

NORTH KENT MULTI AREA AGREEMENT

Executive Summary

July 2009



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Over the last year the local authorities and key partners in North Kent have come together under the auspices of the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership (TGKP), to develop this Multi Area Agreement. It has been an intense, but productive, period of partnership working. The result is a substantial Agreement which sets out a road map for Central Government and local partners to deal with some of the critical issues we face; issues which must be tackled if we are to come out of the current recession and achieve our targets for sustainable economic growth.

The signatories to the Agreement are the 5 local authorities with responsibilities in North Kent (Kent County Council, Medway Council (Unitary Authority), Dartford Borough Council, Gravesham Borough Council and Swale Borough Council), Central Government, SEEDA, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the LSC and Job Centre Plus.

The full text of the MAA is attached. This Executive Summary briefly describes the nature of the challenges and opportunities in the area, explains why we have opted for an MAA, summarises the proposals themselves and sets out the governance arrangements we have put in place to implement the Agreement.

The Challenge, the Opportunity and the Vision

With a population of half a million people and a workforce of over a quarter a million, Thames Gateway Kent is an ethnically and socially diverse sub-region. As well as areas of prosperity, it has some of the most deprived localities in the South East.

Over the last few decades the area has had to cope with the decline of many of its traditional industries. This has left a legacy of unemployment, a damaged environment, worn out and inadequate infrastructure, below average educational achievement and under-investment in skills.

There has been much improvement in recent years – the economy has grown and diversified. Unemployment has significantly reduced. But the proportion of higher value, knowledge based industries and the numbers of people with higher level skills fall short of what we need to transform our economy. And more recently we have the new challenge of the credit crunch and the economic downturn, with indications that some communities in the Thames Gateway have been particularly vulnerable to the impact of the recession.

The area also has great assets – its heritage, countryside, riverside, strong communities and leadership – and huge potential, thanks to its excellent strategic location, large areas of brown field sites ready for development and new high speed transport links.

Strategic Context

We are not starting from scratch. As part of the Thames Gateway the area is a national Government priority for growth and regeneration. This priority is reflected in not just the Thames Gateway Delivery plan but also in the Regional Spatial Strategy, in SEEDA's Regional Economic Strategy – where the Thames Gateway Kent is identified as one of the 'Diamonds for Growth' – and in KCC and Medway's own economic development strategies.

To make sure we had the necessary evidence base for the MAA, to ensure that our economic priorities were properly aligned and to take account of the changed economic circumstances, TGKP has recently prepared a new Economic Development Strategy, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. As a result we have a clear set of thematic priorities – skills, housing and transport – which are reflected in the themes of the MAA.

We also have established spatial priorities, with making a success of Ebbsfleet Valley – the “economic transformer” for this part of the Gateway – the number one priority for North Kent.

There is therefore a clear strategic context for the MAA. There is a long history of effective partnership working in the area and there is strong track record of successful regeneration, with areas such as Chatham Maritime transformed from what they were a generation ago.

Why a Multi Area Agreement for North Kent?

So with partnerships in place, a clear set of priorities agreed and good progress on delivery being made, why is an MAA needed, what added value can it bring?

Although real progress has been made, the scale of the challenges we face, particularly in this new economic climate, requires a step change in our performance, which can only be achieved by local authorities and partners working jointly, with Central Government, to devise new solutions. We need new approaches to delivery that cross organisational and administrative boundaries, both locally and in Central Government.

The MAA is a mechanism that can help us achieve that step change. As a functional economic area with a shared set of challenges and opportunities North Kent is well suited for an MAA. We believe the MAA will strengthen partnership working across North Kent so as to:

- bring more certainty, less risk, to achieving our growth and regeneration targets,
- increase the effectiveness of the delivery of Government programmes, and
- improve opportunities for local residents and businesses.

The MAA is focused on achieving our sustainable economic growth and regeneration targets. The main themes are:

- developing new investment and funding mechanisms to underpin infrastructure delivery,
- increasing skills and employability to equip the workforce,
- securing sustainable transport and connectivity, and
- fostering sustainable communities in tandem with housing growth.

The detailed proposals on each of these themes are set out in Chapter 3.

In addition, initial work has been done on a number of developing themes – business and enterprise, culture and the environment. The developing themes are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The MAA – Outcomes, Proposals and Asks

The substantive content of the MAA is broken down into a series of 6 outcome objectives, 13 proposals and 16 Asks of Government. These are summarised in a table in Chapter 2 at paragraph 2.13 and explored fully in Chapter 3.

The 6 outcome objectives are:

Outcome objective 1: Alignment of investment and strategic priorities to support sustainable, economic-led growth and regeneration in North Kent

Outcome objective 2: Greater personalisation and coherent integration of support for people not in work to access training, improve skills and gain employment.

Outcome objective 3: Better engagement with and responsiveness to employers, investing in the skills needed to grow and “future proof” the North Kent economy and enabling working people to improve their skills and progress in a changing economic environment

Outcome Objective 4: Swifter and more certain delivery of transport infrastructure to support sustainable economic growth

Outcome Objective 5: More sustainable and integrated transport systems and networks

Outcome Objective 6: Maintaining momentum in the delivery of new housing, particularly to meet localised priorities across North Kent.

For each of these outcomes there is a number of proposed actions and a number of “asks” of Government that are needed to facilitate the proposed action.

Targets

The Thames Gateway Kent Partnership has ambitious targets for growth. These have been reviewed in preparing the new Economic Development Strategy. The key long term targets are, by 2026, to:

- support the creation of at least 58,000 jobs, particularly in high value sectors
- deliver 52,140 new homes in Thames Gateway Kent
- raise GVA per head in North Kent towards the South East average, narrowing the current £3bn prosperity gap.

In addition to these overall targets we have included targets in the MAA based on indicators which should respond to the specific proposals in the MAA. They show the added value of the Agreement, although, of course, many factors will influence these indicators including the economic situation. An important caveat needs to be accepted in relation to these targets. Many of the agreed actions and asks are for further joint programmes of work. Once those are completed it may be appropriate to review the targets to reflect the outcome of that joint work and any agreed solutions.

Initial targets include:

- 20% narrowing by 2014 of the gap between North Kent and South East rates of population on out of work benefits.
- 14% increase in the proportion of the resident working age population with at least a level 2 qualification by 2014.
- By 2014, reduce per capita carbon emissions by 16.7% compared with 2005 levels.
- 100% of major development sites to be served by quality public transport giving high frequency access to town centre facilities.
- Increase of around 1,700 in the number of new homes delivered by 2012 above what would be delivered without the MAA.

Governance and Implementation

The TGKP Board is an informal, sub-regional strategic partnership bringing together public, private and third sector partners across Thames Gateway Kent under an independent Chairman from the private sector. The Board discusses and, where appropriate, forms a view on the strategic priorities facing North Kent. However, it has the character of a high level reference or advisory group rather than a decision making body.

In order to provide a clear decision making group for the MAA a TGK Leaders Board has been established, chaired by the Leader of Swale Borough Council who is also Vice Chair of TGKP. It comprises, at present, the Leaders of the five local authorities, KCC's Regeneration Portfolio-Holder, and senior representation from SEEDA and GOSE. Membership will be extended to include representation from other signatories such as the HCA, LSC.

The TGK Leaders Board is supported by the TGK Officers Group, chaired by Neil Davies, Chief Executive of Medway Council and with senior/Chief Executive level representation from each local authority, SEEDA, GOSE and other partners.

Once the MAA has been approved the real work begins. The arrangements for implementation are set out in Chapter 6. A detailed implementation plan will be prepared and submitted to the TGK Leaders Board for agreement in September 2009. In the meantime there are some early actions which need to be implemented immediately. These are listed in paragraph 6.2 of the main document.

Conclusion

The MAA is a wide ranging Agreement covering crucial issues affecting economic development. It is the product of a great deal of hard work put in by local and central Government partners over the last 12 months. However, this MAA is just the first stage in the development of a new way of working between local partners and central Government. Over the coming months we will work jointly to tackle some of the complex issues which are hindering growth and regeneration in North Kent. We will develop some of the emerging themes on business and enterprise, culture and the environment. By July 2010, or sooner, we would expect to be ready to sign a further iteration of the MAA.

As well as the MAA itself, the outcome of this work is a strengthened and more robust Partnership. There has been a greater recognition of the value and potential of joint working, and there is a desire amongst partners to work collaboratively, across local authority boundaries, on issues that go much wider than the specific proposals in the MAA.

**Thames Gateway Kent Partnership
July 2009**