 In addition, there are specific KPIs related to each individual strand of KMEF activity (for example, the Innovation Partnership is focussing on 'Businesses' expenditure on R&D' and 'Innovate UK grants' awarded to organisations and businesses based in Kent and Medway'.

9. Next steps and the Devolution Agenda

8.1 Recognising that Kent & Medway will not be on the Devolution Priority Programme, there will be less immediate resource to deliver against the framework ambitions and local economic growth compared to our neighbouring regions. We await further clarity from Government on local growth funding for non-devolved authorities.

8.2 Government still expects every area to eventually have a statutory Local Growth Plan. KMEF provides a solid strategic foundation for our eventual Local Growth Plan. It is expected that activity associated with KMEF will directly support the ambitions of a future Local Growth Plan.

8.3 KMEP will continue to work effectively across the entire county, with Kent & Medway expected to remain the functional economic area under any future devolution arrangement.

10. Resourcing and Financial Implications

10.1 The implementation of the KMEF is led by KCC Economy team.

10.2 Certain programmes have associated funding streams (e.g. Connect to Work and GPF); however, much of the work to date on the remaining workstreams has been delivered with minimal or no budget for delivery. We are exceedingly grateful to the board members of KMEP and BAB (particularly the employers) who give up their time for free to help drive this work forward.

10.3 We await further information from Government on the future of local economic growth funding, particularly for non-devolved areas, as we move into the next phase of implementation.

11. Strategic Alignment

11.1 Kent County Council has adopted the KMEF as its local economic growth strategy.

11.2 Delivering on the KMEF also aligns with these strategies:

Framing Kent's Future: Priority 1: Levelling Up Kent

- *To support the Kent economy to be resilient and successfully adapt to the challenges and opportunities it faces over the coming years.*
- *To work with partners to develop a skills system for Kent that delivers skills that are resilient to changing workforce needs and opportunities and supports people to higher level skills.*
- *To see significant improvements in the economy, connectivity, educational attainment, skills and employment rates and public health outcomes in deprived communities in coastal areas so that they improve faster than the rest of Kent to reduce the gaps.*
- *To work with our partners to hardwire a preventative approach into improving the health of Kent's population and narrowing health inequalities.*

Framing Kent's Future: Priority 2: Infrastructure for Communities

- *Through our 'Infrastructure First' commitment we seek to ensure that new development provides the appropriate physical and social infrastructure necessary to support new and existing communities' quality of life.*
- *To improve digital connectivity and access across Kent by supporting the delivery of both Government-led and local programmes.*
- *To support our rural communities and businesses in meeting the distinctive challenges and opportunities that they face.*
- *To ensure residents have access to viable and attractive travel options that allow them to make safe, efficient and more sustainable journeys throughout Kent.*
- *To help all Kent's communities benefit from having a strong social fabric which underpins family, community and personal resilience*

Framing Kent's Future: Priority 3: Environmental Step Change

- *To consider Kent's environment as a core asset that is valued, strengthened and protected.*
- *To work towards Kent being Net Zero by 2050.*
- *To support Kent to become a leading county for carbon zero energy production and use.*
- *To ensure the county is well placed to adapt to climate change*

Framing Kent's Future: Priority 4: New Models of Care and Support

- *To seize the opportunity of integrating our planning, commissioning and decision making in adult, childrens', and public health services through being a partner in the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System at place and system level.*

Securing Kent's Future: The activities are undertaken within the existing Economy budget envelope.

Government priorities and strategies:

- Invest 2035: Industrial strategy (due with phase 2 of spending review)
- 8 High-Growth Sector Plans (due with phase 2 of spending review)
- Local Growth Plans (due with phase 2 of spending review)
- Trade Strategy (due soon)
- Small Business Strategy (due soon)
- Adoption of Technical Advice (due with phase 2 of spending review)
- Get Britain Working (published)
- Third Road Investment Strategy (due soon)
- 10-year Health Plan for NHS (due soon)
- 10-year Infrastructure Strategy (due in June).

12. Legal implications

12.1 N/A

13. Equalities implications

13.1 Each individual programme has its own EqIA.

14. Data Protection Implications

14.1 N/A

15. Conclusion

15.1 This report has provided an overview of the progress in implementing the Kent and Medway Economic Framework. Much work is underway, and more future activity is planned to support sustainable growth of Kent & Medway’s economy, through to 2030.

16. Appendices

Appendix A: KMIP Terms of Reference

17. Contact details:

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Appendix A

Kent & Medway Innovation Partnership Board (IPB)

Terms of Reference

February 2025

Purpose

- To increase strategic focus on innovation within the functional economic area of Kent & Medway.
- To build clusters and deepen links between academia and research institutions with Kent & Medway businesses, to encourage the increased commercialisation of innovation – both the commercialisation of academic intellectual property and the adoption and diffusion of technology.
- Market our cluster strengths to Government and set out why investment in key cluster assets is important to UK PLC.
- Market cluster strengths to support inward investment.
- These clusters may choose to:
 - Support communication of funding opportunities to businesses (e.g. advertising relevant Innovate UK funding calls).
 - Support B2B learning about cutting-edge innovation and technologies.
 - Support B2B networking.
 - Provide bid writing support to businesses, where feasible.
 - Identify the future skills needs and how training can be delivered so that we have a highly skilled workforce equipped with the skills necessary to access the techniques and business practices needed for innovation.
 - Establish links to international clusters where there might be mutual benefits.
- To increase overall investment in innovation within Kent & Medway.
- To support the delivery of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework.
- To advocate for policy at a national and local level that supports our innovation priorities.
- To support and champion equality, diversity and inclusion – with a particular focus on skills development for under-represented groups.
- To support initiatives that increase inward investment and the development of international partnerships that promote innovation.

Responsibilities

The Innovation Board is a formal Sub-Board of the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP).

The Innovation Board will:

- Provide the leadership to ensure all partners contribute to the delivery of the high-level ambitions.
- Consider the 'big picture', providing strategic direction to the KMEP Board and its partners on matters relating to innovation.
- Drive and coordinate activity which delivers against the strategic objectives of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework.
- Support the development of the innovation strand within the future Local Growth Plan, identifying actions and interventions and best practice.
- Stimulate greater levels of collaboration between university, research institutions and businesses in the region.
- Support the development of cluster hubs, potentially in high-growth sectors identified in the expected future Local Growth Plan – also responding to the Government's Industrial Strategy Sector Growth Plans.
- Assess policies, projects and programmes of investment linked to innovation regionally, nationally and internationally, providing guidance to KMEP on how they relate Kent & Medway's innovation assets and skills, and identifying any gaps in provision.
- Develop links to other areas with similar capabilities nationally and internationally and help to initiate constructive collaboration
- Champion and provide input into strategic projects and game changing opportunities.
- Commission task and finish groups where appropriate and where no other sub-board or committee can fulfil the task.

Membership and Appointment

The Innovation Board will be chaired by the Business Thematic Lead of KMEP and will consist of representatives from the following institutions:

Note: We will seek wider private sector representation and work to confirm non-university representation as listed below.

Universities and Research Institutions

- University of Greenwich
- University of Kent
- Canterbury Christ Church University
- Niab

Life-Science and Med-tech clusters

- *Discovery Park*
- *Kent Science Park*
- *Kent Innovation Park / Maidstone Innovation Centre*

Upper-tier Local Authorities

- Kent County Council

- Medway Council

A representative from Innovate UK, the British Business Bank and the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce will be invited to attend Board meetings as an observer.

The board will be supported by the KMEP Secretariat.

Board membership will be for a period of two years initially, with an option to be re-appointed. No more than half of the board will stand down on an annual basis. Board members will be responsible for attending at least three meetings a year. Members failing to take part in at least three successive meetings will have their membership revoked. If unable to attend, Board members are only able to nominate a substitute with prior agreement from the Chair.

Board members, including co-opted members, or additional observers, are selected by nomination; at least two Board members are required to nominate a Board member or observer and final decisions will be made by a majority vote of the Board.

Decisions will be based on how well nominated individuals can represent their sector and on ensuring a balance of representation across the Board by geography, size of businesses and sector. Decisions on co-opted members, observers and working party membership will be based on the specialist advice, knowledge and networks required.

The Board may co-opt up to three specialist advisors to support specific project development and delivery.

The Board may invite observers from other KMEP groups or interested parties, on a reciprocal basis and for a fixed period of time. If a vote is required on any matter it will be decided on a simple majority with the chairperson having the casting vote.

Operations and reporting

KMEP will provide secretariat support for the Innovation Board. Minutes will be circulated and published on the KMEP website no later than two weeks after the meeting has taken place. The Board will determine the frequency and timing of meetings according to the programme of work required.

Attendance of non-members at meetings

Members of the KMEP executive team, sub-boards and committees may also be invited to attend meetings where appropriate.

Delegated Authority

Can hold other groups - including Task and Finish groups - to account. It has the authority to task a sub-board, group or committee to deliver action within the deliver plan.

Innovation Forum

The Innovation Partnership Board will convene an open Innovation Forum bi-annually to bring together regional partners. The Forum will provide wider engagement and constructive feedback to the Innovation Board helping to set the strategic objectives and focus.

Managing Conflicts of Interest

Members of the Board are all representatives of their industry sector or community of interests and have a responsibility to act on behalf of their wider constituency at all times in relation to the work of the Innovation Partnership Board. Members of the board will be asked to complete an annual declaration of their interests which will be held in a register at the KMEP office and members will be asked at the beginning of each meeting to declare any conflicts of interest pertaining to the agenda items to be discussed.