

Greater North Kent: Position Statement 2021-22

About Greater North Kent

Greater North Kent (GNK)'s strategic aim is to be a stronger collective voice for North Kent, to help make North Kent a place of choice to live, work, learn, do business, invest and enjoy leisure and recreation.

GNK operates as a 'think-tank', preparing and commissioning reports and evidence linked with proposals for action and change. This enables the partner authorities in North Kent to set out an aspirational case for change, influencing as well as responding to others' agendas, and setting out a route to impact.

Priorities and work programme

GNK identified four areas as the focus for a shared work programme: **Health; Learning and Skills; Culture; and Infrastructure**. In addition, **Climate Action** was seen as a thread running through all priority areas: the imperatives of adapting to climate change and supporting progress to de-carbonise our economy would be an integral part of GNK's thinking about the four thematic priorities. This will also be explored further in its own right in 2022/23.

(1) Health

- **Issue:** The GNK authorities have a key role in making the case for the services that their residents need, articulating the 'place-based' components of health and wellbeing outcomes, and shaping a more integrated approach to the preventative dimension of population health.
- **Action:** We undertook an analysis of the **2021 NHS GP Patient Survey** to examine North Kent residents' experience trying access primary care compared with the rest of Kent and Medway, and England as a whole. The resulting report has been used as baseline evidence for engagement and dialogue with the new Integrated Care System, and for GNK authorities' involvement in local Health and Care Partnerships.
- **Next steps:** Follow-up analysis of the 2022 NHS GP Patient Survey; review of processes for securing new or expanded healthcare facilities; holding the ICS to account for progress on key measures; developing a collaborative approach to support recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals in North Kent.

(2) Learning and skills

- **Issue:** North Kent residents' skills and qualifications lag below national levels and new and improved skills will be needed to respond to new challenges and opportunities, including digitalisation, de-carbonisation and automation. Some of these challenges are national/general in nature; however, some are compounded by specific local issues and solutions will need to involve local action.
- **Action:** GNK commissioned a North Kent-specific **Workforce Skills Evidence Base (WSEB)**, completed in December 2021, building upon the existing Kent & Medway WSEB, and used as one of the inputs into the Trailblazer **Local Skills Improvement Plan** for Kent & Medway. This also made important links with the Strategic Development Fund investments being led by the three Further Education Colleges. This report was shared widely with stakeholders ahead of a workshop held in April 2022 aiming to distil a set of priorities for North Kent-specific action.
- **Next steps:** Develop WSEB Action Plan; ongoing engagement with refinement of the LSIP and its follow-up with a particular focus on opportunities linked to climate action and de-carbonisation; develop a collaborative initiative to attract and retain public sector professionals in shortage occupations.

(3) Culture

- **Issue:** Culture runs through the wider place-making agenda and is especially important in creating distinctive places in the context of growth and in contributing to economic, social and health outcomes and in supporting the visitor economy.
- **Action:** Supporting the work of **Creative Estuary** and wider work relating to the **Thames Estuary Production Corridor**. This has particularly focused on looking to increase the supply of sustainable and affordable creative workspace, and serving in an advisory capacity on the Steering Group for Creative Estuary as a whole.
- **Next Steps:** GNK has scheduled the Culture Work Stream for further development from summer 2022; an early priority will be enabling better co-ordination and promotion of events and the cultural offer to visitors and residents across municipal boundaries.

(4) Infrastructure

- **Issue:** Making the case for investment in infrastructure to support anticipated growth, with a particular focus on **digital infrastructure**, especially in relation to addressing digital exclusion, and ensuring GNK engagement on **major investment proposals** that could impact upon North Kent.
- **Action:** As part of the **C2E Partnership**, GNK assisted with the development of the Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for extension of Crossrail to Ebbsfleet and Gravesend, submitted to government in October 2021. GNK has also engaged closely with Homes England and the Thames Estuary Growth Board on the joint Economic, Infrastructure and Housing Study due to be published later in 2022, and as a consultee on proposals including the Lower Thames Crossing and London Resort.
- **Next Steps:** Developing a portfolio of priority infrastructure investments across North Kent, and exploring linkage with skills and employment opportunities.

Other activities

As a new partnership, but building on long-established foundations of joint working, GNK has pursued a mixture of strategic and 'continuity' activity, including:

- Ongoing engagement with the **Thames Estuary Growth Board**, including specific contribution to selected work streams including its Levelling Up Analysis and Data Atlas.
- Research and Report to the Board on the **Kent & Medway Business Fund**, including development of re-purposing options.
- Taking over the former Thames Gateway Kent Partnership (TGKP) role supporting the **North Kent Enterprise Zone** and its Strategic Board, including the Board's wind-up and legacy arrangements at the end of March 2022.
- Ongoing positive engagement and **participation in relevant networks** and programmes led by other bodies including Transport for the South East and South East Creative Economy Network.

Organisational development

To formalize and support its new working arrangements and programme, during 2021/22 GNK established a **Board** comprising the Leaders of the partner authorities, and a **Chief Officers' Group** to lead delivery of the work programme. The Board also agreed: **Terms of Reference**, covering vision and purpose and practical arrangements; a **Greater North Kent Agreement**, setting out partners' mutual commitments including funding; a **Communications Plan**; and **Branding** to provide GNK's distinctive visual identity.

During 2022/23 GNK will be launching a **website** to raise its profile and extend its communications reach.

Greater North Kent

September 2022