

## West Kent Partnership Meeting

Friday 24 January, 2014, K College

## Present

Lesley Game, K College  
 Tudor Price, KICC  
 Ross Gill, KCC  
 Jonathan MacDonald  
 Wayne Peet, BIS  
 Mark Raymond, TMBC  
 Pav Ramewal, SDC  
 Jane March, TWBC  
 Bridget Remy, K College  
 Roger House, FSB

Lesley Bowles, SDC  
 Julie Beilby, TMBC  
 Nicolas Heslop, TMBC  
 Peter Fleming, SDC  
 Wendy Wood, WKP  
 John Balcolombe, TMBC  
 Brian Luker, TMBC  
 David Godfrey, KCC  
 Paul Lulham, KCC

## Apologies

David Candlin, TWBC  
 John Marshall, SFA  
 Paul Sayers, SFA  
 John Regan, Hugh Lowe Farms  
 Jo James, KICC (Tudor Price represents)  
 Ch Supt Corbishley, Kent Police

Jan Van der Velde, Kit for Kids  
 Paul Bentley, Maidstone & TW Trust  
 Caroline Shaw, VAWK  
 Iain McNab, BIS (Wayne Peet attends)  
 Damian Lazenby, BIS

## 1. Minutes and Matter Arising - all covered in Agenda, except

- item 2 Letter to DEFRA Minister re directing underspend from underperforming Leader groups to best performing groups - A letter will be sent at the appropriate time in the development of the new programme to have the best impact. Details still awaited from DEFRA on timetable. WW
- Item 4 Economy group met with skills partners in November to scope skills needs and opportunities in West Kent. A sector based workshop will take place in early February to develop this further. WW

## 2. Innovation Driving Prosperity (South East LEP Strategic Economic Plan):

<http://www.southeastlep.com/about-us/activities/262-developing-a-growth-strategy-and-prioritising-investment-in-the-south-east>

David Godfrey updated Partners on progress with the Strategic Economic Plan which was submitted in draft to government just before Christmas. Official feedback is awaited but unofficial feedback from Greg Clark indicates that document has a good evidence base but there's a need now to focus down and produce a compelling argument for funding in what is after all a, competitive process. There needs to be clarity on how delivery will take place within 5-6 year framework. This feedback and the civil service feedback will inform the approach up until end March when final submission has to be made.

Devolved operation is very clear and agreed at last LEP board meeting. Kent and Medway offer needs to show coherence and also demonstrate what private investment can be secured for projects.

The comments on the SEP draft from West Kent were welcomed and will be reviewed to see if amendments can be made to the SEP draft to reflect higher priority for some West Kent issues. The Chairman re-iterated that West Kent will only be able to maintain its position as an economic driver if investment in infrastructure in particular is maintained. DG

Peter Jones, LEP Chair will be attending the next WKP meeting.

3. **Unlocking the Potential: Going for Growth: (UtP)** <http://www.kmep.org.uk/pdfs/Unlocking-the-Potential-v31191213.pdf>

This document feeds into the SEP and is appended to it. Ross Gill explained that the tight time frame for submission with the SEP had ruled out a formal consultation process and that comments were welcomed. The draft is less of a strategy and more of a bid for Investment for Growth and EU funding. Formal government feedback is awaited and the final SELEP SEP submission along with Unlocking the Potential and other county documents needs to be submitted by 31 March.

The LEP has agreed in principle to establish itself on a federated model. Work has been done on setting up the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership which replaces Kent Economic Board. The Partnership has met 3 times including last week when it considered UtP. A big issue of discussion was the way in which it represented the geography of Kent in terms of districts' relationships to one another. This was not an issue of contention for West Kent but was for Maidstone and Ashford and there will be some changes. Peter Fleming sits on new the board representing West Kent.

Unlocking the Potential needs to provide a compelling bid for a fair share of a significant amount of funding. There is just over £2B in Local Growth Fund to be distributed nationally from 2015/16 and thereafter. The Department for Transport is the largest contributor to the Growth Fund and the lion's share of funding is notionally allocated to transport. In the period to 2020 there is also £165M of EU structural funds allocated to the SELEP which is largely for 'softer' projects such as skills, low carbon, business support etc.

More detail is needed in the document and a commissioning plan which can feed into the LEP document is being worked on. Some areas, for example around transport and infrastructure will take longer to work up and the plan can be continually reviewed.

A key role for the WKP was identified in the commissioning process. The Commissioning Panel will be set up by 6 February and it is the intention to then involve Partners with specific expertise. An officer support group has also been established and together these groups are the Joint Management Group for KMEP. Julie Beilby represents West Kent.

Ross acknowledged that the WKP is the first of the sub county Partnerships to provide comments. None of the comments are a surprise and most are likely to be incorporated. For West Kent there is a concern that if UtP majors on a small number of large items then the fact that West Kent doesn't possess one of those, disadvantages us. West Kent is asking for quite soft issues and need LEP support to help deliver these. The West Kent voice cannot put the same pressure on as Kent and LEP.

4. **West Kent Priorities for Growth**

Mark Raymond introduced the Paper which is a revision of the early draft discussed at the

October meeting. It has been prepared in parallel with the SEP and UtP and has been taken into account in the drafts.

Partners commended the document and endorsed it. It was also recognised that as well as feeding into the County and LEP documents it stands alone as a strategy for West Kent. The Chairman commented that it might be necessary to deliver without any external funding as across the LEP area bigger investments may well attract the support.

It was pointed out that the infrastructure investment requirements highlighted in the document are essential not just for the health of the local economy but also to deliver on Government housing growth targets. Without appropriate transport infrastructure to support the extra homes it will be difficult to influence residents and businesses in West Kent that housing growth is desirable and money for infrastructure improvements following after housing delivered is unsustainable. David Godfrey commented that infrastructure project bids will not be successful unless they enable housing or job growth.

The Chairman commented on the impact and success of West Kent Leader and wished to register the need for the next Leader Programme to be delivered from West Kent for West Kent.

It was agreed that the focus now for West Kent would be on supporting the development of the KMEP commissioning plan.

#### 4. Escalate

Ross Gill updated the meeting on progress with Escalate and conveyed apologies from Jacqui Ward.

Escalate is now open for applications following a Tunbridge Wells launch on 6 December with Greg Clark. A successful event was held in Tonbridge & Malling on 15 January at K College and a Sevenoaks event is planned for February/March.

Further events and continual promotion will be put in place to raise awareness of the Fund and to encourage businesses to find out more about it. It is also being promoted through banks and other third parties who can help businesses to identify and secure the matched funds needed for projects. Awareness to be raised that value of leased equipment can be used as match and that salaries from new members of staff can similarly be capitalised. KICC are offering free support to businesses to bring forward pre-applications.

The programme has got off to a strong start and just 6 weeks in has received 20 pre-applications totalling overall loan request of £2.5M. The first full application has also been received. The Escalate offer has been refined learning from Expansion East Kent and Tiger and the calibre of applicants coming through is good.

Partners have given details of prospective members of the Approval Panel and the first panel meeting will take place at the end of February. The target is for announce first funding allocations in April.

Both East Kent Expansion and Tiger are on target to commit all funds by end of March 2015. There is potential however to deliver in excess of £5.5M through Escalate if funds are committed early and a strong case can be made to BIS for funds from a further round. There might also be scope to use the Escalate vehicle to deliver a further funding programme utilising European funds. Flexible terms are part of the Escalate offer and repayment terms tailored to what the business can support. However, repaid funds go back into pot and can be re-used which is another route to extending the life of the Fund.

Ross will advise position on the Accelerator Plus £150K initial fund. This was not all committed as for applicants it made more sense to wait a few months for the larger fund to be available.

RG

## 5. Transport

The West Kent Priorities document reflects the transport priorities for West Kent. This includes the A21 dualling as an announcement is still awaited on this and expected in February. The land has been purchased and at the recent Public Inquiry, most involved were in favour of the improvements.

Other major schemes for West Kent include Colts Hill bypass, M20 J4 improvements, M26 access at Sevenoaks, improvements around Tunbridge Wells town centre and Tonbridge town centre and rail infrastructure enhancements. It was also suggested that Kent Street on the A228 is very dangerous and improvements to this are a priority.

The Third Thames Crossing options have now been reduced to options A, C and C variant. More work is ongoing on air quality and environmental impacts on Dartford and East of Gravesend on these options. The KCC preference is for the East of Gravesend c variant option.

The Davies Commission is due to report final recommendations in summer 2015 after elections on where new airport capacity will be accommodated. Options are a new runway at Heathrow, a new runway at Gatwick and a Thames Estuary airport. KCC, Medway and all districts are opposed to the Thames Estuary option. Additional airport capacity is a long term project. Terminal 5 at Heathrow took 19 years in planning and construction.

KCC are working up a business case for Kent to Gatwick rail services with an objective to see an award included in the new Southeastern Franchise. The earliest date for this would be May 2018. Lobbying will continue for this at the Rail Summit in April as part of building the business case for investment in this service.

The Highways Agency is making funding available for a bridge to service the Peters Village development in Tonbridge and Malling.

Free flow tolling at the Dartford Crossing will commence in October 2014. This will use similar technology to the London congestion charge model with automatic vehicle registration and an online payment system. Free flow will help to identify if pay tolls are the cause of delays at the crossing. Government and Highways Agency studies would seem to indicate that it will only be a short term fix and that free flow will unlock suppressed demand.

## 6. K College

Bridget Remy, Campus Director updated Partners on behalf of Chris Hare on the current position regarding transition to new providers.

The competition running over last year was discontinued just before Christmas after a review by Ofsted highlighted that the competition was taking too long, was too slow and was impeding improvement at the College. The Principal and Vice Principal have now been given more say on negotiations and things are moving more rapidly. Three criteria for identifying new providers have been identified

- Local to area with local knowledge

- Grade 2 or above Ofsted rating
- Financially viable

Three Colleges meet the selection criteria, namely East Kent College, Hadlow, and Mid Kent. East Kent College are being considered to deliver for Dover and Folkestone. There was a strong case made to treat Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells and Ashford separately and Mid Kent and Hadlow are the 2 providers being considered. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA), Education Funding Agency, the Skills Minister, the FE commissioner and the views of the local councils also have to be taken into consideration. A decision is expected by 28 January, to be confirmed on 13 February or shortly thereafter.

There was some discussion around the comparative strengths of the two providers. Concern was expressed that now it is looking probable that the SFA debt will be written off and some of the earlier competitors may have been able to put forward stronger bids. Partners are also keen to see a local West Kent College and not a college covering a catchment area including Ashford. Particularly for employers it was felt that they will engage more strongly with colleges where they are delivering training solutions for the local workforce.

Partners agreed that a local West Kent branding was important whatever the management structure lying behind it and that engagement with the local community would be essential in scoping future provision. For example, how to cater for the needs of Sevenoaks residents and businesses. It would be beneficial for any potential provider to visit the local councils to hear their ideas about the provision requirements. This made available to all bidders in the original cohort although not all took up the invitation.

There was some discussion around outreach and distance learning opportunities and Bridget explained that experience shows that students benefits most from a blended learning experience around distance learning so that they have some face to face time and ongoing access to a tutor to avoid isolation.

Opportunities for the college to deliver a greater number of bespoke training for local employers should be exploited and routes should be established to identify businesses which may have particular training needs such as those securing Escalate funding for high tech expansion.

The college is delivering some innovative courses to NEETs, drawing them into the campus to deliver skills training and delivering core and softer skills as part of the package.

## 7. Business Support

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce are delivering workshops and 1:1 support. Tudor Price reported that overall they are engaging with the right type of businesses. 90% are established businesses with services being the main sector and an interesting rise in manufacturing businesses.

Workshops have been well taken up, especially social media and marketing. Finance not so well subscribed. For the next quarter there will be a more diverse selection of workshops including bids and tendering, food labelling and international trade. Workshop delivery was started in Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells to get a foothold and to assess take up. Delivery will now be extended to more remote centres like Edenbridge.

Delivery on 1:1's is lagging behind on original profile. It was suggested that cultural differences in the West Kent area are the cause of the poor take up. The higher net wealth has created higher expectation of service delivery in this area. Consequently established

businesses, which are the key target, are unlikely to adjust their schedule to accommodate the clinic availability. Therefore, it is proposed that a change of delivery model be adopted for 1:1 engagement which will involve the Adviser arranging with the Client a mutually convenient time to visit them. This change in approach will also serve to enhance the support of the current Escalate Loan fund.

Centre for Microbusiness are delivering programmes to support home based businesses and the unemployed.

Roger House reported that the Be Your Own Boss scheme is being run with Job Centres who have been extremely helpful and refer clients regularly.

The home based business scheme is engaging with businesses regularly through drop in events at Asda cafes. Most clients have embryonic businesses and need advice to move them on. Clients are encouraged to collaborate with each other but most also require quite a lot of individual support with an average of 20-30 hours support. The support is being promoted through county libraries across the West Kent area. A very well received presentation was made to Parish clerks in Sevenoaks District who will promote the programme and it is hoped to deliver similar in Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells.

Roger can also see potential to work with Orchards Academy in Swanley utilising their vocational centre to provide access to resources for home based businesses.

The Young Entrepreneur Programme presented to Partners at the last meeting will commence delivery in April/May in Tunbridge Wells.

The WKP is to sponsor the first KICC West Kent B2B event on 30 April at the River Centre, Tonbridge.

8. Dates of Next Meetings – all Fridays 10am-noon

- 25 April, 2014 – St Julians, Sevenoaks
- 25 July, 2014
- 24 October, 2014