

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce – Ashford Economic Development Group

Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the AEDG held at Ashford College (EKC) on 15th June 2023 at 8.30am.

PRESENT:	NAME	POSITION
	Nettie Buss	Chair
	Richard Stafford	
	Richard Lavender	
	Dan Sherlock	
	Maria Callow	
	Susan Bonett	
	Peter Heritage	
	Sharon Norman	Replacing Dylan (Katie)
	Andrew Osborne	
	Tim Sheppard	
	Naomi Morris	EKC - guest
[APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE RECEIVED FROM:]	Jason Rainbird	

1. NOTICE AND QUORUM

The chair reported that enough notice of the meeting had been duly given and that a quorum was present. The chair declared that the meeting was open.

2. APPROVAL OF PRIOR MINUTES

A draft of the minutes of the board meeting held on 18th May 2023 was sent prior to the meeting. It was agreed to approve this draft without amendment and the chair was authorised to sign them as a complete record of the relevant meeting.

3. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

1. The Chair asked if anyone had recently heard from HS and whether he is well as he has not responded to recent meeting invites – RL advised he would follow this up.
2. **AB** advised that along with DS and SB they were now looking for exams for ACCA and the Kent Law Society to be taken at the college in Ashford. This follows on from recent exam students travelling around the country to sit exams – for accountancy, an exam centre that was originally in Maidstone has now been closed. SB advised that this was progressing well and we are hopeful that this could be in place later 2023. A joint blog – once this has been completed will be arranged which AO will look to share in the ABC

Business Newsletter.

3. **SB** advised that CSCS for construction is still being completed at the Wootton Road campus of Ashford College.
4. The Chair advised that there are still a couple of o/s bios, once these are received AB will work with NV @ KiCC to create an AEDG LinkedIn page
5. **RL** commented with regards to a new drive through at Waterbrook, which the Chamber have historically supported which can be circulated, any views to be sent to RL by 01 July 2023. AO commented the importance of making sure the town centre has a chance to attract the drive through food brands, MC raised the question of litter which is harder to enforce out of town than within it and suggested 'nudging signage' re taking litter home etc.

Round Table discussions

RS – commented that the office market appears to be coming back and rents seem to be stable. Industrial units still seem to be in short supply especially smaller units. AO commented units industrial are up for sale and NB commented that most people appear to be returning to the office.

TS – has been in touch with the chamber about building his construction network to better represent his AEDG portfolio and has now joined the KCFG. TS has a list of organisations in construction he is interested in talking with to be able to feed their concerns and opinions into AEDG. He commented that construction was generally buoyant but skills and training remained a big issue. RS, DS & SN all advised they may be able to assist with contacts – AO commented that there are a number of construction challenges concerning costs.

RL – advised he had recently attended the 'Kent & Medway Civilian / Military Partnership Programme' which is working with employers to engage with reservists and ex forces generally for employment and the commitment to give them the required leave for training etc.

RL also mentioned as has been widely published that Tudor Price will take over as CEO when Jo James retires at the end of 2023

MC – recruitment in small businesses remains a challenge and more sales roles training is required. Also commented that since the pandemic there seems to be a lack of catering companies for corporate lunches. Comments made concerning AI which is creeping in to various businesses and that an education piece on this is required.

AO – Elections were held in May and there is no clear majority – the new leader is an independent. There is a local 'residents group' looking to campaign to bring back Eurostar to Ashford. RL advised there is a meeting concerning this in July.

DS – cash is tight and clients are looking for cheaper deals so much so, there is now a growing disconnection between value and cash. Insolvency cases continue to rise and there is more scrutiny on Directors when companies close down. Commercial Property appears to be busy. Recruitment remains a problem – especially middle tier which are hard to get and leads to instability – AB endorsed this comment. SB suggested looking at some fast track skills courses.

PH – retail at the outlet has been well placed with nearly 10% growth – however there are aggressive budgets in place which makes trading tight. There is an issue with the food outlets having to close at 7PM

SB welcomes everyone to the college and explained that she wanted the building to be more accessible for meetings and industry in general with equipment they can use for example robotics. SB wants to expand the connected employers to the college and pair up sectors especially with the opening of the new building later this year.

The subject of guests was raised and it was suggested that Damian Green attending an AEDG meeting would be excellent, as well as Tudor Price either later in the year or January 2024. The new leader of the council was also suggested – **AB will follow this up.**

A list of items to action was then produced as follows:

Action Items	Owner(s)	Deadline	Status
Bios and Headshots	All members	NB will email all those O/S	Pending
LinkedIn	NB to speak with KiCC	Before next AEDG meeting	Pending
Future meeting guests	NB	NB	Pending

4. NEXT MEETING

20th July 2023 @ 8.30am @ KiCC

5. CLOSE

There was no further business and therefore the chair declared that the meeting was closed.

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Chair – Nettie Buss - Date