

**KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
EAST KENT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP (EKEDG)
Wednesday 28 January 2026**

Venue: NEC Instruments, Gladstone Rd, Folkestone CT19 5NF

1. Welcome and Apologies

Members Present:

Ray Johnson (RJ) - Chair
Andy Cruttenden (AC) - Martello Building Consultancy
Craig Styles (CS) - MHA
Daniel Sansuisepe (DS) - Castlewood Hotels
Gavin Coleman (GC) - Handelsbanken
Jason Lewis (JL) - Stantech
Jayne Miles (JM) - Dover District Council
Steve Wisbey (SW) - NIC Instruments Ltd
Lucy Druesne (LD) - Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Apologies:

Ella Sandall (ES) - Jenner
Hayley Benn (HB) - MHA
Lindsey Biggs (LB) - EKC Group
Mathew Arnold (MA) - Bayliss
Natalie Glover (NG) - Thanet District Council
Nicola Wood (NW) - Thanet District Council
Paul Roberts (PR) - Metroline
Philip Clapham (PC) - Smith Woolley
Richard Christian (RC) - Port of Dover

Not present:

Andrew Pledger (AP) - Barclays Bank
Ewan Green (EG) - Folkestone & Hythe District Council
Joel Mitchell (JM) - Stagecoach

2. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed.

3. Outstanding actions

None.

4. Chairman's comments

RJ welcomed attendees, thanked SW from NIC Instruments for hosting, and introduced guest speaker Luke Mullaney from GSE Property Group.

5. Sector updates/discussion and other updates

5.1. Hospitality - Daniel Sangiuseppe, Burlington Hotel

January remains the most challenging month for hospitality which is especially quiet for seaside towns. The hospitality sector is really struggling due to the rising costs - changes to business rates, NI and minimum wage rises. Every day another pub closes. Other issues include hiring and retaining quality staff.

5.2. Local Government - Jayne Miles, Dover District Council

Two Dover wards have been selected for the Government's 'Pride in Place' programme and will receive up to £20m over 10 years. A new board will be created to develop and deliver a plan. DDC to act as the accountable body for at least 3 years.

A new 'UK Town of Culture 2028' competition has been launched - deadline to submit an EOI is 31 March. DDC have contacted Town Councils to gauge interest.

Dover Beacon (Levelling Up) project and the new Deal Leisure Centre are both progressing well.

5.3. Building Consultancy - Andy Cruttenden, Martello

Martello are maintaining a consistent turnover due local authority housing work. Private development facing challenges.

5.4. Accountancy - Craig Styles, MHA

Sector remains strong overall. Hospitality struggling; construction mixed. Talent recruitment and retention remain difficult. AI is changing workflows significantly.

5.5. Construction - Luke Mullaney, GSE Property Group – (Guest Speaker)

GSE's turnover has been underpinned by prison work but smaller jobs are currently needing to be won. GSE own and operate Hythe Imperial hotel which has 60% occupancy.

5.6. Chamber of Commerce - Lucy Druesne, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Networking events well attended. Upcoming events: '[Skills 26 \(18 March\)](#)' and AI Conference (24 June).

Seeking local business rates feedback via policy@kentinvictachamber.co.uk.

5.7. Engineering Services - Jason Lewis, Stantech

Consultancy work ongoing with the 'Big 6' housebuilders who predict house prices to go up later this year.

The December 2024 revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has introduced major changes to the planning process to accelerate housebuilding.

5.8. Banking - Gavin Coleman, Handelsbanken

Banking sector is still very busy and there is lots of positivity overall despite challenges.

5.9. Property, Insurance and Chamber - Ray Johnson

Chamber update: David Wimble KCC's Economic Development portfolio holder. RJ Board member Kent & Medway Business Fund/ KCC and are offering 0% business loans over 5 years (with fee).

RJ to share British Chambers report on planning. Usual challenges for companies with rates, tech and skills.

Insurance update: AI is improving efficiencies. RJ can provide access to specialist risk brokers. As chair all welcome to join: <https://www.localinstitutes.cii.co.uk/mid-kent/home/events/2026/kent-conference-2026-insuring-tomorrow-building-sustainable-success>

Chamber engaged fully with British Chambers covering worldwide.

6. Presentation on New Truck Stop planning application at Court Wood Interchange

Luke Mullaney gave a presentation on the proposal for a new lorry park at Court Wood Interchange in Capel. Details: www.courtwood-truckstop.co.uk. The group agreed that a solution is needed to prevent congestion when there are issues at the Port of Dover and approved.

7. Presentation & Tour of NIC Instruments Ltd

SW provided company overview and site tour.

8. Meeting close

Meeting closed at 12.15pm.

RJ thanked all for their attendance and especially SW for hosting and providing the tour.

9. Future meeting dates:

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 25 March. Venue TBA.

Future dates:

25/03/26

27/05/26

29/07/26

30/09/26

25/11/26