

West Kent Partnership Meeting – 23 April 2021

Minutes

Present

Nicolas Heslop, TMBC, Chair
Peter Fleming, SDC
Lesley Dyball, SDC
Brian Luker, TMBC
Jane March, TWBC
Jim Mawby, West Kent College
Allan Baillee, KCC,
Andrew Metcalf, KICC
David Candlin, TWBC
Detlev Munster, SDC
Dr Lindsay Pamphilon, Hadlow College
Daniel Cotton, Mid Kent College
James Read, TMBC
Jeremy Whittaker, TMBC
Jon Regan, Hugh Lowe Farms
Henry Warde, Squerryes
Wendy McGeachy, IMAGO
Summer Fox, IMAGO
Simon Harris, WKEAN
Wendy Wood, WKP

Apologies

Pav Ramewal, SDC
Nigel Smith, KCC
Catherine Brunger, AXA PPP
David Joyner, KCC
Sarah Nurden, KMEP
Hilary Smith, TWBC
Emily Haswell, SDC
Paul Baker, FSB/Wealden Properties

Guests

Carol Ford
Richard Cavendish, SDC

1 Introduction

- Thanks were recorded to Alison Parmar for her contribution to the WKP and best wishes for her new role
- Guests and new members were introduced

2 Minutes & Matters Arising

- Broadband - A letter was sent to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and a response has been received. These are attached.
- Follow up meeting with Trooli has taken place
- Kickstart – update included in quarterly Recovery Action plan update
- Update on LEADER - Nicolas Heslop wrote on 3 December to all West Kent MPs to make representations for a continuation of a grant programme to support rural and land-based sectors. Holding reply received. Jon Regan also wrote to MPs.

3. Skills – Colleges

West Kent College – Jim Mawby

- West Kent College is fully open with 100% of students in College, Covid secure
- Knock on effect of Covid on apprenticeships with end dates, but not a huge impact. Some of the practical work cannot be delivered and may have to continue during summer

- Working with local schools on progression, teacher assessed grades replacing exams in vast majority of qualifications
- Post covid world – looking at opportunities for curriculum development. Upsurge in health and hairdressing applications
- Planning on how to best support sectors badly hit
- Meeting has taken place with Gatwick airport and will work with them on skills required - both technical and tourism
- Strategy to retain travellers in Kent so not immediately lost to London
- Gatwick Northern Runway consultation – Part of a steering group from an education perspective in Kent and Sussex on how to support skills agenda. Long-term project, now restarting. Opportunity to look at skills across age range including adult re-training. Flexible curriculum to support skills needs. Progression route 16 to degree. Work with them to identify what skills needed.
- **Action: Gatwick to attend WKP July meeting.**

WW

Hadlow College – Lindsay Pamphilon

- 16-18 students completing their courses – for landbased largely about skills, so focus on completing with those practical skills. Back in college since March with heavy focus on skills delivered on site since then
- HE students were in group allowed back into college from March so there has been an opportunity to undertake practical training
- New apprenticeship in equine level 2 starting in September
- New general farm worker qualification at level 2, awaiting funding approval. Flexibility to agricultural and horticultural industries as meets a wide range of needs
- New flexi apprenticeship review mentions agriculture – seasonality is still an issue
- Viticulture – meeting with Allan Baillee took place – opportunities for students who have placements in that sector to choose as a specialism
- Skills paper – adults back at front of delivery. Skills fund for adult qualifications started April-July for level 3 courses including some rural courses but currently not listed as continuing beyond end of July. Awaiting government announcement on funding
- Need to build confidence of adults from being at home to coming back to College
- Range of free qualifications for adults in Kent only, 1 day or 3 hour qualifications to take next step into education, expecting rise in interest as furlough ends and people need to look at retraining.
- **Action: Skills Group to work with Colleges around securing funding to deliver level 3, 4 and 5 technical qualifications**
- **Action: Nicolas to raise issue of ongoing funding for adult qualifications at level 3 and possibility of funding for 3, 4 and 5 technical qualifications at Employment Task Force**

AB

NH

Discussion followed on issues for the agricultural sector

- Henry Warde commented that the transient labour needed to support agriculture has reduced and local people are not interested in the work as a rule. Also a real struggle to find back of house catering staff. Front of house staff are repurposing themselves from other careers in the interim and roles are in high demand but not from people looking for a long-term career in hospitality as in Europe. Challenge is to convince people there is a career path in hospitality.
- **Action: Nicolas to raise promoting hospitality as a career at Employment Task Force**

NH

- Peter Fleming commented that younger UK nationals expectations around wage levels is a barrier to recruiting into many traditionally lower paid roles.
- Jon Regan commented that Eastern Europeans are paid a fair wage reflecting the high cost of living in UK but it is seasonal work and UK residents are looking for full time work.

Mid Kent College – Daniel Cotton

- National Skills Fund – frustrated by qualifications that made it onto list – targeted at 24+ and extended diplomas which would traditionally be offered over 2 years. These are not going to suit the needs of local communities where adults are out of work and seeking to reskill
- FE students returned at the beginning of March. HE and adult this week. Challenges around vocational competency based assessments and practical work is underway
- Kickstart – the College has been recruiting its own Kickstarters
- There has been a steady increase in applications, particularly marked in plumbing and electrical at levels 1, 2 and 3 which is welcomed. Huge increase in access to healthcare
- Involved with SELEP bid for Institute for Technology, waiting to hear if approved at stage 1
- Strategic focus as result of white paper around adult skills – English and maths, digital skills, essential business and employability. Flexible delivery – online, night-time, condensed weekends, all options.
- Doubled provision in English and maths, teaching and HR and accountancy qualifications
- HE provision in civil engineering
- Apprenticeships – many employers have furloughed staff so difficult to get long-term commitment to apprenticeships. Believe will recover
- Manufacturing degree apprenticeship with CCCU
- Will run face to face open evenings at the end July
- Retained online short courses at level 2, healthcare, dementia, counselling – free at level 2 and 3

4. Growing our Future, Carol Ford, Fresh Food/Horticulture Employment Task Force sector led working group – Presentation attached

- Carol's presentation was well received and comments and questions followed.
- Henry Warde commented on viticulture. Two associated problems – cost of housing and relatively low paid role. He stated that he is able to house people but as the sector grows there will be a need to create affordable housing, creating a community, long term and beneficial, linked to loyalty and wellness agenda. The younger generation have a more holistic approach to quality of life and local authorities will need to look at exceptional circumstances to generate appropriate housing in greenbelt/AONB
- Jon Regan endorsed the proposed model of moving seasonal workers around so they have a 12 month job but felt there may be some logistics issues. Seasonal work is hard work and very early starts. At his Australian farm they use south Pacific islanders and the scheme is treated like overseas aid. The original Eastern European scheme was similar and was a student scheme. As well as returning home with money and UK values, many also returned with technical and management skills. Picking and packing should still be an attractive offer to UK students and needs marketing

- Simon Harris suggested that Enterprise Advisers who are business owners and strategic managers and advise head teachers and careers leaders about the labour market which filters into lessons, encounters and experiences could inspire and attract young people into the sector.
- **Action – Carol and Simon to meet** SH
- Carol explained that an ideas hack is being held at NIAB-EMR to capture youth ideas and help to find solutions. Employment Task Force is working collaboratively on this
- **Action – Landbased agenda and skills are 2 key priorities for WKP. Carol to feedback to Partnership after the hack and partners to send through any suggestions for topics for the hack via Wendy** CF
All

5. LEADER Update, Richard Cavanagh, LEADER Programme Project Officer, SDC

Richard introduced Paper A. He outlined the main achievements of West Kent LEADER and explained that the grant programme is now closed to applications. Work will be undertaken to December 2021 to close and evaluate all aspects of the programme.

It is hoped that future funding will be available through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The UK Community Renewal Fund is a bridge and pilot to inform what the UKSPF will look like.

Partners had the following comments

- Nicolas Heslop pointed out that the inward investment on the back of LEADER has been very significant and expressed concern that with the government levelling up agenda areas like West Kent may lose out on future funding.
- Peter Fleming pointed out that the UK Community Renewal Fund focuses on 4 priority districts in Kent, and that government is unclear about what it wants from the countryside but suspects it will not be around job creation
- Tudor Price felt that there is very little coherence on Economic Strategy from Government. The next big agenda is climate change and the focus seems to be there
- Jon Regan endorsed the LEADER programme. He has been involved as a member of the Executive Local Action Group for many years and has seen the good it has done in the community and in creating jobs
- **Action: WKP to lobby as appropriate as soon as Government proposals are known for UKSPF, highlighting the benefits of a grant support programme for the rural economy** WW

6. West Kent Priorities for Economic Growth, Wendy Wood, WKP

Wendy introduced Paper B which will be a standing report to future meetings

7. Standing Updates

Skills, Allan Baillee, KCC

Allan introduced Paper C and spoke to a powerpoint presentation which is attached.

- Unemployment creeping up, 10,000 benefit claimants in West Kent of which 2,000 are under 24
- Kickstart up and running and recruiting, gaining momentum
- Concern about impact on unemployment when furlough ends

- Climate change agenda – grants available for retrofitting are not being widely taken up as there are insufficient numbers of trade people trained to install

Peter Fleming advised that previous College administrations had failed to deliver any HE or FE provision within Sevenoaks district over many years. SDC is now looking to potentially provide its own site for an HE provider who may work with an FE provider from WK

Action: Skills group will develop proposals around aspiration to deliver degree apprenticeships from a West Kent hub potentially in project management, law, health and social care and the creative sector

AB

Action: Allan Baillee and 3 Colleges to liaise on making representations to Skills Minister re continuation and extension of funding for adult training and to meet local need. Letter to be sent from the Chairman

AB

Enterprise Adviser Network, Simon Harris, WKEAN

Simon introduced Paper D

- Network in a good position, high quality Enterprise Advisers and almost all schools matched. Challenges for schools this year and surveying schools around what expectations are for next year in careers so we can work with them on addressing
- West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network will continue alongside fledgling hubs from September

Nicolas Heslop commended the work delivered by the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network which he feels to be of a very high standard and committed ongoing support from the West Kent Partnership.

Infrastructure & Transport, Paper E

The report was noted.

FSB – Paul Baker

Paul had sent apologies and provided a short update

A quick update from the FSB as they continue to work with the Council and the Government to help businesses through this period.

As previously stated support from these parties has been good over the last 12 months but it is important not to lose all the good work as there are a number of perhaps unforeseen consequences of Covid - not all about retail businesses that have been closed. Need to consider cost of PPE, cost of setting up employees to work from home, those wholesale or manufacturing businesses that could remain open but have been hit as retail shops etc have meant there is less demand for their products

The Business Rates announcement in the Budget was not as helpful as hoped or anticipated and the FSB will continue to work with all parties to help businesses through this period

Action: A note of thanks to be sent to Alison Farmer for her support of the Partnership as she moves on from FSB

WW

KMEP – Sarah Nurden

Apologies for the meeting received from Sarah as she is unwell

KICC and Growth Hub, Tudor Price - Powerpoint presentation attached

- Chat link on TMBC grants page makes access to the service straightforward for businesses and is reflected in higher usage in TMBC than elsewhere in WK
- SME Brexit support fund is easy to apply for a £2K grant for training/consultancy to assist with Brexit issues
- A joint bid with University of Kent will be submitted to the UK Community Renewal Fund for the creation of a net zero audit hub
- KICC is running one of the largest Kickstart Gateways in the UK and very involved in drafting guidelines and criteria. Drafting issues left some gaps and are working closely with DWP to manage and address. Also having a Gateway Plus conversation to try and set up a Gateway Plus to help sole traders to access
- Skills improvement Plan – Chambers were cited in the White Paper to lead and KICC will be leading on a proposal for Kent and Medway. Currently are bringing Partners to the table.
- **Action: WKP to be engaged with the development of the local skills improvement plan** TP

7. Next Meeting – 10-12, Friday 16 July 2021

- Invitations for a teams meeting have been sent but the Chairman expressed a hope that we might meet in person
- Gatwick airport are consulting on bringing the Northern runway into use and Alison Addy will be attending to consult with Partners, particularly around opportunities for the West Kent economy from increased capacity and growth at the airport.
- **Action: partners were invited to put forward ideas for inclusion on future agendas** All