

## **GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 6 March 2025.

PRESENT: Mr A Sandhu, MBE (Chairman), Mr D L Brazier (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr D Crow-Brown, Mr M A J Hood, Mr S C Manion, Ms J Meade, Mr J Meade, Mr M J Sole, Sir Paul Carter, CBE and Rich Lehmann

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D Murphy and Mrs C Bell

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer), Ms S Berdo (Strategic Programme Manager), Ms B Hooker (Head of Coroner Service), Mr Jarvis (Kent Downs and Marshes Leader Manager), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mrs S Nurden (Kent and Medway Economic Partnership's Strategic Programme Manager), Mr M Riley (Project Manager), Mr S Rock (Head - Trading Standards), Mr M Rolfe (Head of Community Protection), Mr S Samson (Head of Economy) and Mrs S Thompson (Head of Planning Applications Group)

### **UNRESTRICTED ITEMS**

#### **253. Apologies and Substitutes** *(Item 2)*

Apologies were received from Baldock, Mr Cannon, and Mr McInroy. Mr Lehmann was present virtually as substitute for Mr Baldock and Sir Paul Carter was present as substitute for Mr Cannon.

#### **254. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda** *(Item 3)*

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **255. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2025** *(Item 4)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2025 be approved as a correct record.

#### **256. Presentation from Locate in Kent** *(Item 5)*

*Mr Nick Fenton, CEO Locate in Kent, and Ms Karima Kamel, Business Development Manager Locate in Kent, were in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Nick Fenton, CEO of Locate in Kent, and Ms Karima Kamel, Business Development Manager at Locate in Kent, showed a video and PowerPoint presentation, the slides for which are attached to the minutes.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
  - Focus was on areas with common skills, interests and abilities, and not just individual districts. For example, Locate in Kent was currently focusing on a green corridor which would encompass Dover, Thanet and Canterbury, and a project in West Kent that would incorporate three districts.
  - Regarding areas for business development sometimes land was allocated for commercial space but having commercial property available to showcase to businesses at any given point was important, especially due to competition with the rest of the country.
  - The main priority for Locate in Kent was business investment and identifying a location for the best fit. A company or project setting up in one district could benefit a wider area in terms of job creation, tourism and business opportunities.
  - Opportunities for young people to work locally rather than commuting to London or elsewhere was important.
  - A project had a specific skills agenda that included work with the local education authorities to ensure that the skills necessary were provided for.
  - Every town in Kent was different with various offerings in terms of attractions and challenges and there was not one solution for all.
  - It was important for commercial development to sit alongside housing to provide local opportunities and reduce travelling time.
  - It was important to accommodate the expansion of manufacturing companies in Kent so that they stay local and retain the experience and skills of their staff.
3. RESOLVED to note the presentation.

**257. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director**  
(Item 6)

*Mr James Pearson (Head of Libraries, Registrations and Archives) was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
  - (a) Kent Libraries had been hosting freecycle events across the county to help local families find costumes to celebrate World Book Day. Libraries across the county were offering themed story times and incentives such as one pound book tokens for preschool children.
  - (b) From April 2024 to January 2025, visits to Kent libraries had increased by 4% compared to last year, with e-book and e-audio book usage up 12%. The archive service remained a key resource for Kent history, with in-person visits up 4%. The registration service continued to meet demand, with ceremonies increasing by 4%, including a 22% rise in citizenship ceremonies.

- (c) Broadstairs Library had been shortlisted for the Library of the Year award as part of the British Book Awards 2025. The Know Your Neighbourhood project in Thanet was helping vulnerable residents access library services and community support.
- (d) A long-term solution was being worked on for the Folkestone Town Centre Library and Mrs Bell had recently met with Creative Folkestone regarding their idea for the Grace Hill building. Proposals from other community organisations would shortly be invited through the Asset of Community Value process.
- (e) The Dover Discovery Centre's refurbishment was progressing on track for completion in the summer and multiple library spaces were being modernised using developer contributions.
- (f) Her Majesty the Queen visited Canterbury last week where she unveiled a statue of Aphra Behn, one of the first English women to earn her living as a professional writer. Mrs Bell said it was an honour to represent KCC at the event, alongside the Leader, the Chairman, the Chief Executive, and other senior officers. The Queen was taken on a guided tour of The Beaney by the Council's Head of Service, Mr James Pearson. The visit received extensive media coverage and was a special day for Canterbury and Kent as a whole.
- (g) The archives service had resumed its popular program of talks at the History and Library Centre in Maidstone. Mrs Bell was looking forward to attending the first talk for this year on Monday, 10 March, which would explore the life of Sir Edward Deering, who lived from 1598 to 1644. The talks were free to attend and open to all. Kent Archives was featured in and supported the first episode of Edward versus George, which was a Channel 4 historical series exploring the royal feud between Edward VIII and George VI.
- (h) A webinar hosted by the Kent Association of Local Councils explored options for local parish councils to fund community warden services, and over 20 councils had shown interest and six had committed to funding. The wardens were being trained by the NHS to deliver advice on stop smoking, and signpost to the stop smoking service.
- (i) The coroner service had settled into their new accommodation at Oakwood House which provided excellent facilities for supporting families and delivering an efficient judicial service. The introduction of the medical examiner role had led to a review of operations with referrals now becoming more complex. On 13 February, the High Sheriff of Kent visited the coroner's facilities at Oakwood House.

2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- Members expressed thanks to library staff for their continued dedication to the service.

- Works had been undertaken to sustain the opening of Wood Avenue Library and the building would continue to be monitored.
  - Community wardens were engaging positively with local residents and community groups, however it was noted some areas of Kent did not have a warden and some parishes were working together to bring small pots of their resources together to fund part of a warden. Conversations outside of the meeting regarding specific locations were welcomed. Parish council funding would not subsidise the Council's service but would be used to expand it.
3. Mr Meade, Deputy Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update regarding the Council's partnership with the Chernihiv region in Ukraine which included the following:
- (a) In November 2024, the Leader of the Council and Mr Meade, at their own expense, travelled to Chernihiv to sign the agreement on behalf of the Council, and cooperation continued to evolve. In January 2025, Mr Meade visited the region again to take out 12,000 items of humanitarian aid directly to the hospitals in Chernihiv. He referred to a specific project at Mayfield Grammar School in Gravesend and paid tribute to Cobham Hall Independent School who had taken on three displaced Ukrainian students under full scholarship. Schools across Kent had continued to be outstanding in the way that they had welcomed and supported displaced Ukrainian children.
  - (b) Chernihiv had suffered from the targeted destruction of libraries and the Kent Library Service was working in partnership through the National Libraries Connected Scheme to support their libraries. Work was underway to progress relations across a number of spheres including culture, health, development and commerce with a number of large Kent-based businesses starting to explore opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships.
  - (c) To mark the third year anniversary the Leader of the Council and Mr Meade held a virtual meeting with Mr Chaus, the military governor of Chernihiv, to once again confirm the county's unwavering support for the people of Chernihiv and Ukraine.
  - (d) Mr Meade had recently attended a meeting with Meopham Parish Council who had had twinned with the Ivanivka territorial community and thanked the Chairman of Meopham Parish Council and the Parish Clerk for their help. Mr Meade was currently working with eight other parish and district councils across Kent to progress twinning arrangements and invited Members of the Council to pursue relationships with their parish councils, schools and community groups. Mr Meade thanked the local NHS trusts across Kent for donating surplus stock, and the hundreds of schools, community groups and individuals who were collecting and donating aid. Mr Meade expressed his sincere thanks to the Chernihiv Governor, Mr Chaus, and his team for their work in develop these relationships and thanked Irena who translated every document passing between the two authorities.

4. The Chair expressed his sincere gratitude to Mr Meade.
5. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
  - (a) The Kent and Medway Economic Framework strategy set out five ambitions and 21 action areas that would support sustainable economic growth in the county and a full report would come later in the meeting.
  - (b) Significant progress continued to be made since the relaunch of the Kent and Medway Business Fund scheme. The Investment Advisory Board and its subgroup had recommended the approval of 41 loans, totalling £4.7million in the last year alone to businesses.
  - (c) Visit Kent continued to deliver a range of commissioned services to support the county's vibrant visitor economy. A recent report confirmed that visitor numbers and spend were back to pre-pandemic levels, with the sector providing over 77,000 local jobs in Kent. The 2025 Big Weekend, funded by KCC in April, would enable residents to enter a ballot to receive free passes to local attractions.
  - (d) The Department for Education confirmed at the end of February that Kent and Medway's bid for local skills bootcamps program had been approved. The programme would enable 50 courses for over 500 learners to be delivered locally to help people back into work and to enhance career opportunities for existing employees.
  - (e) Mr Murphy and the Kent Ambassadors would soon meet representatives from the Straits Committee from Belgium, Holland and France to understand the latest priorities for cross-border working and had recently met with the Deputy German Ambassador with the aim of promoting Kent and investment in Kent with international neighbours.
  - (f) A property in Folkestone which had been empty for over 20 years had had been renovated into five brand new flats through the No Use Empty scheme. There was due to be a No Use Empty presentation to the Local Government Association on 27 March. Since inception, more than 500 individual loans had been processed under the empty properties Initiative, and all funds for 2024, 2025 had been allocated. In 2024-2025, No Use Empty generated a return on investment of 4%, which amounted to £650,000.
  - (g) The Kent and Medway Business Growth Hub service, together with representatives from Kent and Medway Business Fund, had continued with a series of business road shows across the county offering signpost services to local and national businesses. The Growth Hub had launched a series of 11 accelerated workshops which were free to local businesses covering topics such as sales, marketing and finance. The workshops were recorded and uploaded to the Kent Medway Business Growth Hub YouTube channel for businesses to access in their own time.

- (h) Mr Murphy took the opportunity to thank members of the economic development team for their work and support over the last four years.
6. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
- Regarding the Skills Bootcamps Programme two market engagement sessions with potential providers had taken place. These provided an indication of what courses were required in the sectors included in the initial bid. A balance between in-person and online would be considered to ensure it was available as widely as possible.
7. On behalf of the Committee the Chair paid tribute to Mr Murphy and thanked him for his dedication and support in his role as Cabinet Member for Economic Development.
8. Mr Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, provided an operational update on the following:
- (a) The Kent and Medway Economy Framework was progressing and he highlighted work relating to the Kent and Medway Innovation Partnership, the Growing Places Fund, the Local Skills Improvement Plan, the Integrated Work Health Strategy for Kent and Medway and the South East Creative Economy Network, and the return of international rail to Ashford and Ebbsfleet International Rail Stations. Work was taking place with the Department for Work and Pensions to launch the Connect to Work supported employment programme.
  - (b) Since April the Trading Standards team had saved vulnerable adults from losing almost £375,000 to fraud. In the last six months, the service had seized just over 185,000 unsafe items including 66,000 incorrectly labelled nicotine pouches and 100 packages of tooth whitening strips with dangerous levels of hydrogen peroxide. In 2024 the Trading Standards vape team seized over 25,000 illegal vapes and around 4,000 nicotine pouches.
  - (c) In terms of community safety there were currently 24 active domestic abuse related death reviews. The first themed event for 2025 focused on parental conflict.
  - (d) Regarding Kent Scientific Services, sample numbers at the laboratory were now 50% higher than pre-pandemic levels. All apprenticeships had completed their chemistry degrees and on the 26th of February, the lab hosted a delegation of food safety officials from Qatar investigating food safety controls.
  - (e) The Resilience and Emergency Planning Service were continuing to review and embed the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower inquiry and other incidents and regulatory duties for nuclear and chemical sites, high pressure pipelines and reservoirs.
  - (f) Active Kent and Medway Sport England had confirmed £250million investment to tackle inequalities in activity levels. The annual primary PE

conference would be held on 26 March and Active Kent and Medway continued to run grant funding programs benefiting thousands across the county.

9. RESOLVED to note the updates.

**258. 25/00034 - Proposed merger of the existing four coronial jurisdictions covering Kent and Medway into one jurisdiction**  
(Item 7)

*Ms Belinda Hooker, Head of Kent and Medway Coroner Service and Mr Mark Rolfe, Head of Community Protection, were in attendance for this item.*

1. Mrs Bell introduced the report and said the proposal to merge four jurisdictions into one was in accordance with guidance from the Chief Coroner. It would create opportunities for greater efficiencies and more cohesion across Kent and Medway.
2. RESOLVED to endorse the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services on the proposal to approve the merger of the four existing coronial areas covering Kent and Medway into a single jurisdiction as shown at Appendix A.

**259. Kent and Medway Business Fund Bi-Annual Monitoring - Q2 2024-25**  
(Item 8)

*Mr Martyn Riley, Project Manager, and Ms Susan Berdo, Strategic Programme Manager, were in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Murphy, Ms Susan Berdo and Mr Martyn Riley introduced the report and provided a presentation, the slides of which are attached to the minutes. Sir Paul Carter, provided context surrounding the scheme. Sir Paul Carter thanked Mr James McInroy and business representatives that sit on the board, as well as the officers involved in administering the fund.
2. RESOLVED to note the report.

**260. Risk Management: Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate**  
(Item 9)

*Mr Mike Hand, Risk and Delivery Assurance Officer, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Mike Hand introduced the report which presented the strategic risks on the Council's corporate risk register and a summary of the key risks from within the Growth Environment and Transport directorate that were of particular relevance to the committee.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- In relation to risk GT0025, Capital Investment and Asset Management, significant levels of external funding had been secured through successful bids and projects were rarely aborted.

3. RESOLVED to note the report.

## **261. Implementation of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework**

*(Item 10)*

*Mr Alex Riley and Ms Sarah Nuden, Strategic Programme Managers, were in attendance for this item.*

1. Ms Sarah Nurden and Mr Alex Riley introduced the report which provided an overview of the progress in implementing the Kent and Medway Economic Framework and highlighted key areas.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
  - The Innovation Partnership was supported by officers within the Council and engagement took place with Medway Council.
  - The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership had officer based reach with all 14 Kent Leaders.
  - It was suggested that future cabinet committees could focus, one at a time, on the various themes included in the framework.

3. RESOLVED to note the report.

## **262. Adoption of the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2024-2039**

*(Item 11)*

*Mrs Sharon Thompson, Head of Planning Applications Group, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Murphy and Mrs Thompson introduced the report. Mr Murphy explained that the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013 -2030 was adopted by the Council in July 2016 and partially amended in 2020. It set out the strategy and policy framework for minerals and waste development in Kent, which included future capacity and supply requirements. The Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan, together with the Kent Minerals Sites Plan, formed part of the development plan for Kent and is the strategy for determining planning applications in Kent. He clarified that the Kent Mineral and Waste Local Plan was the overall framework and did not deal with individual sites.
2. Mrs Thompson explained that the plan was a statutory document which set out the planning strategy for minerals and waste development in the county. There had been significant changes to planning and environmental policy over the last 10 years including multiple changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and the plan took into account council strategies such as the Environment Strategy and the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emission Strategy. The plan had been subject to extensive public consultation and a cross party informal members group. The pre-submission version of the plan was considered by County Council in December 2023 and an Inspector was



appointed by the Secretary of State in May 2024 who considered the plan to be sound and could be adopted subject to the modifications set out in the report (Appendix A). The adoption of the plan was a decision for County Council at its meeting on 13 March.

3. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
  - Mrs Thompson and her team were congratulated and thanked for their achievement and hard work.
  - Whilst not directly relevant to the adoption of the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan the issue of planning enforcement was being explored with stakeholder partners to look at how waste crime was tackled within the county.
  - The plan was one of the first in the country to include circular economy objectives and this would change the focus on how waste materials were considered and used going forward.
4. RESOLVED to:
  - (i) Note the Inspector's Report (see Appendix A) on the examination of the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2024-2039 (KWMLP);
  - (ii) Note the recommendations of the Sustainability Appraisal of the KMWLP (Appendix D); and,
  - (iii) Endorse the Cabinet Member's proposal to recommend the KMWLP (Appendix B), as modified, to County Council for Approval and Adoption.

## **263. Trading Standards Checked**

*(Item 12)*

*Rebecca Law, Business Innovation Manager, Steve Rock, Head of Trading Standards, and Ian Baugh, Head of Innovation and Business Intelligence were in attendance for this item.*

1. Mrs Bell and Ms Rebecca Law introduced the report which provided an overview of the Trading Standards Checked Scheme. As well as prevention of doorstep crime, the scheme played an important role in supporting small businesses in the trade sector and boosting Kent's economy. Two videos were shown to highlight the kind of situation the Trading Standards Checked Scheme was designed to avoid.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
  - Efforts were being made to increase the membership and awareness of the scheme across Kent.
  - Members of the scheme were provided with an accreditation which showed potential consumers that they were a trusted business.
  - Members of the committee recognised the importance of the scheme and expressed their support in raising awareness.
  - The cost of membership of the scheme could be paid monthly by direct debit.

- The full cost recovery element of the scheme would come from increased numbers and the offer being developed.

3. RESOLVED to note the report.

## **264. Kent County Council Capital Grant Scheme for Sport**

*(Item 13)*

*Ms Sophie Ward, Strategic Lead, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mrs Bell introduced the report and the capital grant scheme was administered by Active Kent and Medway and designed to support the development of sports facilities and increase participation in physical activity.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
  - Four rounds of the scheme were run per year and approximately 20 to 30 applications were received per round.
  - Officers worked with applicants to build a stronger case where required to either apply again for grant funder or to work with an external grant funder.
  - The Scheme ran from April to March and would re-open again from 1 April 2025 with deadlines in May, August, October and February.
  - A summary of sports grants that were available would be helpful. There were organisations across Kent who could signpost community organisations to various different finance schemes.

3. RESOLVED to note the report.

## **265. Update on Inward Investment and Visitor Economy commissioned services for Kent & Medway**

*(Item 14)*

*Mr Steve Samson, Head of Economy, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Steve Samson introduced the report and said plans for the future procurement of the services which were due to end in March 2026 would begin over the summer.
2. RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

## **266. Farming Economy - Presentation from National Farmers Union (NFU) and Produced in Kent**

*(Item 15)*

*Mr Alan Clifton-Holt, Regional Board Chair and Kent Officeholder for the National Farmers Union (NFU), Ms Carol Ford, Chair of the Fresh Food/Horticulture Group and Mr Huw Jarvis, Programme Manager, were in attendance for this item.*

1. Ms Carol Ford, Chair of the Fresh Food/Horticulture Group, provided a presentation by way of a series of slides which are attached to these minutes.

Ms Ford stressed the importance of ensuring that the fresh food sector was fully supported across all levels of government, especially in public procurement.

2. Mr Clifton-Holt spoke about the Land Use Framework, for which there was currently a government consultation. He said the NFU welcomed the Land Use Framework in relation to the pressures on land use such as housing, commercial use, transport, leisure and tourism, and renewable energy, each of which had a huge impact on land. He said it was expected that at least 9% of Kent agricultural ground would be lost to other uses each year. Mr Clifton-Holt spoke about the difficulties in relation to compulsory purchase and compensation rules which effectively gave power to local government to compulsory purchase land for other uses, for example housing. He stressed the importance of working with the Council to ensure that the Land Use Framework was sensible and balanced.
3. Secondly, Mr Clifton-Holt spoke about inheritance tax in particular agricultural property relief (APR) and business property relief (BPR). He explained that APR and BPR had had a zero rate band for the past 30 years. Land could be passed on to the next generation at a zero rate inheritance tax and BPR applied to business assets. Mr Clifton-Holt went on to explain the changes the government had announced in the autumn budget which included a million pound threshold of 20%. Farms were asset rich, with most valued in the region of £7million to £8million, and UK agriculture had a return on investment of, on average, 0.5 %. Therefore, farming was capital wealthy, but had a very poor rate of return. He explained the NFU had been campaigning hard, particularly on APR and there had been protests in London, petitions and letters sent to MPs. The primary legislation to change the inheritance tax rule would go before Parliament in September 2025. He stressed that this family tax was unfair and that farmers were now being forced to urgently reconsider their options.
4. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
  - Members expressed their support for the issues presented and welcomed a report back to the committee.
  - Members discussed the importance of food security within the UK and educating residents to choose UK produce.
  - Members expressed their agreement with the points raised regarding tax relief on agricultural land. It was noted that a motion regarding this was resolved at County Council on 19 December 2024.
  - Food production in England was still viable and should be protected.
  - The UK was capable of growing high-value quality produce and different crops were being grown due to climate change in the UK providing more opportunities.
  - The significant amounts of money that could come from renewable energy and housing was a temptation to a lot of farmers. The Land Use Framework would be useful to the wider community in providing a balance.
5. RESOLVED to note the presentation.

**267. Work Programme 2025**  
(Item 16)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.