

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Ashford Economic Development Group

Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the AEDG held at Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce on 15th January 2026 at 8.30am.

PRESENT	NAME	POSITION
	Nettie Buss (AB)	Chair
	Maria Callow (MC)	
	Lee Collette (LC)	
	Steve Garnett (SG)	
	Katie Hodson (KH)	
	Andrew Osborne (AO)	
	Tudor Price (TP)	
	Tom Shaw-Dunn (TS-D)	
	Dan Sherlock (DS)	
	Richard Stafford (RS)	
APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE RECEIVED FROM	Jo Brown (JB) Lucy Clark (LAC) Peter Heritage (PH) Tom Jenkins (TJ) James McComas (JM) Jason Rainbird (JR) Tim Sheppard (TS) Natalie Ward (NW)	

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 20th November 2025 had already been approved. The chair had been authorised to sign them as a complete record of the relevant meeting.

3. ANY MATTERS ARISING/PREVIOUS MEETING

No matters arising.

4. BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

AB welcomed all to the meeting.

2026 AGENDA

TP outlined national topics of interest that could be talking points for the year ahead, he was keen to gauge what is of interest and what should be on the agenda for 2026. He suggested:

- Employment Rights Act
- Visitor Levy – new Mayoral power
- Business rates
- Digital contract, online safety

BUSINESS RATES

AB mentioned that business rates is a key topic of concern for **JR**. **RS** shared he was meeting Sojan Joseph MP soon to discuss business rates and small business rate relief thresholds. **AO** said he would talk to ABC to identify which businesses had small business rate relief in Ashford.

WATER AND UTILITIES

RS felt rural businesses especially suffer when there are road closures to repair water damage. **AO** has interaction with the Kent Resilience Forum and mentioned there are many challenges around water resilience on the network across Kent.

TP is keen to hear from utilities leaders around accountability, he will invite them to future AEDG meetings. Overall he felt we need closer representation and engagement in Kent.

SKILLS

KH is keen to review the latest LSIP results, **TP** said they are due in March 2026. **KH** shared Azets took on a T level student from Ashford College and since recruited them – a good news skills story.

LC shared AI is becoming essential to retail, but the brands have less people on the payroll. For example when stock taking can be done with a live scanning wand, it's faster and more efficient. The Ashford Designer Outlet is a flagship for Ashford growth; they would like to see a loosening of restrictions on them from ABC. **LC** extended an invite to host a future AEDG meeting.

TP said there is a planned KICC AI conference on 24th June 2026 and he is keen to explore pressing business themes.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

TP said Eurostar and bring back international rail remains an important theme to the Kent business community. Oliver Betts (a corporate lawyer) plans to bring a class action against Eurostar and **TP** appealed for business leaders to support him. **RS** said he would share his contacts to support the class action.

6. CLOSE

AB thanked AEDG members for their continued support.

Date of next meeting - 8.30am, 19th February 2026.

There was no further business and therefore the chair declared that the meeting was closed at 10.00am.

.....Chair – Nettie Buss - Date