**LGA Brexit Roundtable**

**15th March 2019, 2.30 pm at Dover District Council Offices**

**Jointly facilitated by Kent County Council and Dover District Council**

**Welcome:**

* **Cllr Keith Morris**, Leader of Dover District Council
* **Cllr Paul Carter**, Leader of Kent County Council

**Panel and Expert Speakers:**

* **Ian Hughes,** Head of Policy, Local Government Association (LGA)
* **Richard Murphy,** EU Exit Business Intelligence and Readiness Directorate, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
* **Simon Gundry**, Local Government EU Exit Team, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG)
* **Deidre Wells OBE,** Chief Executive, Visit Kent
* **F**i**ona Gaffney,** Head of Kent Resilience Team, Kent County Council
* **Cllr Mike Whiting and Simon Jones,** KCC Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste; and Director of Highways, Transportation & Waste

**Panel Introductions:**

**Visit Kent:**

* The Tourism economy is worth £4bn and has seen 10% growth over the last few years
* When Op Stack was implemented in 2015 73% of businesses were affected
* There has already been a 10% reduction in forward bookings from France, Holland and Germany
* We need to ensure communication is accurate
* We need to rebuild demand as soon as we have clarity
* We need to focus on strong campaigns
* We need to maximise bi-lateral funding programmes and funding
* We need to be communicating nationally loud and clear that we remain open and welcome.

**LGA:**

* Need to raise local issues and opportunities to elevate into Westminster. Here to listen and take information back to Ministers as soon as possible.

**BEIS:**

* The Government is still working to secure a deal but is working to improve its advice and guidance.
* Noted updated information for EU Citizens – all information on the settlement scheme is available on the Government’s EU Exit website[[1]](#footnote-1)
* The Home Office has also published a white paper, setting out the government's immigration plans going forward[[2]](#footnote-2).
* Businesses also need to make sure that they will be data protection compliant – refer to ICO website

**MCHLG:**

* The Government recognises that local authorities have a big role to play.
* Hubs have recently been set up in each of the regions, led by a Chief Executive, to ensure effective information flow, still a relatively new process. Trying to ensure important issues are not being missed and get as much information to the public as possible.

**Kent Resilience Forum:**

* A multi-agency group looking at preparedness from day one and for a ‘new normal’ going forward.
* Some testing of plans have taken place and may need to change plans as events unfold.
* Communications have been difficult; want to make sure plans are right and ready before communicating more widely. Public information will be made available as necessary.

**KCC Highways:**

* Clear message from Chris Grayling and Paul Carter to keep M20 open, so Operation Brock devised to keep Kent’s local roads safe and fit for purpose, and to enhance them.
* Explained how Op Brock would work and advised that it will be up and running from 25th March 2019..
* Working with Kent Police on compliance and enforcement; road enhancements; dedicated freight lanes; creating ‘clearways’; increased CCTV coverage; and ensuring information and signage is readily available. Making sure roads are resilient, drivers, passengers and communities are safe.
* Manston plans are still being developed; up to 6,500 HGV’s so far. Community and environmental impact assessments being completed.
* Ticketing system for HGVs will be implemented, with additional security features so that they cannot be forged.

**Question and Answer Session:**

***Q. Plans don’t work - Op Stack was implemented this week as the town had become gridlocked. Concern raised that foreign drivers will not comply and will try to find alternative routes through.***

A. New Op Brock system was not in place. Recognise that it is not perfect but the hope is that the new plan will mitigate traffic chaos.

***Q. How will you stop drivers trying to by-pass?***

A. Signage and marshalling. Will have to work within current legislation; had advocated for enhanced police powers but the Government responded too late to have in place

The recent Op Stack situation was aggravated by existing roadworks that are being undertaken in preparation for Brexit. Will be looking to have a clear road network for 6-months from Brexit.

In addition to signage and ticketing, will be working with DVLA and ‘stop and detain’ powers to stop any deviation. Will use a combination of discouragement and enforcement regimes.

***Q. Concern raised about the challenge getting staff and customers to and from business premises when town gridlocked***

A. Concern acknowledged.

It was recommended that businesses look at their business continuity plans and consider, for example, changing operating hours, bussing staff into smaller train stations to avoid congestion, making use of trains; communication queue lengths to customers. Actions depend on their operating model.

***Q. Many businesses already have contingency plans in place but these fall down if traffic cannot move.***

A. There will be more staff in place (e.g. Kent Police, Highways England, Kent Highways). Checkpoints will prevent HGV drivers without the correct paperwork entering the route to the Port / Tunnel

***Q. Has central Government looked at holding (non Kent) freight in other counties if Brock is busy? How will perishable goods and livestock be treated?***

A. The DfT is developing a Priority Operations Centre looking at locations and capacity out of Kent; and possibility of diverting freight to other Ports. The keeping freight out of Kent strategy goes up into the Midlands, so looking to signpost key locations on route to try to influence driver behaviour. Also communication campaigns. Recognise Jncs 2 and 3 of the M25 are already over capacity, therefore Jnc 6 will be used to access to the M26 when needed, diversions will be signposted and managed. Will try to preserve local traffic using Jnc 3 and use Jnc 6 as a turnaround. Use of smart signage to influence driver behaviour, for example, use A2/M2 if it is the quickest route.

***Q. Lorries parking up are blocking entrances to local businesses, this is happening overnight and out of hours when parking officers are not working, what can be done? Some foreign lorry drivers do not always want to comply.***

A. DDC parking enforcement officers are patrolling the whole district 24/7. This is a growing problem but we can only issue £70 PCN. If their drivers hours are up, a driver will accept the PCN in preference to a fine for driving over hours Instances of non-compliance can be fed into to the KCC Highways Team to give them more data to influence partners. Drivers can be moved onto places such as Manston. Driver behaviour needs to be influenced so they know by complying they are likely to be on their way more quickly. The Government is looking at the provision of more lorry parks nationwide (either Highways England or private sector license) with suitable facilities for foreign drivers.

***Q. Some businesses will find it easier to put contingency plans in place than others. Public agencies need to be honest that it will be a painful process despite all the hard work being done.***

A. All agreed needs to be honest and accurate information supplied and communicated clearly. KCC Highways is working on providing accurate information regarding journey times.

***Q. When A256 tap is on, tractors and trailers with fresh produce, and HGV deliveries into and out of the district, UK bound, will still need to move around. How can we ensure they will not get caught up in traffic plans?***

A. The A258 will not be a holding area but there will be displacement issues. The A256 will have yellow boxes to keep junctions clear. If the road becomes overwhelmed, tap will be turned off at Manston to create gaps in the flow, to ensure cross traffic and movement and tap A20 will be used to keep the Port full. Local traffic does not have to comply with the freight lane, provided it can prove at the checkpoint that it is local or delivering / collecting from local businesses. We will listen to local communities and adapt as things happen. There will be a dedicated Highways 24 hour phone line to try to resolve issues (number not yet available). This can also be used to report lorries parked incorrectly overnight.

***Q. We welcome the awakening nationally of the importance of the Port of Dover. 17% of trading goods pass through Dover and there have been many campaigns over the past 40-years, for dualling the A2 (can drive all the way from Glasgow and the first set of traffic lights encountered is at Lydden, on the approach to the Port. We welcome the news about lorry parks, however there is a certain amount of confusion about where these will be located. Was the Manston test worthwhile. There are 3 ways to support businesses in Dover: inward investment; current companies getting bigger, and assisting start-ups. Need to send out more positive messages about the district.***

A. Locate in Kent works to promote Kent as a business destination in the UK and nationally. Need to be realistic and then work to get those positive messages out, with compelling reasons for why businesses should locate in Dover. Post Brexit, waiting for certainty before launching a big campaign; will co-ordinate with Visit Kent to get the message out.

We have been asking for years to get Lydden Junction investment and improvements- been a high priority for us but not those in control. Our message to the Secretary of State is that the Third Thames Crossing cannot be delivered in isolation – adequate road infrastructure is needed all of the way from the crossing to the Port.

Kent County Council is the principal funder of Visit Kent, huge success at the Discovery Park and local businesses have been recipients of the Expansion East Kent funding (from the Local Growth Fund). , however, still need to do more rather than less.

There are a number of major events coming up, e.g., Turner Prize and Open Golf and we need to ensure a positive national and international profile, ensuring the new norm is up and ready to capitalise on those major events. Working with colleagues to promote – need to look forward to 2020.

Highways England is moving into their second investment period 2020/21 and we are making representations for Brenley Corner and Lydden to be included in their Kent Corridor Strategic Plan. Design and development – phase 3 – 10-years ahead. Consideration of lorry parks started with 114 potential sites, including those on-road, this has now been filtered down to 14-16 locations. The Manston test was an entrance and exit test only and not about route viability; this was not communicated well and lessons will be learnt.

***Q. Will we learn from mistakes for Operation Stack? , as we have lorries coming from all over the UK, some English and some international, how are we intending to handle customs?***

A. We are not looking to ensure full compliance at the first stage. As we get overwhelmed at the Port or Tunnel we will implement streamlining on M20, talk to lorry drivers and use checks. If drivers comply they will move more quickly. They may try cheating the system but will stopped by police, causing them a delay.

***Q. Representative from a company with short-shelf life products, a big employer (including 50% EU nationals), with about 100 HGVs moving through Dover per week, raised a concern about getting lorries to retail distribution centres and out of the UK as quickly as possible.***

A. Timing depends on what checks are carried out at the border, which can have a knock-on effect on local traffic. HGVs can register for permits to allow access to local businesses. Simon Jones offered to sit down with businesses to look at modelled travel times from various locations.

The Port is working with various control agencies for ways to apply customs controls to lorry traffic. This is currently predicated by goods sitting in a shed and someone performing a check to give clearance for it to leave. This will not work at the Port for all freight as there is insufficient capacity. Need all goods pre-declared before getting to the Port so that goods can embark and discharge as they do now. The Port is confident in-bound traffic will flow at the same rate as it does now, outbound traffic will depend on the speed of French controls. Something new is required. The Government has been slow to publish guidance and not all of it is helpful due to the quantity that is now available. The functioning of the model relies businesses in the supply chain doing something different.

There is danger of placing a blanket of doom over travel in Kent. The Port of Dover does not have confidence in the new traffic management plan but will do everything possible to keep traffic moving.

Freight traffic by and large has to travel through either the Port of Dover or the Tunnel but tourist traffic is discretionary and we need to encourage people to want to travel to the area. Need to take opportunities, while we have the spotlight on us, to show what is good about the district and not focus on what is wrong.

It was recognised that businesses will need help completing the necessary paperwork. The Road Haulage Association is involved with the Border Delivery Group and advice and guidance should be coming out from that Group and from HMRC to help them prepare.

***Q. We need to endorse Kent as open for business. 20,000 students contribute £800m to local economy. If Kent is portrayed as a lorry park it will damage student numbers. Are there enough people to deal with this?***

A. Need to make sure local and national comms is better co-ordinated and reaching all businesses – signposting through, for example, the Chambers of Commerce. A number of agencies have national arrangements through Mutual Aid; locally we also have these arrangements through the Kent Resilience Forum and are satisfied resources are in place. Extra command and control officers have also been trained. We need to think about recovery, positive messages and building the Kent brand. With regards Highways, preparations are strong.

***Q. What engagement has the KRF had with HMRC?***

A. The Border Delivery Group has had engagement for some time, however, they are struggling with co-ordination of all the agencies involved and need to give as much advice locally as possible. In the past couple of weeks more information has come out and the LGA are trying to focus on getting critical information out to councils, so it would be useful to have any feedback from businesses on how they are co-ordinating information.

***Q. There is a large horticultural/agricultural sector in Kent, with seasonal workers drawn from the EU. In a no deal scenario, EU workers will only be able to work for up to 3-months and the harvesting season lasts longer than this period, so employers will need to apply for temporary leave to remain. If the permitting process is held up, how will we ensure the employer is not deemed to be employing illegally?***

A. The BEIS representative ensured this will be taken back to the Home Office and an answer provided.

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| On the 25th March, the following answer was provided:**What right to work checks do employers need to do?** Until 2021, there is no change to right to work checks that employers need to undertake. In a deal or no deal scenario, EU citizens will continue to be able to come to the UK using a passport or national ID card. In a no deal scenario, employers are not expected to differentiate between those who arrive before, or after, leave day.   We will not require employers or landlords to carry out retrospective checks on existing EEA and Swiss workers at the end of the transition period when the new skills-based immigration system is introduced.When the transition period ends, any new employees or tenants will be required to undergo the checks in place under the new skills-based immigration system.Individuals who have obtained status from the Home Office EU Settlement Scheme or the European temporary leave to remain scheme, will be able to use the new on-line status checking service to evidence their entitlement to live and work in this country. |

***Q. In terms of business continuity it is difficult for businesses to know where to start. The housing market is flat, making it difficult for contractors. What efforts are there at the local level to encourage the situation to be resolved? How can market confidence be improved and businesses given the confidence to invest?***

A. Both Councils are advocating to Ministers and MPs at all times. After the referendum there was lots of visionary discussion about devolvement of funds to local areas – not just replacing Brussels with Whitehall. However, these discussions reduced in September time to focus on ‘no deal’ contingency planning but need to be reignited so opportunities can be sought and risks managed.

***Q. Why did it take so long on Wednesday for Maidstone to wake up and help Dover, when the traffic situation started at 5.40am? There is a rumour tourist traffic will be put through Dover town, how do we protect our communities?***

A. There will be a debrief with Highways England about the speed of response and what could have happened better. Need to work better together on Dover pinch points to better understand and manage events and managing passenger traffic and local road users. Need to warn and inform communities better. Lessons have been learnt from 2016 when passenger traffic was held for long periods and have a much better understanding of the needs of people stuck in traffic. Op Perch is dealing with this and working with centres and supermarkets about placement of facilities, storage and support.

The messages to take back are: risks to national and local economy; concerns of local companies e.g. transport; getting legislation through quickly to support local businesses; big events coming up that need support and attention e.g. Open Golf and Lambeth Conference.

**Main points the panel will take away from the meeting:**

* Challenge plans, make sure there is honest dialogue and share information immediately to help businesses prepare
* Better understanding of specific local issues and lorries moving around for local businesses and look at how better to ensure local businesses are not disadvantaged. Will work with local businesses on predicted return times to the continent / around the UK
* Start looking at opportunities; going into recovery and getting positive messages out.
* Note the importance MHCLG can play in supporting local businesses and local government and fight as hard as we can to make sure local voices are heard. Ensure communication flows are effective and information is as relevant as possible.
* Heard concerns regarding infrastructure, will put together a briefing and flag up to BEIS and other government departments being worked with. Issues of lorry parking will also be flagged. Note the action point regarding seasonal workers and will take this up with the Home Office.
* Dover is at the front line - moving forward we need to empower local places such as this to be able to make own local decisions.
* Will pick up the points on local traffic and make sure this is properly thought through and considered at KRF.
1. [www.euexit.campaign.gov.uk/](http://www.euexit.campaign.gov.uk/)). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-future-skills-based-immigration-system> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)