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**Minutes currently confidential to Council**

**Minutes marked Commercial in confidence or confidential have been redacted from the web version**

**UNIVERSITY OF KENT**

**MEETING OF COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Strategy Day held on 23 January 2025**

**Hybrid Meeting Held at Darwin Boardroom, Darwin Conference Suite, Canterbury Campus and via MS Teams**

**Present:** The Chair of Council, Mark Preston; The Deputy Chair of Council and Chair of Finance & Resources Committee, Andrew Newell; The Acting Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Georgina Randsley de Moura; Lay members: Dr Mark Downs; Paul Pugh; Victoria Wilson; Graham Razey OBE; Dr Sam Parrett CBE; Sarah Dance; Julie Kelly. President Kent Union, Lulu Collins; Vice President Postgraduate Experience, Cláudia Moreira; Elected Student Representative, Lewis Sawyer; Deputy Vice Chancellor Education and Student Experience (ESE), Professor Richard Reece; Acting Deputy Vice Chancellor Strategy and Performance (S&P), Professor Claire Peppiatt-Wildman; Academic Staff Representatives, Dr Balihar Sanghera, Professor Shujun Li; Non-Academic Staff Representatives, Jahanara Ahmed, Dr Daniel Knox.

**In attendance:** Leader of Kent County Council (Cllr Roger Gough), Leader of Medway Council (Cllr Vince Maple) and team (David Smith, David Godfrey, Bryan Adam) for item 1; Chief Financial Officer (Jane Higham); Director of Financial Sustainability, Peter Pentecost; Policy Adviser (David Powell), DVC R&I (Professor Shane Weller) and Pro-Vice Chancellor (Professor David Wilkinson) for item 1; Pro-Vice Chancellor Education Modernisation (Professor Ben Cosh); Director of Education (William Collier), Head of Careers and Employability (James Corbin) and Head of Students Services (Mica Rose) for item 5; Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor (Professor Iain Wilkinson) and Head of Philanthropy and Alumni Relations (Hilary Edridge) for item 7; Director of Commercial Services and Estates (Trevor Periera) for item 6; Assistant Director of Governance, Sarah Megson; Lanre Folarin, Head of Secretariat; Dr Jo Wright, Director of Governance and Assurance (Secretary to the Council).

**Apologies:** Mayuri Lakhani; Dan Cook; Thomas Hyner.

**5920 STRATEGY DISCUSSION: DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER**

Council discussed the implication of devolution on the local Councils of Kent and Medway with Cllr Roger Gough, Leader of Kent County Council and Cllr Vince Maple, Leader of Medway Council.

**[minutes confidential to Council]** Council indicated its commitment to working with both Council Leaders to deliver a successful devolution and highlighted possible areas for collaboration and innovation, possible partners to engage as well as how to improve funding.

*Action: EG to present a briefing paper on devolution to Council in due course.*

## 5921 CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

- a. The Chair welcomed members, particularly, Victoria Wilson and Julie Kelly who were joining the meeting in person for the first time. Subsequently, the Chair highlighted the matters for approval as well as the workshop and encouraged contributions from members. Apologies were also noted.
- b. The Chair also reported that Dan Cook would be stepping down from Council due to **[minutes confidential to Council]**. In view of this, the Chair stated that there would be need to appoint a substitute member to the Joint Committee for the Appointment of the Vice Chancellor.
- c. **Disclosure of Interest:** None.

## 5922 ACTING VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Acting Vice Chancellor welcomed everyone and reported on the following:

### **External:**

- The upcoming Spending Review and funding for the higher education sector
- The possible overhauling of portions of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech legislation imposing free speech duties on higher education in England over and beyond the promotion of free speech.

### **Internal:**

- Positive Philanthropy Impact Report
- Assessment of Brompton Academy, Medway ('Good' in all six categories)

Council noted the Acting Vice-Chancellor's updates.

## 5923 REBASED KENT 2030 PLAN: TUITION FEE INCOME

The DVC (S&P), Director of HR&OD, Chief Financial Officer and Financial Sustainability Director made a presentation on the **Student Recruitment Strategy, Planning and Business Intelligence** and **Priority Subject Areas** with the following highlights:

- The K2030 strategy remains viable but a rebase was necessary due to the negative in-year recruitment position, the sector context, funding and projects' status.
- The new portfolios in furtherance of the Educational Modernisation and Employability Workstream will launch in September 2025.
- Plans aimed at ramping up efforts in conversion, international recruitment, TNE, tariff and offer strategy, employability skills and research and innovation income.

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- Recommended immediate priorities and resourcing plans for income generation, cost control and funding, as well as a proposed timeline.

Through discussions, Council noted that:

- Given the obvious change in student demographics, there is need to ascertain the type of students that are being recruited by the University as this will enable the University to develop a targeted approach in marketing and provide bespoke support to students. This includes ensuring a positive and consistent student experience and the need to deploy a long-term plan that ensures this is delivered.
- There is a need to identify and project the unique value proposition of the University (which could vary across various Schools) and improve the University's profile across and beyond the South-East region. The University should work with the colleges within the region and adopt a proactive, rather than reactive tariff strategy, regardless of the pressures from competition.
- Coherently project the University's identity across the various schools.
- The international market appears more buoyant than the home market provided the University is able to develop a winning approach that appeals to international students, e.g. accreditations, reputation, league tables position, etc.
- The core issues to note and address are high cost and limited revenue and a way to possibly reduce revenue uncertainty is to improve TNE collaboration as an additional channel for overseas recruitment.
- Measuring student experience is quite complex as the feedback from surveys like the NSS give a one year snap shot of a third year cohort, which may not mirror the feedback from all students on ground. There is thus a need to continuously engage students to measure their expectations and experiences and this dovetails into the need to prioritise academic staff performance management and identify other areas for improvement.
- There has been a lot of positive feedback from the University's Open Day experiences which point to the fact that there are still so many good staff in the University and they are the University's best assets. There are also a lot of stories about the positive impact of the University on the lives of many students and these should be better publicised. It was noted that the Student Recruitment and Outreach teams were being merged precisely for this reason and the benefits will soon be obvious.
- The focus should now be on deciding the key 3 things that can be done to deliver the most impact in favour of the University.

### 5924 STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The DVC (ESE), the Director of Education, and the Pro-Vice Chancellor on Educational Modernisation presented an update on the **NSS Action Plan**, **Graduate Outcomes**, and **Continuous Improvement Projects** being deployed with the following highlights:

- With the new academic structure now in place, improvement plans are being disseminated to individual Schools and the Heads of Schools and School Directors of Education will have clear responsibility for improvements.

- All institutional actions in the plan are either complete or due for completion in Spring Term. In addition, a suite of education and student voice related metrics, some aligned to NSS actions, have been confirmed by the Education and Student Experience portfolios for inclusion in the new School Dashboards being developed by SPP to support current and future cycles of institutional and School planning.
- A more rigorous monitoring of the educational basics (turnaround times for course work, peer observations of teaching, assessment and feedback principles, common academic advising structure across the institution, etc) will be introduced.
- Effective implementation of EM25 is expected to shift the dial on future NSS results.
- Employability is being embedded into degree offerings to equip students with the skills and confidence to enter the workplace of their choice. It entails the Graduate Support Programme and Career Readiness support.
- Continuous Improvement Projects were noted as necessary promote student engagement with campus facilities and improve overall student experience. The initial focus will be on student events, facilities enhancement and student voice activities.

Through discussions, Council noted that:

- There have been extensive timetabling improvements based on student feedback in order to improve student planning given that many students are having to balance studying alongside work due to the cost of living crisis. Although it was noted that the timetabling software needs to be improved and that early release of the timetable, rather than frequent updates should be prioritised. Additionally, it was mentioned that sufficient initiatives should be introduced to keep non-working students sufficiently engaged and maintain sufficient student footfall on campus; e.g., language programmes; optional lectures; seminars; student advisory services tutorials.
- With EM25, continuous assessment will be introduced and thus, assessment feedback will be more frequent (per term), enabling students to tackle their areas of weakness earlier in the academic session.
- To improve assessment quality, workshops on Professional Assessment Frameworks are being convened to better equip staff and in turn set the structures for better NSS results in future. There will also be improved monitoring of the delivery of staff objectives. Academic are also encouraged to undertake the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme.
- The drive for employability should be balanced against the need to ensure that the University still pursues the objective of transforming minds. It was noted that Academic Learning, Work-Readiness and Employability are not mutually exclusive and being applicable to the FE sector, must also be applicable to the HE sector. Promoting employability goes beyond the academic content.
- Student experience is very individualistic and young people will rate an institution based on their experience. The University must be aware of this and deploy the necessary resources to deliver on relevant initiatives, including improving the teaching quality.

Director of Commercial Services and Estates presented and Council **noted** the proposed restructure of the University's facilities management model **[minutes confidential to Council]**. The presentation set out the objectives of the project, the options open to the University as well as the risks involved, and the route to market for a potential outsourcing opportunity.

Council was informed that a tender process was currently ongoing for one of the projects and projected to conclude by March to give room for due diligence reviews and contract negotiations in hopes of going live by January 2026.

Council was also informed and **noted** that the contract negotiation process for the other project was tracking positively and a business case would be presented to Council by March.

Through discussions, Council noted that:

- The impact of the proposed model on the interests of staff, students and other stakeholders were being addressed first by ensuring the selection of an adaptable partner and by improving service standards.
- **[minutes confidential to Council]**.
- **[minutes confidential to Council]**.
- **[minutes confidential to Council]**.
- There is also a plan to adopt more use of technology and AI to enhance service delivery.
- The structure of the contract should, as much as is allowable by the standard CCS (Crown Commercial Service) framework, be negotiated and prepared in a way that is fit for purpose. It was also confirmed that the University would obtain legal advice in this regard.

**Action:** *Present the full business cases for both projects to Council in due course.  
(Director C&E; CFO)*

## 5926 UNIVERSITY OF SANCTUARY: THE SANCTUARY SCHOLARS

Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor Iain Wilkinson and Head of Philanthropy & Alumni Relations, Hilary Edridge gave a presentation on the work of the University in the area of providing Article 26 Scholarships. They explained that the University provides scholarships and fellowships to students and at-risk academics seeking asylum in the UK and has provided 150 scholarships and 8 fellowships, since 2012 and 2015, respectively. The University also works closely with the Council for At Risk Academics, amongst others.

In particular, the University aims to transform lives by supporting up to 5 undergraduates per year and a maximum of 15 scholars at any given time, and aspires to increase the financial and wellbeing support provided through the Sanctuary Fund. It was mentioned that there are currently 11 Sanctuary Scholars in the University and a few of their stories were told. There was also an opportunity for Council members to meet with some of them after the session.

**5927 REBASED KENT 2030 PLAN: FUNDING UPDATES**

The Chief Financial Officer, Financial Sustainability Director and Director of Commercial Services and Estates reported the latest developments to Council.

**A. C2024-058**

[minutes confidential to Council].

[minutes confidential to Council].

[minutes confidential to Council].

The final transaction terms will be presented to FRC and Council for approval.

**Decision**

Council noted the update and **approved** the advancement of the transaction [minutes confidential to Council].

*Action: CFO & FSD to present final HoT for approval of FRC and Council and facilitate an updated PSA21 analysis by EY in due course.*

**B. Project Update**

The Financial Sustainability Director presented an update on the transaction and the significant progress made since the last meeting. Council was informed of the basic deal parameters as well as the pros, cons, risks and implications for the University. [minutes confidential to Council].

It was noted that this opportunity was due to come back to Finance & Resources Committee and then Council for final sign off when all the documentation is complete, and will require Lender approvals. Council was pleased to hear of the progress and clearly recognised the benefits that the opportunity brings to the University. Concern was expressed, however, that, given the extension granted to the sector for audited accounts to be finalised, the signing off of the University's accounts would not likely be until the end of March. Council's view was that it should not enter into a long-term financial commitment of this nature until the accounts have been signed off.

**Decision**

Council therefore recommended that the timescale [minutes confidential to Council] be deferred until after the signing off of the accounts and that this decision be shared with the counterparties as soon as possible to manage their expectations. A full business case will be presented at the next FRC and Council meetings.

*Action: Full Business Case to be presented to FRC and Council in due course (FSD, CFO, Dir CSE).*

## 5928 REBASED KENT 2030 PLAN: FINANCIALS

The Chief Financial Officer presented the financial update including papers **C2024-059** Key Stakeholder Update, Rebased Plan Assumptions, and **C2024-060** Outperformance Test, alongside the Head of Legal, DVC (S&P), and the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development. Paper **C2024-061** was taken as read.

Council was advised to and noted trustees' duties throughout the deliberations.

### A. C2024-059 Key Stakeholder Update

**[minutes confidential to Council]**The OfS have been sufficiently updated on the Rebased Plan **[minutes confidential to Council]**. Likewise, Pension Schemes will be updated on the Rebased Plan in due course.

### B. Rebased Plan Assumptions

Council was reminded of and discussed the key assumptions of the Rebased Plan with the following highlights:

- Current Financial Performance and our in-year mitigations
- Rebasing the plan – focus on expenditure
- Savings required for a sustainable cost base
- TOM Phase 2 and 2A
- Academic Productivity – the performance management framework
- TOM Phase 3

Through discussions, Council noted that:

- There is an urgent need to take action to close the gap in forecasted revenue and actual income and the rebased plan will help achieve that, albeit over a longer period. **[minutes confidential to Council]****[minutes confidential to Council]**.
- **[minutes confidential to Council]**.
- The need to prioritise staff and student support throughout the delivery of the various initiatives necessary to keep the University on track for financial sustainability, was agreed. It was also agreed that there is need for more innovation.

### C. C2024-060

Council considered paper **C2024-060** as follows:

#### 1. Documents

- 1.1 A draft copy of the rebased Kent 2030 plan (the “Rebased Kent 2030 Plan”), including the proposal to amend the University’s facility agreements, prepared by the University, with support from EY, (the “Lender Proposal”) was made available in advance of the meeting via the Diligent Board portal.

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1.2 The Council received an oral update from the Chief Financial Officer (Jane Higham) and the Financial Sustainability Director (Peter Pentecost), talking to the Lender Proposal, which detailed:

- (a) [minutes confidential to Council];
- (b) [minutes confidential to Council];
- (c) [minutes confidential to Council].

1.3 [minutes confidential to Council].

1.4 [minutes confidential to Council]

1.5 Copies of the following documents were made available in advance of the meeting via the Diligent Board portal:

- (a) a deed of amendment [minutes confidential to Council]; and
- (b) a deed of amendment to the override agreement [minutes confidential to Council].

## 2. Noted

2.1 It was noted in particular that:

- (a) [minutes confidential to Council];
- (b) [minutes confidential to Council];
- (c) [minutes confidential to Council];
- (d) [minutes confidential to Council];
- (e) [minutes confidential to Council].

## Deeds of Amendment

2.2 [minutes confidential to Council]:

- (a) [minutes confidential to Council] or
- (b) [minutes confidential to Council],  
[minutes confidential to Council].

2.3 [minutes confidential to Council].

2.4 [minutes confidential to Council].

2.5 [minutes confidential to Council].

2.6 [minutes confidential to Council].

## 3. Consideration of Pension Schemes Act 2021

3.1 It was noted that the University is a participating employer in the Pension Schemes.

3.2 In agreeing to any terms within the Lender Proposal, the University must have regard to its obligations under the Pensions Schemes and, in particular, to the provisions of the Pensions Act 2004 and the Pension Schemes Act 2021.

3.3 **[minutes confidential to Council].**

3.4 **[minutes confidential to Council].**

**4. Resolved**

4.1 After due and careful consideration of the Lender Proposal, and taking into account their duties and obligations as charity trustees pursuant to the Charities Act 2011, their obligations under the Pension Acts and all other relevant legislation and the University's constitutional documents and considering the best interests of the University and its creditors, it was duly resolved by the Council that:

(a) **[minutes confidential to Council]:**

(i) **[minutes confidential to Council]a:**

(1) **[minutes confidential to Council];**

(2) **[minutes confidential to Council];**

(3) **[minutes confidential to Council];**

**[minutes confidential to Council];**

(ii) **[minutes confidential to Council];**

(iii) **[minutes confidential to Council];** and

(b) **[minutes confidential to Council]:**

(i) **[minutes confidential to Council];**

(ii) **[minutes confidential to Council].**

(iii) **[minutes confidential to Council].**

**D. C2024-061 Terms of Reference for Council Sub-Group**

Council noted and approved paper **C2024-061**.

**5929 UPDATE ON VC APPOINTMENT**

Martin Atkinson, Director of HR&OD informed Council that the recruitment was nearing the final stage as the final selection process would commence in the second week of February along with requests for character and employer references. He explained that the shortlisted candidates had signed Non-Disclosure Agreements in view of the financial information shared with them.

The recruitment process has attracted candidates from diverse backgrounds and currently has good shortlist of 6 candidates (5 males and 1 female; 2 with non-HE

experience). There has been reasonable staff engagement in the early stages of the recruitment process.

**5930 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

**5931 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Council noted the following dates for forthcoming meetings in the academic session 2024/25 holding at the Darwin Boardroom unless otherwise Indicated:

- Friday 21 March 2025 (2-5pm) (*Medway*)
- Friday 16 May 2025 (2-5pm)
- Friday 27 June 2025 (2-5pm)

**Notes**

**1. Papers**

Copies are available on the Council e-board portal (Diligent Boards) or on request from the Secretary. Approved Minutes and many of the papers are published on the University SharePoint site at <https://livekentac.sharepoint.com/sites/council>.

**2. Queries**

Any queries should be addressed to Dr Jo Wright, (University Secretary), (email: [j.wright-2062@kent.ac.uk](mailto:j.wright-2062@kent.ac.uk)).