

From: **Paul King, Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration**

Simon Jones, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport

To: **Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee (GEDCCC) 1 July 2025**

Subject: Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent & Medway

Key decision: 25/00005

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: [GEDCCC November 2024](#)

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: All KCC electoral divisions

Summary: This report provides an update on the development of an Integrated Health and Work Strategy for Kent & Medway which aims to tackle the issues linked to economic inactivity related to long-term health conditions.

Recommendation:

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration to:

APPROVE and **ADOPT** the Kent and Medway Integrated Work and Health Strategy on behalf of Kent County Council. Other partner organisations (Medway Council, the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board) will also be taking the Plan through their own approval processes.

DELEGATE authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Director of Growth and Communities, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health and Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration, to sign off the final plan, refresh and/or make revisions to the Plan as appropriate during the lifetime of the plan.

DELEGATE authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Director of Growth & Communities, to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper provides an update on the **Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent & Medway 2025-2030** (included at Appendix 1) which has been developed over the last year using funding from the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)
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and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). The strategy aims to enable key organisations in Kent & Medway to better understand the challenges that employers face with regard to supporting new and existing employees with long term health conditions and the issues that prevent people with health conditions from accessing employment opportunities and sustaining work.

- 1.2 The plan has been developed by several teams within Kent County Council (KCC) (Economy; Public Health; and Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance), Medway Council and the NHS Kent & Medway.
- 1.3 A final plan is now ready for formal endorsement by KCC's Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee (GEDCCC); KCC's Health Reform & Public Health Cabinet Committee; the Medway Council Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee; the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB); and the Kent & Medway Strategic Partnership for Health & Economy (SPHE)¹ which reports to both the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) and the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP)².
- 1.4 A paper was presented to [GEDCCC in November 2024](#) which provided an overview of:
 - The background to and purpose of the strategy;
 - Strategic alignment to KCC and wider Kent & Medway strategies and programmes;
 - Information and statistics about the levels of economic inactivity linked to long term health conditions nationally and in Kent & Medway and the impacts on local employers and residents;
 - How tackling economic inactivity linked to ill-health would benefit Kent & Medway's population and employers including helping to fill skills gaps in key industry sectors;
 - Details of the planned development phases of the strategy including a public consultation process;
 - Emerging priorities based on early feedback from local stakeholders.
- 1.5 The details outlined in the November paper ([available to view here](#)) have intentionally not been repeated in this paper. It should be noted, however, that local businesses are negatively impacted by the prevalence of long-term health conditions which are linked to labour market shortages and lower productivity while individuals are hindered from accessing and retaining employment opportunities.

2. Developing the Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent & Medway:

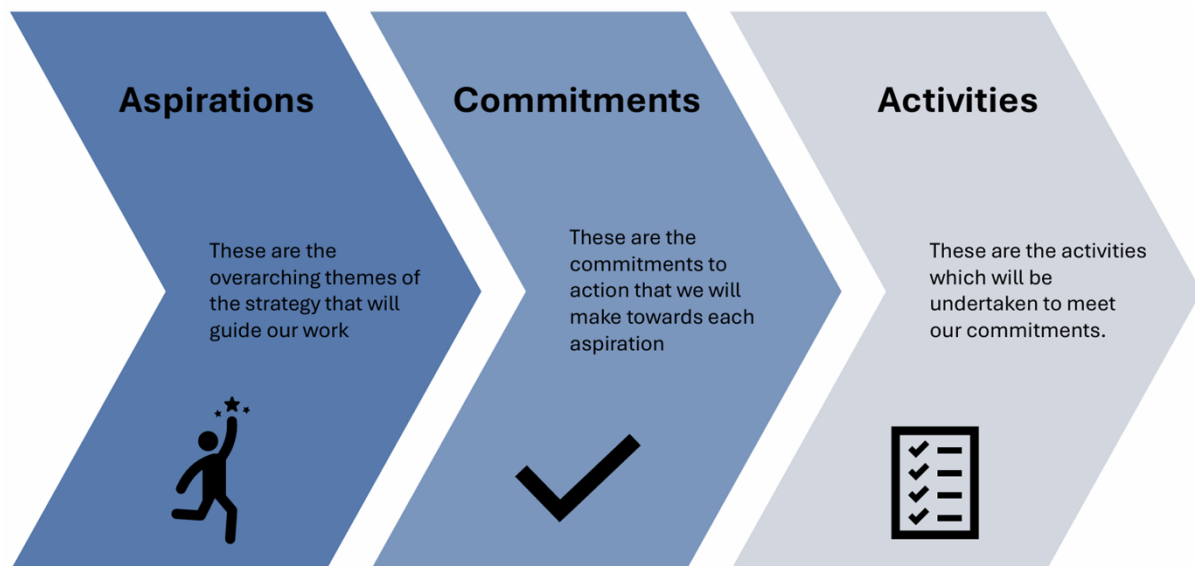
¹ The SPHE includes representatives from local government including economic development, public health and social care, the NHS, businesses and business representative organisations, skills providers, voluntary groups, and the Department for Work & Pensions.

² The Kent & Medway Integrated Care Partnership includes Kent County Council, Medway Council, the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board, the four Kent & Medway Health & Care Partnerships and District Councils along with support from Kent Healthwatch, Medway Healthwatch and Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise.

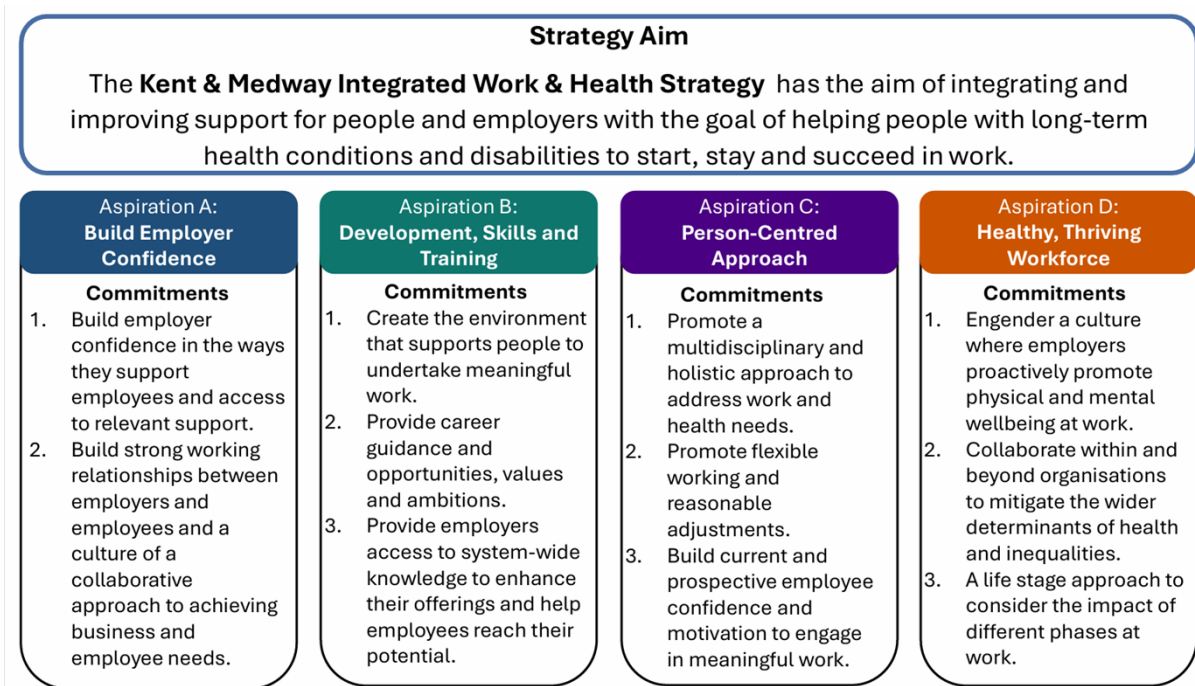
- 2.1 The development of the strategy started in April 2024 with an ICP workshop focused on work and health. This workshop brought together stakeholders including Kent & Medway Employment Taskforce, KMEP, the K&M Business Advisory Board, NHS Kent and Medway ICB, Local Authorities and DWP. Themes explored included Skills Development, Employer Perspectives, Mental Health, Community Support, In-Work Support for People & Employers (businesses and public sector).
- 2.2 The Intelligence Gathering Phase followed between May and September 2024 where over 115 stakeholders (employers and employees) were engaged in interviews or focus groups to provide views and intelligence. National, regional, and local policies, strategies and programmes were reviewed, and this continues as an ongoing process. Health, economy, and employment data is being brought together from the perspective of supporting people with long-term health conditions and disabilities to start, stay and succeed in work. See **appendix 4** for broad categories of stakeholders consulted.
- 2.4 The first draft of the strategy was compiled in December 2024 and a number of key partnerships were informed about progress and emerging themes. Groups included the SPHE, KMEP, the Employment Task Force and Business Advisory Board.
- 2.5 A public consultation took place from January to March 2025 via an online survey and 336 responses were received. A final piece of work took place in early June 2025 to seek the views of people with lived experience to inform the final strategy.
- 2.6 Development of the final strategy was started in April 2025, based on a 'You said, we did' approach using the analysis of workshop outcomes, input from strategic partnerships and strategic partners, survey data and feedback from the lived experience engagement sessions.
- 2.7 Throughout the development of the strategy, it was important to ensure that the views of local businesses were taken into account and this was done via the main business representative bodies (Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, The Federation of Small Businesses and the Institute of Directors who are members of BAB and KMEP) and individual companies. From an employer perspective there was strong feedback about helping local firms to better understand how to maintain a strong and healthy workforce, understand legislation and support to help employees with health conditions and to make use of the strategy to help tackle skills gaps.
- 2.8 It should be noted that since work began on drafting the strategy, the government published the [Get Britain Working White Paper](#) in November 2024. This included a commitment to produce Local Get Britain Working Plans by July 2025. KCC was asked in February 2025 to lead the 'Get Kent & Medway Working Plan' (GKMWP) on behalf of KCC, Medway Council, Jobcentre Plus and the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board. The plan will encompass the Work & Health strategy and is not intended to duplicate efforts but to build on the Health & Work Strategy, Local Skills Improvement Plan, Kent & Medway Economic Framework, and the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Strategy. The GKMWP is the subject of another GEDCCC paper.

3. The Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent & Medway:

- 3.1 The strategy is built on the following structure:
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- 3.2 The strategy is based on four aspirations which are the overarching themes that will guide the work of the strategy. Each aspiration comprises two or three commitments to action.



- 3.3 Concerns expressed by employers about how best to support people with long-term health conditions and disabilities in the workplace are addressed in **Aspiration A**. Employers would welcome support in fully understanding and applying legislation and in sharing practice through case studies and examples. This aspiration is particularly important given the nature of Kent & Medway economic make-up with over 90% of firms employing fewer than nine people. Support for small enterprises is particularly important given that they often lack resource and capacity, to ensure that they can engage in the health and work agenda without compromising their ability to operate commercially and thrive.
- 3.4 **Aspiration B** responds to the strong case that was made during engagement for quality training and development opportunities to enhance employment opportunities

and provide meaningful work both for those currently out of work and for the existing labour force across a number of aspects. Training and development in appropriate areas also provides opportunity for employers to fill known skills gaps in Kent & Medway's key industry sectors. This Aspiration also seeks opportunity for people with long-term health conditions and disabilities to access guidance for career change where exacerbations of their long-term health conditions or disabilities prevent continuation with current career or employment.

- 3.5 **Aspiration C** responds to feedback about the multiple factors that can make the management of long-term health conditions and disabilities difficult whilst engaging in meaningful work. There are a range of wider factors which can influence the ability of a person with a long-term health condition or disability to start, stay or succeed in work including transport and housing.
- 3.6 **Aspiration D** aims to ensure that workplaces are conducive to good physical and mental health and wellbeing for employees which in turn leads to increased productivity for local firms. This aspiration encompasses leadership and management practices, flexibility to achieve a good work life balance and recognising the need for additional support for employees at different of their life and career to ensure that employees are supported to remain productive.
- 3.7 Partners are confident that the strategy responds to challenges in Kent & Medway and the local context given the feedback from the public consultation:
- Aspiration A was supported with a total of 69.9% respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing.
 - For Aspiration B, 71.1% of respondents selected strongly agree with a further 22% selecting agree.
 - Aspiration C received a strongly agree from 72% of respondents with an additional 18.8% of respondents selecting agree.
 - For Aspiration D, 70.2% of respondents selected strongly agree with a further 21.4% of respondents answering agree.
- 3.8 **Appendix 3** includes a 'you said, we did' report that demonstrates how feedback from stakeholders was addressed in the strategy and **Appendix 5** is the Consultation Results Report.

4. Implementing the Strategy

- 4.1 In order to take the strategy forward, an action plan is currently being developed which comprises short- and medium-term actions and those that can be developed for the longer term. The draft action plan, which will remain a live document, can be seen in **Appendix 2**.
- 4.2 The implementation of the strategy will be led by teams from KCC, Medway Council and the Integrated Care System and overseen by the SPHE.

5. Other options considered

- 5.1 Do nothing. This was rejected as there is a national expectation and strong local support for the development of an Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent and Medway.
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6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The development of the strategy was funded by a DWP/DHSC grant which covered a post based within Medway Council. KCC (Economy; Public Health; and Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance) and additional Medway Council officers and NHS colleagues also contributed support in the form of staff time given the links to wider KCC priorities. KCC staff involved in developing the strategy are funded by core budget, but their respective roles include activity to support strategies and initiatives that boost the local economy and improve health outcomes.
- 6.2 The strategy itself is not a funded strategy but there are a number of 'quick wins' which can be implemented within existing resource.
- 6.3 The strategy will be an integral pillar of the forthcoming GKMWP which will set out a number of asks of government so it is anticipated that with evidence of need highlighted in the strategy, there may be possibilities to access future government funding to support the delivery of the action plan. The future implementation of the strategy should support economic growth through supporting people into work, tackling skills gaps and reducing workforce absence due to sickness enabling businesses to operate more productively.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications for KCC, or its partners associated with the development of the Work & Health Strategy.

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 A high-level Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was prepared for the development of the strategy phase and more detailed EqIAs will be produced to support the programmes and initiatives that will be put in place to support the implementation of the strategy. It is anticipated that these action plan will have a positive effect on groups with protected characteristics who find themselves excluded from the labour market due to health-related issues.

9. Data Protection Implications

- 9.1 There are no data protection implications for KCC, or its partners associated with the Work & Health Strategy itself. Data Protection Impact Assessments will be developed to support the programmes and activities delivered under the action plan.

10. Other corporate implications

- 10.1 The development of the strategy was led by the K&M Integrated Care System with oversight from several KCC services: Economy; Public Health; and Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance. Different elements of the strategy will be delivered by the most appropriate KCC services and partner organisation(s) in future, subject to resource being identified.

11. Governance

- 11.1 A similar paper is being taken to KCC's Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee in July; the August Medway Council Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and the September K&M Integrated Care Board meeting for endorsement.
- 11.2 Any decisions and delegations needed to support the implementation of the strategy's action plan will be taken by the relevant partner organisations in line with their governance policies.

12. Conclusions

- 12.1 Given the level of economic inactivity both nationally and within Kent & Medway and the negative impacts that this has on individuals and the local economy, the development of the Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent & Medway and its subsequent implementation is an important area of work for KCC and its partners. The **Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent & Medway** and the support it has from key local stakeholders will enable Kent & Medway to support local businesses and residents by tackling barriers to employment and helping individuals to access and succeed in work while tackling skills gaps faced by key industry sectors.

Recommendation:

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration to:

APPROVE and **ADOPT** the Kent and Medway Integrated Work and Health Strategy on behalf of Kent County Council. Other partner organisations (Medway Council, the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board) will also be taking the Plan through their own approval processes.

DELEGATE authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Director of Growth and Communities, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health and Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Coastal Regeneration, to sign off the final plan, refresh and/or make revisions to the Plan as appropriate during the lifetime of the plan.

DELEGATE authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Director of Growth & Communities, to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.

13. Background Documents

Equality Impact Assessment

14. Appendices

- Appendix A: Proposed Record of Decision
 - Appendix 1: The Integrated Work and Health Strategy for Kent & Medway
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- Appendix 2: Draft Action Plan for the strategy
- Appendix 3: 'You Said, We Did' Report
- Appendix 4: Summary of Stakeholder Engagement Broad Categories
- Appendix 5: Consultation Results Report

15. Contact details:

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