

## **Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce – Ashford Economic Development Group**

Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the AEDG held at Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Ashford on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024 at 8.30am.

<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>POSITION</b>
	Nettie Buss (AB)	Chair
	Maria Callow (MC)	
	Lucy Drusene (LD)	KiCC
	Steve Garnett SG)	Guest
	Peter Heritage (PH)	
	Richard Lavendar (RL)	
	Sharon Norman (SN)	
	Andrew Osborne (AO)	
	Tudor Price (TP)	CEO KiCC
	Tim Sheppard (TS)	
	Richard Stafford (RS)	
<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE RECEIVED FROM</b>	Susan Bonett (SB) Jason Rainbird (JR) Dan Sherlock (DS)	

### **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 at 8.30am.

### **2. APPROVAL OF PRIOR MINUTES**

Minutes of the board meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023 had already been approved. The chair had been authorised to sign them as a complete record of the relevant meeting.

### **3. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING**

#### **Welcome**

AB welcomed a potential new member SG from Utilitas Solutions Ltd who had shown interest in attending the AEDG – he works in the green energy sector.

#### **EDG Strategy Discussion**

TP presented the EDG Strategy Discussion deck (attached). Key topics of discussion were:

#### Landscape

As part of the wider landscape discussion, AO mentioned the new Entry-Exit System (EES). Post-Brexit biometric checks are due to be implemented in October 2024.

Ashford faces the prospect of Operation Brock again. We need to make the most of the British

Chamber of Commerce to elevate the challenges of this issue.

### Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference clearly outlines the purpose of the AEDG to represent the local business community on matters of economic development.

This objective will be achieved through regular meetings to identify, highlight and action current and future local business needs.

### Expanded Term

It was reiterated and agreed that the AEDG would act as a conduit for the gathering of business opinion, feedback, and intelligence on matters of local, regional, national and international interest.

TP suggested that the AEDG could be a pilot approach to roll out across other Economic Development Groups in Kent.

A further delivery would be for the AEDG to act as a sector representative to ensure the voice of local business is heard at all levels.

MC mentioned there were potential gaps in sector representation to playback concerns and issues in particular for Food Production and Manufacturing.

### BCC Policy Framework

TP outlined the proposal to set up a Business Council Working Groups to follow five strands: People and Work; Local Economy of the Future; Green Innovation; Digital Revolution and Global Britain.

AO mentioned the importance of getting the balance of local Ashford related issues right and the AEDG being a constructive forum. Key issues in the pipeline for 2024 are:

- Eurostar
- Entry-Exit System (EES)
- Local Ashford Plan
- Ashford Borough Council Corporate Plan

AEDG together with the chamber are keen to support Eurostar coming back. AO emphasised Ashford as a location has the opportunity to provide resilience. It is better connected as a rail hub and if the train breaks it can take passengers off and put them on HS1. In addition, Ashford has space and capacity to meet new border regulations at passport control.

### Sector Voice

TP put a call out for members to be a media spokesperson to offer comment and opinion on matters affecting their sector. There was discussion about being prepared for potential upcoming topics in 2024, controlling the narrative and maintaining an authentic business voice. PH, RL, AO and AB all put themselves forward as potential spokespeople.

## **4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

RS shared that the commercial market had picked up and was busy and he is recruiting a new employee.

RL reported although he was officially due to step down from the AEDG if approved he would be happy to represent Infrastructure and Planning issues and feed in wider Ashford related concerns. The AEDG agreed for RL to continue to be a member. Names were

discussed as potential voices on rural issues and food production.

LD mentioned she sits on a number of sector related groups across Kent and would consider who might be suitable new members for the food sector.

SN reported it is a very busy time with the tax self-assessment deadline imminent.

AO shared some outline Eurostar survey findings from over 630 respondents, overall responses were very positive and still coming through.

SG reported that many businesses are sitting tight on spending and managing budgets.

TS shared feedback from the retail sector in Canterbury was very positive for early 2024.

## **5. CLOSE**

AB thanked everyone for their continued support and advised that representatives from ABC will be joining the next meeting.

Date of next meeting – 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024 at 8.30am @ KiCC

There was no further business and therefore the chair declared that the meeting was closed at 9.55am.

.....

Chair – Nettie Buss

Date