

From: Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Economic Development
David Smith, Director of Economic Development

To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee - 10 March 2020

Subject: Kent's Rural Economy – a coordinated approach

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: All Divisions

Summary: The report gives a background to the initial activity with partners to explore ways of working together to develop a coordinated rural input into the draft Kent and Medway Enterprise and Productivity Strategy in the context of KCC's "Your Future, Our Priority" Strategic Statement.

Recommendation:

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 KCC has not had a rural strategy since 2007 and no longer has a rural development team to support a refreshed strategy. Consequently, discussion on rural affairs has been led by Kent Rural Board (KRB) made up of 'broad church' of rural organisations and statutory bodies with an interest in rural issues. KRB has been chaired by KCC Cabinet Member (or Deputy) for Economic Development. The KRB's primary role has been to bring together the key organisations overseeing Kent's economic, social and rural agendas.
- 1.2 KRB still exists but has not met for eighteen months and remains largely dormant. It has a Terms of Reference (revised November 2016) which is attached at Annex A for reference. The KRB remains an independent body facilitated by KCC (secretariat and chair) but there is no formal reporting line to any cabinet committee. Several members of the KRB have now asked for discussion of rural issues to recommence and whether it is now time to revisit the role of the KRB.

2. Activity and progress

- 2.1 KCC continues to involve itself with the rural agenda with funding for rural businesses being achieved through the three LEADER Programmes in Kent (part of the European Union's Rural Development Programme of England) and the Kent and Medway Business Fund; the roll out of rural broadband; the work in developing the food and drink sector through Produced in Kent; the promotion of the rural visitor

economy by Visit Kent; the development of a Kent Biodiversity Strategy and a Kent Environment Strategy. All of these involve partners across Kent.

2.2 There is now an opportunity to address the future of the KRB, revise its Terms of Reference, review the membership and determine its role and reporting lines working with KCC and other key bodies like KMEP. A reconstituted KRB with an emphasis on the inclusion of the food and drink sector would provide a direct reporting line for the rural community into KCC. It would allow rural economy matters to be discussed in the context of KCC's strategic objectives and draw together a number of complementary themes. It would help provide a coordinated input into the development of Kent and Medway Enterprise and Productivity Strategy.

2.3 There will be a number of issues to be reviewed and resolved, a step at a time, with the aim of creating a reconstituted KRB or similar body with a new membership. This will require a revised Terms of Reference and a clearer role for the new board/body in assisting KCC to take a corporate approach to rural issues. The next step will be to consult stakeholders and commission an evidence base to inform the rural economy strategy. We shall aim to have the first meeting of the reconstituted Board after Easter so that it can contribute to the finalisation of the Kent Enterprise and Productivity Strategy's rural economy strand.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 None at this stage.

4. Conclusions

4.1 A reconstituted Kent Rural Board/Body would help KCC develop a coordinated approach to the development of Kent's rural economy.

5. Recommendation:

Recommendation:

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report.

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