

9th January 2010

1. Business in East Kent

Featured in the last edition of the Thanet & East Kent insider was Paul Carter, Leader of Kent County Council. Delegates at the Chamber business breakfast will recall that Paul stated that 2009 had been the worst year for business he could recall in the last 30 years. In his New Year message, he reiterated his call for the public sector to do more to help local businesses, or as he put it, 'The public sector in general needs to understand that support to our business community is crucial, good public services are dependent upon the private sector providing job opportunities and prosperity'. His prescription of 'less regulation, less bureaucracy and less interference' will find a welcome reception in East Kent as it struggles to come to terms with increased VAT. The KCC Leader's solid support for an extension of High Speed 1 to Manston to create a direct fast rail link to London will also help to boost confidence in Thanet. With the imminent huge increase in investment in wind turbines off the Ramsgate coast and the recent green light for the Dreamland Heritage Amusement Park, Thanet is fast losing its 'peripheral' tag and inward investors are keen to take advantage of the new opportunities. As one Chamber member in property development remarked recently, 'At weekends, there are a lot more personalised number plates on our roads with the drivers looking at the future through their windscreens'.

2. Business Premises Available

Evans Business Centre at Hersden has contacted the Chamber with a list of commercial premises to rent from January 2010 on an 'easy in, easy out' basis with no legal costs or complicated documentation. These range from a two-person office of 205 sq ft commanding a standard rental charge of just £175 +VAT per month to a 1,012 sq ft workshop at £425+VAT per month. The standard monthly rental fee includes a service charge and landlord's insurance. An alternative pricing option of 'inclusive rent' covers business rates, electricity, water, furniture and telecoms. The offices are well suited for any business owner wanting up to six workstations and there is free parking. For more details email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Evans Business Centre" or telephone 0800 0393900.

3. VAT Update

We are grateful to Mark Hurdman of Levicks Chartered Accountants and Business Advisors, for this update on VAT returns. 'HMRC are reminding businesses that new rules on how VAT returns are submitted and payments are made will come into force next year. Paper VAT returns will be phased out from 1 April 2010. As a start of this phasing out process, businesses with both an annual turnover of £100,000 or more, and all businesses which register or should have registered for VAT on or after 1 April 2010 will need to submit their VAT returns online and make payments electronically from April 2010. Those businesses that are already VAT registered, with a turnover below the threshold, will have the choice to use paper returns but this will be reviewed by 2012. Penalties for failing to make an electronic return will be based on turnover and will start at a minimum of £100. HMRC have announced a period of grace which means that penalties will not be imposed initially, however periods ending on or after 31 March 2011 will be charged. This grace period is to allow businesses to adjust to the change in procedures.' If you find this confusing, do not worry. It probably means that you are perfectly normal, eat a well balanced diet and enjoy quality time with your friends and family. Fortunately, there is a Chamber member near you who can provide enlightenment at an eminently reasonable cost that you will probably recover in the savings you make. Levicks of Canterbury, Maidstone & Broadstairs, tel: (01843) 862716, Neville Weston of Ramsgate tel: 01843 594571, Michael Martin Partnership Ltd of Whitstable tel: 01227 770500, JW Accountancy Services of Sheperdswell tel: 01304 830229, J Cleverdon of Broadstairs tel: 01843 866599, IGF Invoice Finance of Maidstone, tel: 01732 849872, County Consultancy of Broadstairs tel: 01843 579316 and Certax Accounting of Margate tel: 01843 280004.

4. Thanet, Canterbury, Dover & Shepway

At the start of 2007, Thanet District Council, Canterbury City Council, Dover District Council and Shepway District Council did not submit a bid to the Department for Communities and Local Government for status as a unitary authority as outlined in the 2006 Local Government White Paper. However, they did agree to work with other Kent councils to examine the issue of shared services. Since then joint arrangements for Human Resources and Audit & Payroll have been agreed between the four councils and are now operational. Dover and Shepway are expected to begin a shared Waste Disposal service in September of this year with Thanet and Canterbury joining in 2013. Kent Regional News tells us that combined savings to the public purse of using a single waste disposal contractor are estimated at £4.4m per year from 2013. It is accepted by all parties that public funding will be under severe constraints in the short and medium term and, as a result, the case for East Kent Joint Services is in sharp focus. There are four options for joint working under examination; lead authority hosting, outsourcing to a private sector provider, joint management arrangements and a Joint Services Group (JSG). News reaching the Thanet & East Kent Insider suggests that the JSG option is currently favourite with the lead authority model not far behind. Many aspects of managing local services could function under either preferred choice. The East Kent Joint Arrangements Committee (EKJAC) has a delicate task in ensuring that each area gains cost savings of at least 10% without compromising local democratic control. Key issues will be the level of service required by each council and who is in charge of each department. Sources close to EKJAC suggest that full agreement should be reached before May 2011 so that the savings can take effect in the ensuing financial year.

5. G Brown Incident

Any readers who over-indulged during the Christmas and New Year break may have experienced some temporary embarrassment if they were momentarily confused through a lack of clear sightedness. This may have been the case with a certain senior politician with the name G Brown. This refers of course not to the distinguished Right Honourable Gordon Brown MP, Prime Minister, First

Lord of the Treasury and Minister of the Civil Service but to the late George Brown, the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party (1960 – 1970) and Foreign Secretary (1966 – 1968) sometimes dubbed ‘the best Foreign Secretary we ever had before lunchtime’. Through his personal spending, he nobly supported British brewing interests. His well publicised drinking habits added to the rich vocabulary of modern English; the phrase ‘tired and emotional’ was first coined by Private Eye to describe his behaviour after lunch. It was alleged that George Brown was at an official gathering in South America and much the worse for drink when he stumbled across the room towards an elegant vision in red and asked for the honour of the next dance. He is supposed to have received the chilling reply, ‘I will not dance with you for three reasons. The first is that you are drunk. The second is that the band is not playing a waltz, but the Peruvian national anthem. Finally, I should point out that I am the Cardinal Archbishop of Lima.’

6. Our Sponsors

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