

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: 25/00046 - Get Kent & Medway Working Plan

Key Decision: Yes

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future pathway of project: For Cabinet Member decision

Electoral Division: All KCC electoral divisions

Summary: This report provides details about the **Get Kent & Medway Working Plan** which is currently under development and aims to provide a comprehensive overview of challenges and opportunities related to health, economic inactivity, and skills.

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 Get Kent and Medway Working Plan on behalf of Kent County Council. Other partner organisations (Medway Council, the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board and Jobcentre Plus) will also be taking the Plan through their own approval processes.

DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth & Communities in consultation with the Director for Public Health; Corporate Director for Children, Young People & Education; Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration; Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health; and Cabinet Member for Education & Skills to sign off the final plan.

DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth & Communities in consultation with the Director for Public Health; Corporate Director for Children, Young People & Education; the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration; Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health; and Cabinet Member for Education & Skills to refresh and/or make revisions to the Plan as appropriate during the lifetime of the plan.

DELEGATE authority to the Director Growth & Communities in consultation with the Director for Public Health, and Corporate Director for Children, Young People &

Education 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 Economic inactivity has increased significantly in recent years¹ which has a negative impact on the economy, reducing productivity, exacerbating skills gaps in the labour market and reducing the quality of life of the population. The government's [Get Britain Working White Paper](#) (November 2024) confirmed that 2.8 million people are currently out of work in the UK due to long-term sickness, one in eight young people are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET) and nine million adults lack the basic skills they need to access and succeed in work.
- 1.2 In Kent² 21% of the working age population aged 16-64, or 204,000 people are currently economically inactive. 27% of these people (55,000) are currently out of work due to long term health conditions., 1,672 16–18-year-olds in Kent are classified as NEET (4.3%) and 7.2% of the Kent working age population has no qualifications.
- 1.3 In the Get Britain Working White Paper, the government made a commitment to support all areas to develop **local Get Britain Working Plans** and to convene local partners to work together to deliver these. Plans are intended to set out an analysis of the economic inactivity challenge in each local area and highlight the actions that could be taken to improve outcomes for the local population and local employers.
- 1.4 The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) wrote to Kent County Council (KCC) on 28 February requiring the Council to lead the development of the Get Kent & Medway Working Plan (GKMWP). The requirement is for the plan to be produced by July 2025 and formally signed off by KCC, Medway Council, the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board and Jobcentre Plus with endorsement from wider partners and stakeholders.

2. About the Get Kent & Medway Working Plan:

- 2.1 In broad terms, the plan should encompass an analysis of local labour market challenges, an overview of the current landscape of support and a clear plan of action.
- 2.2 The DWP recognises that considerable work is already underway in local areas so the new plan should align with and encompass relevant local programmes and strategies to avoid duplication of effort.

¹ Contributing factors include long-term sickness and disability, low levels of educational attainment, caring responsibilities, access to secure, well-paid, skilled roles and high-quality work and a mismatch between vacancies and suitably skilled individuals.

² The combined figure for Kent & Medway is 235,000 people who are currently economically inactive.

- 2.3 The GKMWP should also support the transition of Jobcentre Plus into a new jobs & careers service and inform future commissioning, activity, and support on a 'whole system' basis in Kent & Medway.
- 2.4 Guidance was issued by DWP in April 2025 which outlined the required structure for local plans which will cover:

1. Labour market analysis

- An analysis of the key challenges faced in the Kent & Medway labour market across both labour market participation (employment, unemployment, and economic inactivity) and progression at work (earnings and job quality).
- An assessment of which groups are most disadvantaged and how and details of geographical areas within Kent & Medway where there are particular challenges
- A data analysis approach and making use of local intelligence from frontline public services.
- Information about economic inactivity levels and barriers faced by disabled people, people with a health condition, disadvantaged young people and older people, and people who face multiple disadvantages (for example homelessness, ex-offenders, and care experience).
- An analysis of employment demand within Kent & Medway and vacancies and skills gaps in key industry sectors.

2. Drivers and Causes of Economic Inactivity (and wider supply and demand side labour market issues)

- Conduct a thorough analysis and document the primary drivers and causes of economic inactivity within the region including issues related to education, skills, and health, as well as factors that may limit people's ability to access work such as transport, housing, caring, and the availability and accessibility of jobs.

3. Current System and Offer

- Details of existing systems and support mechanisms available for the key groups and areas identified across organisations including through the health service, local government, and Jobcentre Plus.
- An overview of services to support economically inactive individuals with health conditions, and those who face other barriers
- An assessment of current services and gaps
- How the current system looks from a citizen's perspective
- Whether there is clarity on the currently available support offer
- The degree to which there is a coherent participant journey for economically inactive individuals who face differing barriers to the labour market.

4. Working with partners

- The plan will outline the levers that different stakeholders can apply in addressing the challenges identified, and outline how stakeholders can collaborate to increase engagement with support, ensure provision is aligned to improve outcomes.

- The plan will consider what mechanisms need to be in place to ensure local partners can work collectively to address issues and determine how these mechanisms will be instituted, potentially utilising any future investment or changes to existing funding streams.

5. Systemic changes

- Outline the changes which are required to local systems to improve outcomes and enhance the effectiveness of the system as a whole including an assessment of current capacity and capability challenges of different stakeholders.

6. Priority Actions and Longer-Term Goals

- An outline of ambitious yet achievable priorities for the next 12-24 months, which partners will work through collectively to achieve, and how these will be monitored and reported against at a local level, including through outcome indicators such as the local employment rate.
- A longer-term vision for the next 10 years.
- Ensuring alignment with key local priorities, such as in Local Growth Plans, Local Skills Improvement Plans, and Integrated Care Board strategies. This alignment will help areas demonstrate how their local plans support broader ambitions to grow the local economy at both national and local levels. Where the relevant strategies set out shared priorities of health, skills, or inactivity this will be set out clearly in the plan.

7. Governance, local engagement, and future iterations

- Detail the governance arrangements in place locally which will maintain oversight of plan, and which will ensure alignment with future initiatives and strategies across relevant stakeholders.

3. Developing the Plan:

- 3.1 DWP funding was provided to KCC to cover the costs of producing the plan. In agreement with Medway Council, the Integrated Care Board and Jobcentre Plus, KCC procured the services of 'Shared Intelligence' working with 'Cambridge Econometrics' to lead the development of the plan from 1 May 2025 following the publication of the DWP guidance.
- 3.2 The development of the plan is following several stages:
 - Data gathering and analysis (on skills, employment, and related health factors)
 - Mapping current provision in the health, work, and skills arenas
 - Stakeholder consultation and engagement including questionnaires, interviews, and workshops
 - Alignment to existing strategies
 - Identifying good practice and case studies
 - Developing recommendations and proposed actions
 - Endorsement from key partners and stakeholders
- 3.3 A wider range of stakeholders, groups and partners have been consulted as part of the development of the plan including the Strategic Partnership for

Health & Economy; the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership; the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Partnership; local skills, education and training providers; the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector; local Jobcentres; business representative organisations; employers; and, through linked work on the Kent & Medway Work & Health Strategy, people with lived experience.

- 3.4 In addition to being signed off by KCC, the plan will be presented to Medway Council, the Integrated Care Board and senior leadership within Jobcentre Plus for formal sign off.
- 3.5 The plan itself will set out a series of asks of government to support the area's direction of travel for tackling the causes of economic inactivity, supporting people in training and employment and boosting the local economy.
- 3.6 Given the very short timetable for the development of the plan, the most up to date version of the plan showing progress to date can be found in **appendix 1** with a final plan due to be produced by 31 July 2025 for sharing with DWP and initial publication with a final designed version to follow as soon as possible afterwards.

4. Local Strategic Alignment

- 4.1 The development of the GKMWP and its future implementation supports the following local priorities and strategies:

Kent & Medway Economic Framework:

- Action Area 2: Focusing support to business on measures that will increase long-term productivity and resilience.
- Action Area 6: Investing in Kent and Medway's skills infrastructure
- Action Area 7: Retaining and developing talent
- Action Area 13: Ensuring that everyone who wants a job can find work

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.

Kent & Medway Integrated Care Strategy:

- Shared Outcome 2 - Tackle the wider determinants of health to prevent ill health
- Shared Outcome 4 - Empower people to best manage their health conditions
- Shared Outcome 6 - Support and Grow our Workforce

The Kent & Medway Integrated Strategy for Health & Work which includes four aspirations to:

- Build Employer Confidence
- Develop Skills & Training
- Deliver a person-centred approach
- Support a healthy, thriving workforce

4.2 The plan aligns with the recent commitment to create a **Marmot Coastal Region in Kent** with that commitment's aim of reducing health inequalities in the boroughs of Swale, Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Ashford.

4.3 **Securing Kent's Future:** The strategy is being developed using external funding secured for this purpose and it does not in itself commit KCC to further spend. The strategy aims to make a positive contribution to key health determinants (employment and income specifically) without which, individuals are more likely to require ongoing support from public health and social care services.

5. Other options considered but discarded

5.1 Do nothing: (discounted). It is a government commitment to have a Get Britain Working Plan and therefore the Department for Work & Pensions wrote to Kent County Council (KCC) on 28 February requiring the Council to lead the development of the Get Kent & Medway Working Plan.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 The development of the strategy is being funded by a DWP grant of £125,000 which is covering KCC staff time, the consultancy work to develop the plan, design and publication of the plan and associated online resources and the costs of hosting stakeholder workshops. The future implementation of the strategy's action plan has no current funding allocation from KCC or its partners, but it is anticipated that future funding for government programmes will support delivery activity based on the evidence base, and actions detailed in the plan. External partners, KCC and Medway Council may wish to align current and future funded activity with actions outlined in the plan where this achieves benefits for local businesses and residents.

7. Legal implications

7.1 There are no legal implications for KCC, or its partners associated with the development of the GKMWP.

8. Equalities implications

8.1 A high-level Equalities Impact Assessment was prepared for the development of the plan and more detailed EqlAs 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 programmes 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 development of the GKMWP. All data used to inform the development of the plan is either publicly available or has been anonymised. Data Protection Impact Assessments will be developed as required to support the implementation of the strategy.

10. Other corporate implications

- 10.1 The development of the strategy was led by KCC's Economy group with support from other services including Public Health, Education and Social Care. Different elements of the plan will be delivered by the most appropriate partner organisation(s) in future, subject to resource.

11. Governance

- 11.1 A similar paper to this one will be taken to Medway Council and the Integrated Care Board October at the first available opportunity.
- 11.2 Any decisions and delegations needed to support the implementation phase of the strategy will be taken by the relevant partner organisations in line with their governance policies.

12. Conclusions

- 12.1 Given the level of economic inactivity due to ill health, the numbers of young people classified as NEET and the skills gaps faced by employers nationally and in Kent & Medway, the Get Kent & Medway Working Plan will play an important role to tackling related challenges and provide opportunities to support the local workforce and employers which will in turn, benefit the local economy.

Recommendation:

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13 Background Documents

Equality Impact Assessment

14. Appendices

- Appendix A: Proposed Record of Decision
- Appendix 1: First draft of the Get Kent & Medway Working Plan

15. Contact details:

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