

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Chairman's Annual Report

This is my final report as I hand over to my successor Miranda Chapman and wish her as successful and fulfilling term of office as I have had.

It really has been a privilege and honour to have served as Chairman of such a thriving, active and caring Chamber. I have met and talked to so many businesses throughout my three year tenure and have tried to understand the joys and difficulties you have all endured throughout what has been really my Brexit era.

So three Prime Ministers, plus a possible fourth as we go to print, and a CEO who has received the OBE. What more of a mix could I have asked for?

Regarding the three PM's I thought at one point we had adopted the Italian method of Government, but then I realised even Italy had only had two Prime Ministers in that time.

However firstly to Jo, a very well deserved award for all the hard work and for what she and her team have achieved for the business community of Kent & Medway. All the work and meetings that Jo attends are not always readily seen, but I can assure you that I am aware of the long hours, the business meetings, the travelling to different far-flung venues and keeping our County businesses well represented.

In my position as a non-executive Director and Chairman I see both sides of the Chamber business, it is nice to be wheeled out to most of the more formal occasions, although at times you have to watch the wine and food intake, and on that note you do get to sample some the best food and wines in the world grown here in our County.

On the other side of the coin I get to meet and understand what makes businesses tick. One of my privileges has been to stand in for Jo during Ashford's MP Damian Green's visits to meet businesses in the area, I recently commented to Damian that during the majority of our visits over the past years how positive and progressive our businesses have been. I always thought I was asked to attend as an umpire whilst a disgruntled business has an opportunity to have a crack at their local MP, but that has certainly not been the case during my visits.

However, don't get me wrong, it has not been roses for all the businesses in the southeast, and throughout this year especially, whilst we have been pretty rudderless from Westminster we have experienced a mixed bag, but the determination to succeed has hopefully come out on top in a lot of cases, showing that there have been opportunities on the home market as well as new horizons for exports materialising, possibly from the value of the GBP, but also from the pure determination to succeed.

I feel confident in saying had it not been for the hard working business communities over the past three years this Country could have been facing a very different and difficult challenge.

Kent and Medway covers a very large area, and the Chamber has managed to represent the majority of businesses, and not only those who are members, throughout the region. With Jo's representation on the SELEP, KMEP and many other business partnerships plus the

stakeholder group's that many others of us serve on. Kent and Medway Business interest are clearly heard all the way to the top.

Lastly, I would just like to do a little bit of advertising by mentioning the great work our Economic Development Groups are doing throughout, and remind you that they are an opportunity for you to raise local issues and concerns through your local group and hopefully resolving locally, or by taking them to the board who can escalate to County or National level. If you would be interested in sitting on one of these groups and we have a vacancy, please contact Jo to discuss details.

So, thank you for your support and I hope you have felt that we have supported you our members to the best of our ability through what has been a rather turbulent year.

Thank you all.

Richard M Lavender
Chairman.