

Voice of Business – Summarised feedback from Business Advisory Board to KMEP

Opportunities & Good News

- KCC and KICC working to advertise **supply chain opportunities** arising from Lower Thames Crossing, Gatwick Airport, and Sealink project.
- The government's **SME business plan** commits to end late payments and reduce administrative costs. Poor payment practices cost the UK economy £10 billion annually and lead to the closure of over 30 businesses a day.
- The **creative sector** is collaborating with **PACT** (Producers Association of Cinema and Television) and the **Production Guild** to develop a regional plan for Kent and surrounding counties to strengthen government support for the screen sector.
- **Food and drink businesses** are now actively recognising the need to invest in their own sector and promote innovation more visibly.
- **Grant funding for businesses in Medway** has been doubled, covering both business growth and green grants for cost-effective technologies and decarbonisation. **No Use Empty** has also been expanded by **KCC**.

Recruitment & Skills

- **Construction sector** faces acute skills shortages.
- Potential **employment law changes may worsen existing staffing challenges**, leading to a decision to maintain current workforce rather than expand.
- Recruitment and retention remain **major challenges across the food and beverage sector**, making workforce planning unpredictable.
- **Strong engagement** between Kent's universities, colleges, and businesses to address skills gaps and drive innovation.

Challenges

- Significant concern around the **Employment Rights Bill**.
- Uncertainty ahead of the **November budget** is the biggest concern – voiced by the majority of businesses.
- Proposed changes to employer **National Insurance contributions** next year could significantly impact costs, creating unbudgeted financial pressure.
- The **Stodmarsh issue** continues to block developments in affected areas, with no confirmed launch date for credits despite proposals from Canterbury and Ashford.
- **Energy and water resilience** are critical issues, with flash floods in July highlighting the need for robust planning.
- Underlying **trends in construction** remain a significant concern for UK growth ambitions.
- The operating environment remains challenging due to **rising costs and inflation**.

Free Comment

- The Chamber is launching an **AI Academy**.
- 20 young people from schools and colleges across Kent, who created films through the **Kent BFI Academy**, will showcase their work at Pinewood in January.
- Canterbury will host a major Christmas celebration with 12 stages and activities across the city, reflecting **strong demand for event-led experiences**.
- A young teenager became the **UK's youngest qualified digger driver**, a story shared on YouTube & KMTV to inspire more young people into construction careers.