

Item 1 – Chairman’s Welcome

- 1.1 Liz Gibney (the KMEP Chairman) welcomed attendees to the meeting. She accepted the apologies for absence as listed above.

Item 2 – Declaration of Interests

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

Item 3 – Minutes of previous meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

Item 4 - Central Government update from MHCLG

- 4.1 The Chairman welcomed Julia Jacobs (MHCLG’s Area Lead, London, Kent, Essex, and Hertfordshire) to the meeting.
- 4.2 Julia Jacobs’ update to KMEP was as follows:
- MHCLG is restructuring its area teams. MHCLG officials will continue to support local authorities, but in a slightly different way; Julia Jacobs will hold strategic conversations with the chief executives of local authorities in Kent & Medway, which is an opportunity to look holistically at how the various MHCLG interventions are landing in the place, as well as opportunities to discuss concerns facing the Council.
 - Local authorities should have the contact details of MHCLG funding and policy teams, with the area teams acting as a conduit. **ACTION: Julia Jacobs to please provide these contact details.**
 - The phase two local government spending review (SR) settlement provides an additional £3.4 billion of grant funding for local authorities over the SR period. The Government has committed to multi-year allocations and is moving to a more up-to-date assessment of each Council's needs and resources through the upcoming 2026/27 local government finance settlements. It would to a 3.1% increase.
 - The Government is delivering on its commitment to simplify the local government funding landscape by consolidating as much revenue funding as possible from across government departments into the local government finance settlement (LGFS).
 - The Government is providing targeted long-term local growth funding to support regional growth across the UK. This includes establishing a new local growth fund, investing in up to 350 deprived communities across the UK. The growth mission fund will directly support local economic growth. This fund will invest £240 million of capital from 2026/27 to 2029/30 in projects that enable local job creation and the economic regeneration of local communities, as set out in local growth plans.

- The Government is working with Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) to develop local growth plans as per the recent guidance.
- The Government remains committed to extended devolution to all corners of England and will announce the next steps in due course. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) will be necessary before devolution begins in Kent & Medway.
- Kent & Medway is one of twenty-one areas invited to submit proposals for local government reorganisation by 28 November 2025, which would replace existing county and district councils with unitary councils covering different footprints. Unitary councils can lead to better outcomes for residents and save significant money.
- The Industrial Strategy was published yesterday (23 June 25).

4.3 These questions and answers were shared in response:

- Sarah Nurden asked for clarification on local growth funds. The Industrial Strategy refers to 10-year capital local growth funds being used from 2026-27 for specific mayoral city regions in the North and Midlands with the highest productivity catch-up and agglomeration potential, and for other MSA areas with a local growth plan. She asked if Kent and Medway are excluded from these local growth funds, as this area was not selected by the Government to be a MSA. Julia Jacobs replied that was her understanding, but she would check on this. **ACTION: Julia Jacobs to write to KMEP to confirm its position in relation to future local growth funds.**
- Vince Lucas asked about the local government finance settlement. He asked if this was consolidated revenue financing, a cash settlement and index linked. He was concerned that 3.1% over 5 years isn't an increase, and actually a reduction. **ACTION: Julia Jacobs to provide KMEP with more details of the local authority finance settlement for Kent and Medway, and clarify if it is index-linked.**
- Stephanie Holt-Castle asked how the Government is going to support growth in Kent and Medway? She also asked how LGR before devolution will work in practice? In neighbouring SE authorities, they have been granted permission for LGR and devolution to occur simultaneously. Julia Jacobs said that "Kent and Medway are not on the list to get any funding for growth", but it could "submit some sort of proposal and include in that probably how much money is needed in order to support growth in the area as part of the proposal, and that would feed into policy where the Government would be able to see that there are gaps across some areas or not".
- Alex Riley explained that KMEP had submitted an early draft investor propositions pipeline back in February 25, in response to an immediate MHCLG ask. Locate in Kent, in collaboration with KMEP, is converting this into a more-rounded investment pipeline. There are a number of projects that could be funded immediately.

Item 5 – Local Government Reorganisation

- 5.1 The Chairman welcomed Stephanie Holt-Castle (KCC Director for Growth & Communities) and Tim Woolmer (KCC Head of Partnerships) to the meeting.
- 5.2 Their update to KMEP was as follows:
- Devo and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) are uncoupled for Kent and Medway, as central Government did not select the area for inclusion on the devolution priority programme (DPP).

- At the end of March, Kent & Medway submitted initial plans for LGR, which all 14 authorities agreed. The plan comprised of 4 geographical proposals based on either a 3 or 4 unitary council model.
- An external organisation has been appointed to support the process, and create the full LGR business case which must be submitted by the end of November.
- Central government will consider those and come back in spring 2026 with its response. A public consultation will then occur.
- Currently, central government expects local government reorganisation to be completed by 2028; this would mean shadow elections in 2027.
- There are regular meetings across all the 14 local authorities at both leader and chief executive level about LGR.
- Kent and Medway has a strong collaborative arrangement, and there is an eagerness to work together for the best outcomes of our residents. Kent and Medway are significantly more united than a number of other areas that are on the DPP.
- The team is working to ensure that the exceptional Kent & Medway challenges are reflected in the proposal, as well as the opportunities. These include: the border issues; Operation Brock; and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- The decoupling of LGR from devolution is somewhat problematic because this reduces the ability to be able to attract funding and devolved powers to Kent and Medway.
- The KCC Leader is talking to other district leaders and Medway Council's leader in terms of solidifying the new administration's position on LGR and devolution.

5.3 Linden Kemkaran (KCC Leader) clarified her administration's position on LGR at the moment. She wrote to the Minister to ask if the consultation process could be slowed down. He's not replied officially, but his team said no in a meeting. KCC will continue to lobby for a revised timeframe, as the subject has significant implications, not just for KCC, but for all districts and everybody in the county. There are some advantages to LGR, but there is a substantial cost to all involved in terms of finances and staff time.

5.4 Adam Bryan spoke of the importance of the LGR conversations, but stressed that the bigger prize comes from devolution. KMEP has an important role to play in expressing the strong story of local growth to Government, providing a clear narrative about how strongly Kent & Medway stakeholders work together, what the key projects are, and lobbying for devolution to come quicker.

Item 6 – Industrial Strategy

6.1 The Chairman welcomed Sarah Nurden (KMEP Manager) to the meeting.

6.2 Her update to KMEP was as follows:

- Central Government published the Industrial Strategy on Monday 23 June.
- Five high-growth sector plans were published alongside the Industrial Strategy; the remaining three high-growth sectors are due to be published shortly (for instance, the Financial Services Plan is due out on 15 July 2025).
- The KMEP presentation focussed solely on the overarching Industrial Strategy.
- The Industrial Strategy comprises of four different sections:
 - Thematic approach
 - Place-based approach
 - Sectoral approach

- Partnership approach
- Sarah Nurden presented these slides which contain more details about each of these section.



Industrial Strategy -
KMEP.pptx

- The Government is focussing much of its programmes, projects, and finance on city regions and strategic industrial clusters, alongside the eight high-growth sectors.
- The strategy states “City regions are the engines of the modern economy” and have “enormous potential for growth”, and that “Clusters across the UK are critical for the competitiveness of the IS-8 and national economic resilience”.
- Looking through the strategy, it names clusters that it will invest in. These are predominantly “Belfast, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greater Manchester, Liverpool, the North East, South Yorkshire, the West”.
- The only reference to locations in the South East are:
 - Investment in the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, and
 - The Solent Freeport
- There is no reference to a Kent and Medway location or cluster in the document.
- The strategy states Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) are developing ambitious Local Growth Plans (LGPs), which will be published following the Spending Review. These plans will articulate a 10-year vision for growth, setting out their region’s unique strengths, identifying shared priorities of national importance to be taken forwardly jointly with the UK Government, and showcasing the most attractive opportunities.
- This is supported by a £500 million Mayoral Recyclable Growth Fund.
- Also Local Growth Funds are established, with 10-year capital settlement from 2026-27 for specific mayoral city regions in the North and Midlands with the highest productivity. MSA areas will also be access these.
- The strategy also refers to “strengthening supply chains by supporting foundational industries”. These foundational industries include the electricity network and the Ports. Given Kent and Medway’s prime geographical location for the maritime sector, it may be that Kent and Medway would wish to emphasise this in its version of a local growth plan.
- The Industrial Strategy also mentions that there will be Local Innovation Partnership Funding; the majority (£300m of the £500m) will be focussed on ten mayoral regions.

6.3 In the discussion, these comments were raised:

- Alex Riley confirmed that the Government is ending the create growth programme for the South East at the end of this financial year. The Creative Places Growth Fund seems to be its replacement model, but the Government has allocated that funding away from Kent & Medway even though it was the most successful region in terms of getting businesses engaged on the programme and actually having the demand from businesses for the support.
- Jo Nolan said the Thames Estuary Production Corridor was mentioned as a Creative Corridor in the Creative Industries Sector Plan. However, there is a need to have a targeted evidence-led approach to show the loss of enterprise and development in Kent & Medway that will result from the Government's decision to cease the Creative Growth Programme. **ACTION:** Alex Riley and Jo Nolan will ask to meet with DCMS to seek clarity on the support that Kent and Medway can now access.

- Adam Bryan mentioned his significant concern that the place-based approach seems to earmark money for MSA and city regions, and leaves areas, such as Kent & Medway with much less support. He called for lobbying advocacy by KMEP. There are political conversations already happening, but a structured approach using all KMEP partners, particularly business could be advantageous. **ACTION: The KMEP Secretariat to MHCLG to make representations on behalf of Kent and Medway.** Tudor Price echoed Adam's sentiments.
- Simon Cook was concerned that the Industrial Strategy could lead to a loss of partnership momentum and then, as a result of that fall, Kent & Medway could be even further behind the curve. He felt these decisions were a reminder of the importance of that partnership, and working collectively for the greater good.
- Carol Ford mentioned her concern that the data sources used by DSIT (Data City) are not effective in identifying where key sectors in the UK are. More accurate data is required to change the Government's opinion. **ACTION: Sarah Nurden and Alex Riley to explore options to improve data analysis of Kent's strengths and weaknesses.**
- Harinder Mahil confirmed that conversations were taking place with Vince Maple about Medway's response to this, and how traction can be achieved with central Government.

Item 7 – Feedback from the Business Advisory Board

- 7.1 The Chairman welcomed Vince Lucas (KMEP Deputy Chairman and VA Rail Director) to the meeting.
- 7.2 His update to KMEP was as follows:
- The Business Advisory Board (BAB) is a sub-group of KMEP, comprising of circa 40 businesses.
 - BAB meets quarterly and each meeting provides insights from the business community in Kent and Medway on current trading conditions and experience of the local economy, on a sector-by-sector basis.
 - BAB last met on 29 April 25, and this slide shows the prevalent economic commentary made during the meeting.

Item 8 – Implementation of the Kent & Medway Economic Framework

- 8.1 The Chairman welcomed the KMEP Thematic Leads to the meeting. These individuals are:
- **Business** - Tudor Price (Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce) & Steve Samson (KCC Head of Economy)
 - **Skills** - Simon Cook (Principal of Mid-Kent College) & Daniel Ratcliff (MC's Head of Skills, Employment and Adult Education)
 - **Infrastructure** - Vince Lucas (Director of VA Rail) & Tom Marchant (KCC Head of Strategic Development & Place)
 - **Place** - Miranda Chapman (Pillory Barn Strategic Leader) & Adam Bryan (MC's Director of Place).
 - **Community Wellbeing** – Nick Fenton (Locate in Kent) & Andrew Osborne (ABC's Head of Economic Development). Nick and Andrew sent their apologies so Sarah Nurden covered in their absence
- 8.2 These slides were presented:



Item 9 - Local Growth Plan – Initial Stats

9.1 The KMEP board members have agreed to develop a Local Growth Plan (LGP). This document will have a sectoral focus and would sit alongside the existing Kent & Medway Economic Framework (KMEF) (which sets out our thematic ambitions). The KMEF will continue to provide a wider strategic growth vision for Kent and Medway, whereas the proposed LGP will be a much more focused document that identifies our unique high growth sectors and proposed interventions to support these.

9.2 An investible proposition would sit alongside this new Local Growth Plan. This work is being led by Locate in Kent.

9.3 Alex Riley (Sectors and Programme Manager) presented these slides to KMEP:



9.4 **ACTION:** Alex Riley to present information about Kent and Medway's strengths and opportunities to the MHCLG Southeast team during their away day.

Item 10 - Kent Marmot Coastal Region Project

10.1 The Chairman welcomed Dr Michael Alexander, a senior research fellow from UCL's Institute of Health Equity, to the meeting.

10.2 His presentation to KMEP included:

- The term 'Health Equity' relates to the reduction & elimination of systematic unfair avoidable inequalities in health.
- There is a 10-year difference in **life expectancy** for those who are born, grow, work and live in the most deprived areas of England compared to the least deprived neighbourhoods if one uses area measurements. If one looks on an individual level, this difference can rise to 20 years.
- This difference results in health and social care costs to the UK government, but also incurs other costs like lost productivity and economic longevity of working life.
- Healthcare is only one contributing factor to the difference in life expectancy.
- Other factors are the inequalities in the basic building blocks of health – such as where you live, access to food, education & skills, your employment, your income, the quality of your employment, and the security of your employment.
- Furthermore, life expectancy stalled over the last 10 years in England, and began to decrease during COVID.
- People tend to go to the doctor after they're sick, not before and therefore it is not access to the doctor that's driving whether people are sick or not in the first place.
- Sir Michael Marmot's research has produced eight principles for tackling health inequalities by addressing the **social determinants of health**—the conditions in which

people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These principles can guide communities and governments in creating fairer, healthier societies:

- 1) **Give every child the best start in life** - Early childhood experiences shape lifelong health and development.
 - 2) **Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives** - Education, skills, and autonomy are key to wellbeing.
 - 3) **Create fair employment and good work for all** - Secure, rewarding jobs support mental and physical health.
 - 4) **Ensure a healthy standard of living for all** - Income and access to basic needs are fundamental to health equity.
 - 5) **Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities** - Safe, connected environments foster better health outcomes.
 - 6) **Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention** - Preventative care reduces long-term health burdens.
 - 7) **Tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes** - Social justice is essential for equitable health.
 - 8) **Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together** - A healthy planet supports healthy people.
- The UCL Institute of Health Equity is commissioned by local places to come in and help in becoming a **Marmot place**. The first one was Coventry, and UCL now works with over 50 local authorities across Great Britain. These Marmot regions includes:
 - Medway and
 - Coastal Kent.
 - Kent County Council choose to focus on coastal Kent as the lowest life expectancy and largest health inequalities are somewhat concentrated through the coastal region, compared to other areas such as Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks, Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling.
 - Preventable death (for example from heart disease related of lifestyle choices) are concentrated in places like Thanet and Folkestone and Hythe, and are related to socio-economic disadvantage.
 - Looking at **skills and education**, there are differences between Kent's districts, but the much starker difference in educational attainment is between children eligible for free school meals and children not eligible for free school meals. Closing that gap would make a huge impact on health, skills attainment, and the jobs that children not eligible for free meals could achieve.
 - Education can be a perpetuator of this inequality cycle; children from disadvantaged backgrounds come into education with disadvantages, and they leave with the same disadvantages.
 - Action on the social determinants will make a huge difference. There is a four times difference in suspensions between preschool meal eligible children and those who are not eligible free school meals.
 - Unemployment is bad for health. When trying to get people back into work, there can be a trust issue with some viewing it as people who are not fit for work being forced back into work, and that the Government is pitting the economy over people's health. Data shows that good quality work is beneficial.
 - **Good quality work** is characterised by providing a minimum income for healthy living that allows the individual to lead a healthy lifestyle and engage fully in society. In many

places, that the national living wage does not reach that level. There is some evidence that suggests that there are forms of work, particularly insecure, dangerous work that is worse for health than unemployment however.

- To reduce health and social care costs, improve productivity, and reduce issues with absenteeism, improve retention, then job quality must be focused on alongside efforts to get people back into work.
- Many people in Kent are not reaching a minimum income for healthy living, often those who are in part time, precarious, or seasonal work.
- On **rising worklessness due to ill health**, there's been an increase in health-related benefits claims everywhere in Kent and Medway since the pandemic.
- Muscular skeletal problems and a significant increase in mental health problems, particularly in the younger working age population, are contributing to the rising worklessness due to ill health.
- Work is underway to identify the drivers and root causes the social determinants of this mental health deterioration. Simply increasing access to mental health support services cannot resolve the situation, so a solution could be include reforming the benefits system to support people to try work who are currently at work due to ill health. However, there is a need to support employers to keep people with health and mental health problems in work with appropriate adjustments.
- Employers supporting people gain greater confidence and helping increase the quality of work on offer can make a significant difference.
- Restoring the hope to young people that by working they can achieve a better life for themselves and for their children, and possibly afford a home is the ambition.
- Connecting up the health agenda with employment and skills is critically important.
- The Marmot team is keen to **engage with employers**, particularly public sector employers, on how they can contribute and help build trust to encourage people back into work.
- Sir Michael Marmot and the team are currently putting together an Advisory Board, which will guide the rest of what this programme looks like. The team is very keen to engage with business with how they can progress HealthEquity and how that can support them and support the local economy.
- **ACTION:** If any employer is interested in linking more to this work or would like to join the HealthEquity network please contact Dr Michael Alexander - michael.alexander@ucl.ac.uk

10.3 In the discussion, these comments were raised:

- Stephanie Holt-Castle praised the work and spoke of the connection between the Marmot work and the forthcoming Get Kent and Medway Working Plan work, which the KCC economy team has commissioned.
- **ACTION:** Prof. Georgina Randsley de Moura asked to put Dr Michael Alexander in touch with university researchers in Kent and Medway who are also looking at health inequalities
- Prof. Georgina Randsley de Moura suggested sharing this type of data with Government, following the earlier Industrial Strategy presentation, as it shows Kent and Medway are an area of significant inequalities and not just the prosperous South East. The richness of this kind of data could be used to support the argument for investment and focus here.

Item 11 - **Get Kent & Medway Working Plan**

11.1 The Chairman welcomed Tony Blake from Shared Intelligence to the meeting.

11.2 These slides were presented:



KMEP - Item 7 -
Shared Intelligence

11.3 Steve Samson explained that the Get Kent and Medway Working Plan would continue to be developed. Central Government has stipulated the document must be finalised by the end of July 2025.

11.4 **ACTION:** Steve Samson to ensure Andy Frost receives the information to attend the stakeholder workshop next week.

ACTION: Jo Nolan offered to provide Tony Blake with material that highlights the benefits of the Access to Work programme for inclusion in the Get Kent and Medway Working Plan. (Jo)

Item 13 – **Any Other Business**

13.1 Carol Ford updated the board that she was conducting a review of the existing food supply chain system in order to create a future plan for Kent and Medway.