

**KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
EAST KENT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP (EKEDG)
Wednesday 24 September 2025**

EKC The Yarrow, Ramsgate Road, Broadstairs CT10 1PN

1. Welcome and Apologies

Members Present:

Ray Johnson (RJ) – Chair

Daniel Sangiuseppe (DS) – Castlewood Hotels, Chair of Folkestone & Hythe Tourism Board Association

Nicola Wood (NW) - Thanet District Council

Matthew Arnold (MA) - Bayliss Transport

Lucy Druesne (LD) – KICC Deputy CEO

Hayley Benn (HB) – MHA

Suzanna Gamwell (SG) – EKC Group

Apologies:

Ella Sandall (ES) – Jenner

Lindsey Biggs (LB) – EKC Group

Tudor Price (TP) – KICC

Richard Christian (RC) – Port of Dover

Guy Vine (GV) – MHA Accountants

Jayne Miles (JM) – Dover District Council

Joel Mitchell (JM) – Stagecoach

Steve Wisbey (SW) – NIC Instruments Ltd

Jason Lewis (JL) – Stantech

Paul Roberts (PR) – Metroline Security

Craig Styles (CS) – MHA

Not present:

Joel Mitchell (JM) – Stagecoach

Andrew Cruttenden (AC) – Martello Building Consultancy

Philip Clapham (PC) – Smith Woolley

Gavin Coleman (GC) – Handelsbanken

Andrew Pledger (AP) – Barclays Bank

2. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed.

3. Outstanding actions

None.

4. Chairman's comments and report

- RJ introduced and welcomed both HB & SG as substitutes and LD to the group.

- The chamber website has been updated for our group with minutes.
- RJ thanked the SG and the College for their hospitality and later tour of the site.
- He gave an overview of issues relating to business in the region and nationally along with some of the opportunities. In addition, the networking availability and AI involvement which is already gaining traction.

Ella (in absence)

Construction remains challenging but it is certainly far better than it was. Seemingly there are plenty of opportunities on the horizon, owing to increased client confidence and demand for housing etc but crystallising these into live contracts is particularly difficult owing to the cost of construction vs the expectation of clients in terms of budgets and affordability and a lot of red tape that continues to stall progress. For us however, we are incredibly proud to celebrate our 150 years in business making us Kent's longest standing and largest regional contractor. Quite a feat!

Matthew

- **Sector Update:**
 - Busy summer period.
 - Concerns around collapse of Visit Kent and Locate in Kent
 - Loss of sector champion
 - Risk of missed opportunities 2026 season.
 - KCC is aware and considering alternatives.
 - VK Leaders Group still operating informally.
 - Lucy D to host virtual Chamber hospitality group meeting focused on this issue.
- **Border Controls:**
 - New **EES system** starts 12 October.
 - Concerns at Dover Docks.
 - POD introducing dedicated coach processing area.
 - Potential issues with driver hours and local traffic impact.

Daniel

- **Hospitality Sector Challenges:**
 - 100,000 jobs lost; hardest hit by budget.
 - UK Hospitality campaign: **"Taxed Out"** – NI, business rates, minimum wage; additional campaigning around impact of interest rates on businesses
 - Unsustainable margins.
 - Recruitment issues:
 - Leadership roles difficult to fill.
 - Lack of experienced mid-level managers.
 - Skills gap among new entrants.
 - DS-G lobbying government to raise awareness.
 - Loss of VK and BLK compounds the issue.
- **Destination Marketing:**
 - Good communication between LAs however -
 - Need for unified **"Kent"** message.
- **Upcoming Event:**
 - **6 November** – Local MP Employer Engagement at Folkestone College.

Nicola

- **Programmes & Events:**
 - Success of **SWAPS Hospitality Passport** – 11 learners, one employed.
 - **Creative Event at Margate Digital** – TDC, EKC Group, and partners.
 - **Free Networking Event** – Chapel House, 12 November.
 - **Ramsgate Space** – Business support for Thanet; Emma Jones (Small Business Commissioner) on board.
 - **Youth Hub for Thanet** – Employability and skills support with DWP access.
- **Funding & Skills:**
 - UKSPF ending – uncertainty about future funding.
 - KCC's **Get Kent and Medway Working Plan** – no funding attached yet.
 - SIA security courses – consistently successful.
 - Toolkits in development:
 - **Green Tourism Toolkit**
 - **Accessible Tourism Toolkit**
 - **Creative Catalyst** expanding into **Green Catalyst** – Green Skills.
- **Actions:**
 - Nicola to loop Lucy into Ramsgate's successful £20M Plan for Neighbourhoods funding award.

Hayley

- **Business Support:**
 - Reduced recruitment due to AI impact.
 - NI increases concerning for clients.
 - Preparing businesses for **Making Tax Digital**:
 - Low engagement.
 - Applies to sole traders/landlords with turnover >£50k.
 - Recommending software solutions.
- **Healthcare Sector:**
 - GP surgeries affected by NI increases.
 - New contract specs from October – surgeries must open 8am–6pm.

Lucy

- **Policy & Campaigns:**
 - BCC lobbying against cost pressures on employment ahead of budget.
 - Encouraging participation in **QES survey**.
 - **Eurotrains Campaign** – pushing for international trains to stop in Kent – whole county approach
- **Skills & Employment:**
 - **Get Kent and Medway Working Plan** and **Connect to Work** bootcamps.
 - Focus on upskilling and sector transitions.
 - Skills England now under DWP; Jacqui Smith remains minister.
 - Next LSIP round discussions taking place – sectors invited to participate before January.
- **Events:**
 - **Kent Construction Expo – 2 October:**
 - Chamber café presence.
 - LTC and suppliers attending.
 - **2025 Business Awards – late November.**
 - **Skills 2026 – 18 March.**

- **Infrastructure Roundtables:**
 - Chambers gathering feedback on business impact of infrastructure developments

Actions & Next Steps

- **Next Meeting:** 26 November – Visit & Tour
- **Suzanna:** To ask Camilla to attend 6 November event.
- **Nicola:** To connect Lucy with Ramsgate housing funding success.

Date of next meeting: 26/11/2025 10am Wednesday at NIC The NIC Instruments Ltd. Gladstone Road Folkestone Kent CT19 5NF with tour after.

5. Future meeting dates: TBA