

KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
EAST KENT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP (EKEDG)
Wednesday 25 March 2026

Venue: Bayliss Executive Travel, The Old Tilmanstone Colliery Pike Road, Eythorne CT15 4ND

1. Welcome and Apologies

Members Present:

Ray Johnson (RJ) - Chair
Mathew Arnold (MA) - Bayliss
Philip Clapham (PC) - Smith Woolley
Lucy Druesne (LD) - Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
Jayne Miles (JM) - Dover District Council

Apologies:

Daniel Sansuseppe (DS) - Castlewood Hotels
Jason Lewis (JL) - Stantech
Ella Sandall (ES) - Jenner
Lindsey Biggs (LB) - EKC Group
Richard Christian (RC) - Port of Dover
Steve Wisbey (SW) - NIC Instruments Ltd
Gavin Coleman (GC) - Handelsbanken
Andy Cruttenden (AC) – Martello
Craig Styles (CS) – MHA
Paul Roberts (PR) - Metroline

Not present:

Andrew Pledger (AP) - Barclays Bank
Ewan Green (EG) - Folkestone & Hythe District Council
Joel Mitchell (JM) - Stagecoach
Natalie Glover (NG) - Thanet District Council
Nicola Wood (NW) - Thanet District Council

2. Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed.

3. Outstanding actions

None.

4. Chairman's comments and report

- Ray welcomed attendees and thanked Matthew Arnold for hosting the meeting on board a Bayliss coach!
- News out today is that inflation has stayed the same and that the Strait of Hormuz is to be re-opened which will hopefully improve fuel prices.

5. Update/discussion, any other business & topics & other project updates.

5.1. Group membership

- Ray has been approached by Canterbury City Council to join the group. Matthew is stepping down from the board of the Chamber and is happy to start up a Canterbury Economic Development Group.
- Ray has been in touch with group members and most are still on board but have recently struggled to attend to meetings.
- Ray suggested Discovery Park (no response yet) and had reached out to Hornby (who mainly work from the Midlands).

- Ray and Lucy will discuss inviting businesses from Thanet and agreed that a representative from a Solicitor business would be beneficial. If you have any suggestions please get in touch with Ray.

5.2. Business rates changes

- The Chamber and local authorities have been raising awareness of the changes to the business rates system. Some businesses are facing huge increases and, coupled with the increased staff costs, are finding business especially tough at the moment.

5.3. Employment Rights Bill - [Employment Rights Act 2025 - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#)

- Some parts of the new bill are still in discussion and the Chamber can possibly give some influence - if you have any suggestions or feedback please contact Lucy.

5.4. Insurance – Ray

- Unlike other industries, insurances are either static or, for some businesses, they are being reduced.

5.5. Local Government - Jayne

- Interviews for the Chair of Dover's 'Pride in Place' programme took place this week.
- Deal and Dover will both be submitting bids for the 'UK Town of Culture 2028' competition.
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund schemes are both coming to an end with no replacement funding scheme.
- Dover Beacon (Levelling Up) project and new Deal Leisure Centre are both progressing well.
- Cruise bookings for Dover are looking very healthy this year. One date has four cruise ships in on the same day. The Dover Tourism team are working with excursion companies to try and keep cruise guests local.

5.6. Property management – Philip

- Property management is tough at the moment - landlords are seeing costs growing and profits decreasing.

5.7. Transport - Matthew

- Bayliss are trading well and are officially 16th out of 50 'mega growth' companies in Kent.
- They have 22 coaches in a variety of sizes and contracts include five football clubs plus Kent and Sussex County Cricket Clubs, lots of cruise work and school transport plus they also run day trips and holidays. The new border controls at Dover and Calais are causing problems and add to the length of travel time.
- Matthew is chair of a trade association that is working with local councils to meet the needs of the industry e.g. coach parking, removal of overhanging trees.

5.8. Meeting close

- Meeting closed at 11.20am.
- RJ thanked all for their attendance and especially Matthew for hosting.

6. Next meeting

- Date: Wednesday 27 May 2026 at [Dover Museum](#), Market Square Dover CT16 1PH.
- Nearest car parks:
[St James retail and leisure centre](#)
[Camden Crescent car park](#)

[Stembrook car park](#)

- After the meeting please stay for a while at Dover Museum to see the remarkable Bronze Age Boat. It is at least 3,500 years old (the oldest seagoing boat in the world) and was discovered around 100m from where it is now, during construction of the A20 through Dover.

7. Future meeting dates

- 27 May 26
- 29 July 26
- 30 September 26
- 25 November 26