AGENDA

CABINET

Wednesday, 22nd July, 2026, at 2.00 pm	Ask for:	**Georgina Little**
Council Chamber	Telephone:	**Tel: 03000 414043**
		Email: georgina.little@kent.gov.uk

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UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

(During these items the meeting is likely to be open to the public)

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the agenda
3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 June 2026 (Pages 1 - 20)
4. Cabinet Member Updates
5. 26/00031 - Adoption of the Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) Strategy (Pages 21 - 64)

EXEMPT ITEMS

(At the time of preparing the agenda there were no exempt items. During any such items which may arise the meeting is likely NOT to be open to the public)

Benjamin Watts
Deputy Chief Executive
03000 416814

Tuesday, 14 July 2026

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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 25 June 2026.

PRESENT: Ms L Kemkaran, Mr B Collins, Mr P Osborne, Mr C Hespe, Mr P Webb, Mrs B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mr J Henderson and Mr C Burwash (Substitute for Mr R Palmer)

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr A Ghosh (Director of Public Health), Ms S Hill (Director of Operations (Long Term Support)), Mr K Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Mrs C Head (Head of Finance Operations), Mr B Watts (Deputy Chief Executive), Mr J McKay (Acting Chief Accountant) and Mr M Wagner (Chief Analyst)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

138. Apologies
(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Palmer and Mr Wimble.

Mr Burwash, Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services was in attendance to provide an update on the portfolio on behalf of Mr Palmer. Mr Henderson provided up an update on behalf of Mr Wimble, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special projects.

139. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the agenda
(Item 2)

No declarations of interest were received.

140. Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 March 2026
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 26th March 2026 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

141. Cabinet Member Updates
(Item 4)

1. Mrs Beverley Fordham (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) provided an update on the following:

   (a) An update was provided on KCC's internal work to develop the draft Kent SEND Reform Plan for the Department for Education. She noted a fuller update would be presented to the CYPE Committee. It was explained that the plan was a Kent-wide, sector-led document, developed collaboratively with partners to meet the SEND Reform White Paper requirements. Contributors included education and children's services, Kent Association of Leaders in

Education (KALE), Kent Special Educational Needs Trust (KSENT), Kent Parents and Carers Together (PACT,) NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB), health providers, Early Years settings, schools, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) and post-16 providers. Mrs Fordham highlighted that KCC's role would increasingly be to convene the system over the next decade, while continuing its statutory duties. She acknowledged the leadership of Craig Chapman (Interim Deputy Director for Education: Access and Inclusion), supported by David Adams (Interim Deputy Director - Effectiveness, Sufficiency and Skills), and gave particular thanks to Sophie Dan (Assistant Director SEN Strategy and Quality Assurance) for coordinating the plan and bringing together evidence, data and partners despite sector-wide challenges.

The Kent SEND Reform Plan had been developed and submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) on 19 June, following the close of the public consultation on 18 June. No feedback had yet been received from the DfE.

It was noted that the DfE would review submissions from all local authorities and determine any required amendments, with an outcome anticipated in September. The approval of the plan was highlighted as critical, as it was linked to addressing 90% of the high needs deficit and to future funding arrangements. This presented significant financial, operational and reputational, risks. It was confirmed that a more detailed update would be provided at the CYPE Committee and subsequently at Scrutiny following the DfE's response. Members were advised that further information could be discussed outside the meeting if required

(b) Mrs Fordham attended a workshop in Gravesend, delivered by The Ground in partnership with Gravesend Grammar School for Boys. The session brought together pupils from local schools to share their views on issues including mobile phone use, health and wellbeing, and the curriculum. It was highlighted that young people's perspectives closely aligned with those of employers. Key themes included the need for stronger focus on life skills such as financial literacy, budgeting, workplace experience, enhanced careers guidance, greater employer engagement, and increased vocational and practical learning opportunities. Participants also expressed a desire for earlier access to these experiences, rather than waiting until post-16 pathways. The workshop demonstrated the insight, ambition and engagement of young people, and reinforced the importance of ensuring future policy development reflects these priorities to improve outcomes.

1.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) The Leader noted that the workshop initiative was an excellent model for promoting pupil voice and skills development, and a meeting was welcomed to explore how this approach could be expanded across Kent. The importance of resilience, preparation for adulthood and vocational skills was emphasised as a key priority for the administration.

2. Mrs Georgia Foster (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care), provided an update on the following:

(a) Mrs Foster introduced herself in her new role and expressed appreciation to the directorate management team and wider staff for their support during her five-week induction. Thanks were also extended to her predecessor, Miss Diane Morton, for her contributions. It was noted that the induction period had been very positive.

(b) Recent visits undertaken were outlined, including to Cliftonville Library, which had been refurbished. It was noted that the refurbishment included the installation of a Changing Places facility, providing accessible features such as wider doors, a hoist and a changing bed. Reference was also made to information available on the KCC website to help residents locate such facilities across the county, supporting improved accessibility and inclusion.

(c) Mrs Foster visited West View Integrated Care Centre in Tenterden, accompanied by Mr Chapman as the local member. It was noted that the centre was one of four owned by KCC and supported patients following hospital discharge through rehabilitation, physiotherapy and reablement, with the aim of enabling individuals to return safely to their homes. The dedication of staff was highlighted, with particular thanks given to the activities organiser for her compassionate engagement with residents. Positive service user experiences were also reflected in the number of messages of appreciation displayed at the centre.

(d) Furthermore, Mrs Foster reported on a visit to Milton Hague day services in Gravesend. The service supported around 50 individuals from Gravesend and Dartford. It was noted that KCC supported staff to gain qualifications, demonstrated by a staff member who progressed from apprentice to duty manager over 20 years, providing a strong testament to this approach.

(e) It was noted that Carers Week took place from 8th to 14th June, recognising the vital contribution of unpaid carers across Kent in supporting families, friends and neighbours, and their importance to health and social care services. A Carers' Coffee Morning was hosted at Sessions House on 10th June by Mrs Foster, Mrs Palmer (Deputy Cabinet member for Adult Social Care) and Mr Evans (Vice Chairman of the Council), which provided an opportunity to thank carers and recognise their often unseen contributions. Members were also signposted to information available on the KCC website to support carers and assist with enquiries from residents.

(f) Learning Disability Week took place from 15th to 21st June. KCC supported Mencap's campaign, recognising the valuable contribution of people with learning disabilities and the importance of ensuring they were listened to and fully included. The work that continued to take place across Kent to break down barriers, challenge stigma and support people with learning disabilities to live full, independent and meaningful lives was welcomed. An exhibition, "Do You See Me," was held at Sessions House. During the visit, information was shared about the Learning Disability Partnership Board, through which people with lived experience helped to shape services. The opportunity to speak with the Co-Chair, who had lived experience, was welcomed. It was noted that the Board met at locations across Kent and would welcome offers of suitable venues for future meetings.

(g) Loneliness Awareness Week took place from 15th to 21st June, which promoted conversations about loneliness and encouraged community connection. Members were also signposted to information on befriending services available on the Kent Connect to Support website.

2.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) The Leader welcomed the Cabinet Member to her new role and noted the support received during her induction. Tribute was paid to Miss Morton for her contributions. It was also noted that KCC's support for staff development and qualifications was important for both career progression and service delivery. Appreciation was expressed for unpaid carers across Kent, recognising their vital and often unseen contribution, and the support provided to them

3. Mr Chris Burwash (Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services), provided an update on the following on behalf of Mr Richard Palmer:

(a) Community Wardens had delivered a water safety programme for young people, reaching approximately 100 participants.

(b) The Community Safety Team had successfully passed four reviews.

(c) Trading Standards had secured a significant sentencing outcome, resulting in a 10-year sentence, and had prevented substantial financial losses, including saving £89 million for businesses and £42,000 from nine residents targeted by doorstep scams. Enforcement activity had also led to the closure of over half of illegally trading tobacco shops in Maidstone.

(d) Libraries were noted to be performing well, with Folkestone Library having reopened after three years, alongside refurbishments at Cliftonville and Queenborough.

(e) Improvements to accessibility were highlighted, including the provision of wheelchair access to the Leysdown footpath for the first time.

(f) Progress was also reported through the Active Kent and Medway scheme, which had supported increased physical activity, including free sessions for over 50s and participation by 400 girls.

3.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) The Leader thanked Mr Burwash for highlighting the reopening of Folkestone Library, noting that it was the first new library to open in 14 years. It was highlighted that, despite previous proposals to reduce library provision, the administration had not only retained existing libraries but also enabled new openings, reflecting a strong commitment to literacy and reading in Kent.

4. Mr Jamie Henderson (Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health), provided an update on the following:

   (a) An update was provided on the current heatwave conditions across Kent. It was noted that a Met Office Red Extreme Heat Warning had come into force for western and north-western areas of the county at 9.00am on 24th June, initially until 9.00pm, with the potential for extension. For the remainder of Kent, an Amber Extreme Heat Warning had been in place since 22nd June and had been extended through to Saturday.

   It was highlighted that the UK Health Security Agency had advised that such warnings indicated a risk to life, including for otherwise healthy individuals. Residents were urged to stay informed of forecasts and to check on vulnerable groups, including older people, young children, those who were unwell, and expectant mothers, particularly those who may be unaware of overheating.

   Advice was given on keeping cool, including closing curtains during the day, opening windows at night, staying hydrated, using sunscreen, and seeking shaded areas. Caution was also urged around open water, with residents advised to take care and avoid entering water alone.

   (b) Mr Henderson was accompanied by Mr Mulvihill (Deputy Cabinet Member) on a visit to a residential drug and alcohol recovery service operated by Change, Grow, Live. It was noted that residents spoke of their optimism for the future and appreciation for the support received in overcoming dependency. The importance of these services was acknowledged, and a commitment was given to support their continued delivery, particularly in coastal areas where need was greatest.

   (c) Meningitis B vaccinations would be offered to eligible students in Kent ahead of starting college or university in September. It was noted that meningitis could spread through close contact, including sharing drinks or vapes, kissing and shared accommodation. The programme was described as a one-off initiative aimed at providing reassurance to young people and their families. Eligible individuals would be contacted directly via the NHS app, text, email or letter, with appointments available in July and August for two doses administered at least four weeks apart

   (d) It was reported that, following a further water supply issue in May, the Leader had announced the establishment of the Kent Water Resilience Partnership to address water security and support collaborative action across the county. An inaugural meeting was scheduled for 8th October, bringing together leaders and senior officers to consider strategic challenges and identify key priorities, including those highlighted in the cross-party water-focused inquiry. It was also noted that £170,000 of funding had been secured through the EU's Pathways to Resilience programme to support climate resilience and adaptation. This work would be aligned with the Water Resilience Partnership and the Kent Water Strategy.

   (e) Preparations for the waste conference scheduled for early July were underway, with strong interest from partners wishing to participate. The conference would bring together key stakeholders to address fly tipping and identify practical, collaborative actions. The importance of joint working between borough councils, and the County Council as the waste disposal authority, was emphasised, noting the significant cost of fly tipping to council taxpayers.

(f) It was reported that a new, more cost-effective and simplified booking system had been launched across Household Waste Recycling Centres, which went live on 17 June following a full procurement process. The system made it quicker and easier for residents to book visits and removed the requirement to create an account, addressing issues such as forgotten passwords and duplicate accounts. Further improvements, including integration with the restricted vehicle voucher system, were planned.

(g) Significant improvement works had been completed at Ashford Waste Transfer Station. The original concrete floor had reached the end of its usable life, and a strengthened concrete base had been installed alongside new bay walls to meet waste separation and storage standards. The site had remained accessible for much of the works and fully reopened on 23 May. The investment ensured the facility remained compliant, resilient and fit for long-term service delivery. The works were completed on time and within budget, despite increased complexity, and thanks were extended to those involved.

(h) A Repair Café conference had been held on 19 June, bringing together volunteer repairers and organisations from across Kent to share best practice and strengthen local repair and reuse networks. This work was noted to support cost savings for residents, reduce waste, and promote a circular economy.

(i) It was also noted that reuse shops at Romney Marsh and Allington continued to receive positive feedback, with additional pop-up reuse shops held at other Household Waste Recycling Centres.

(j) Circular South East had been selected by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) as one of eight national pilot projects, which provided Kent with access to expert support to develop opportunities for businesses and communities to reuse materials. It was noted that initiatives such as this would support local schemes, including community reuse projects, and would contribute to reducing waste, increasing reuse, supporting local charities, and strengthening the evidence base for future circular economy activity across Kent and Sussex.

4.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) The Leader noted that a hosepipe ban had been imposed by South East Water and advised that this would be discussed further following the meeting. Appreciation was expressed for the focus on supporting individuals recovering from drug and alcohol addiction and encouraging personal responsibility. The establishment of the Water Resilience Partnership and the forthcoming meeting in October were welcomed, alongside the upcoming waste conference. It was noted that both would provide valuable opportunities for collaboration, and the Leader expressed a commitment to working closely on these initiatives.

(b) In response to whether there were plans to expand reuse shops further, Mr Henderson reported that there had been interest in expanding such services, including an enquiry relating to Thanet and a request from an MP for provision in Faversham. While facilities were not available at every Household Waste Recycling Centre, it was confirmed that collection points were in place at many sites. Ongoing work to increase provision, where financially viable, was also highlighted

(c) Mr Henderson confirmed that Ashford Waste Transfer Station was fully operational and open to residents booking appointments. It was noted that extended access had been maintained for much of the works period, and that, despite additional issues identified with the condition of the floor, the project had been completed on time and within budget through the recycling of materials.

5. Mr Henderson provided an update on behalf of Mr David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special projects):

(a) An update was provided on broadband connectivity, noting that correspondence had been sent to the Telecoms Minister and a press release issued outlining concerns regarding Building Digital UK's decision to scale back 10 Project Gigabit contracts. It was highlighted that almost one in four properties in Kent did not have access to gigabit-capable broadband, with coverage for commercial premises at approximately 53%. It was emphasised that achieving the Government's target of over 99% gigabit coverage by 2032 was critical, particularly given the importance of digital infrastructure to economic growth. Concerns were raised that alternative technologies would not provide sufficient capacity if delivery was not achieved. An urgent meeting with the Minister had been requested to seek clarity and a plan to ensure Project Gigabit delivery in Kent and to support affected residents and businesses.

(b) Progress on mobile connectivity was reported, noting its importance, particularly in emergencies. KCC had worked with a neutral host provider to address longstanding issues at Kings Hill, where mobile network operators had not delivered a solution. A provider had been secured to invest in the infrastructure, with planning permission granted for a new mobile mast at Kings Hill Golf Club. The lease agreement had been finalised to enable construction, and a press release had been issued to mark this investment.

(c) Attendance at the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum in Leeds in May was reported, where the in-house Invest Kent service was formally launched. Investment opportunities across Kent and Medway were promoted through an investment prospectus, generating additional leads for the investment pipeline. It was also noted that Kent's growing viticulture sector had been promoted, and valuable connections had been established with government departments and other UK regions.

(d) Mr Wimble had attended the Straits Committee in Hague, where discussions had taken place on opportunities for collaboration with Dutch agriculture, including the use of fully automated farming equipment and the potential establishment of a distribution hub in Kent.

(e) The Kent and Medway Business Fund had supported the creation of 48 new commercial units in Whitfield, Dover. In addition, loans had been approved for three small businesses operating in the waste management, sports and leisure, and early years childcare sectors.

(f) It was reported that the Kent and Medway Growth Hub continued to play a vital role in supporting businesses across the region to grow and adapt. Since 1 April 2026, the Hub had supported 481 businesses and delivered extensive in-depth support to help them progress.

(g) The Skills Bootcamp Wave 7 had commenced on 1 April and had progressed well, creating 430 training places through £1.5 million of Department for Work and Pensions funding across key sectors including media and digital, agri-food, construction, early years, schools, and health and social care. Approximately 150 learners were near completion, with further cohorts due to continue through to February 2027. It was noted that around 75% of participants from the previous year had progressed into positive outcomes, including employment or self-employment.

5.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) The Leader welcomed the action taken to raise concerns with the Minister regarding broadband connectivity, noting that current provision in parts of Kent was unacceptable. The progress of the Skills Bootcamp programme was also commended, highlighting its importance in supporting young people to develop skills for employment and transition into adulthood.

6. Mr Paul Webb (Cabinet Member for Children's Services) provided an update on the following:

(a) Since his appointment on 30th March 2026, the Cabinet Member had commenced his induction through a programme of meetings with officers and a series of visits across services and the county. These had included visits to Oak Manor Reception Centre, Acacia Court, as well as attendance at the County Youth Justice Board away day on 26 May.

(b) Participation in a Member refresher session was noted, which provided the opportunity to engage directly with children in care and gain a deeper understanding of corporate parenting responsibilities, alongside the services that support children in care and care leavers.

(c) A number of family hubs had been visited, including those in North Ashford and Maidstone, in addition to attending the Temple Hill Family Hub Open Day, which showcased the range of support available to families.

(d) It was further reported that a visit had been undertaken to the Athena Project home in Ashford, with a further visit planned to a completed home in Sittingbourne. A recent visit to Windchimes, Fairlawn and Lodges Short Break units was also highlighted, where the Cabinet Member met with staff and observed the high standards of care being delivered. The dedication, professionalism and compassion of staff in supporting children and families were particularly commended.

(e) It was reported that the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act received Royal Assent on 29 April 2026 and represented a significant and transformative development in children's legislation. The Act introduced a range of measures, including a requirement for local authorities to offer family group decision-making, strengthened information-sharing duties, enhanced roles for children within education and safeguarding processes, and the establishment of multi-agency child protection teams. It was noted that the Act also sought to support children in achieving safe and stable home environments, including the introduction of a statutory framework for the authorisation of deprivation of liberty in settings other than secure children's homes, strengthened regulatory powers for Ofsted to address breaches of the Care Standards Act 2000, including in unregistered provision, and measures to limit the use of agency social workers. Further provisions aimed to reform the care market, including the establishment of regional care cooperatives to improve planning and commissioning of placements, alongside powers to cap profits of non-local authority Ofsted-registered providers where necessary. These changes were intended to strengthen children's wellbeing and provide greater protection for vulnerable children.

6.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) The Leader noted that she had recently accompanied Mr Webb on a visit to a family hub in Maidstone, and highlighted the quality of work being delivered and the ongoing work to further strengthen the role of family hubs within communities. The importance of stable parenting and care for children was emphasised as fundamental, and it was reaffirmed that the administration would continue to support parents and carers to achieve the best outcomes for children.

7. Mr Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) provided an update on the following:

(a) It was reported that the Department for Transport (DfT)had increased requirements on transparency, with performance now directly influencing funding. Work was underway to compile data and refresh the Highways Asset Management Plan ahead of the 10 September deadline, with a key decision expected by the end of the year.

(b) Bids had been submitted to the Department for Transport's Structures Fund for Thanet Way (A299) and Galley Hill, with feedback awaited. Progress at Galley Hill was noted, with design, planning and mitigation works advancing and Members being kept updated. It was further reported that, alongside the funding bid, efforts were ongoing to pursue compensation in relation to the cliff failure.

(c) Mr Osborne reported that consolidated funding from the Department for Transport had been received, which would support highways maintenance, active travel and bus services. Work was underway to develop detailed delivery plans ahead of the October 2026 deadline, with a focus on maintaining and improving services.

(d) Applications for the Kent Travel Saver bus pass had reopened following a short delay following the decision being called-in to Scrutiny Committee, and the scheme remained a strong value offer for families.

(e) A free shuttle bus service would be provided for the County Show between Maidstone and Sittingbourne. The service aimed to improve accessibility for attendees and support reduced car usage, helping to ease congestion and promote more sustainable travel.

(f) It was reported that preparations for winter were already underway, including the introduction of a higher specification gritting fleet, replenished salt supplies, and a new salt barn at Faversham. Training had commenced to ensure readiness ahead of the winter season.

(g) With regard to Summer traffic management, increased summer pressures were anticipated, particularly around Dover and the Eurotunnel. Operation Brock was expected to be implemented from mid-July, supported by additional traffic management measures to maintain flow where possible. It was noted that border checks continued to cause delays, with partners working to minimise disruption.

(h) Implementation of the new highways maintenance contract with Ringway was progressing well, with delivery now evident on the ground. Local maintenance activity had increased, and demand for pothole repairs had reduced significantly.

(i) To prepare for the winter season, new gritters were being introduced, supporting UK manufacturing, and a naming competition would be launched for the 61 vehicles.

(j) To conclude, it was reported that the inspection team had been integrated into highways operations, to help improve clarity, responsiveness and efficiency in identifying and addressing issues.

7.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) In response to a question regarding progress under the new highways contract, it was clarified that white road markings indicating potholes were associated with local maintenance contractors rather than the Ringway contract. It was reported that maintenance activity was progressing well, with works being carried out at pace despite high demand. Positive feedback from residents had increased, reflecting improved service delivery, and it was noted that markings often indicated planned resurfacing works as part of ongoing efforts to address backlog issues.

(b) A question was raised regarding the A299, including potential reimbursement for recent emergency works and the timeline for lifting the temporary speed restriction. In response, it was confirmed that the restriction would be lifted once interim works were completed, with progress reported to be over halfway. It was noted that reimbursement for emergency works was unlikely as these had been met from existing budgets. A bid for £64 million had been submitted to the Structures Fund to support long-term works, with a decision expected in August or September.

(c) In response to guarantees on pothole repairs, Mr Osborne explained that temporary repairs undertaken during periods of severe weather were not guaranteed, as they were intended as short-term measures and were more susceptible to failure. Permanent repairs, however, carried a two-year guarantee, with any failures within that period being rectified by the contractor at their own expense.

(d) The Leader welcomed the update on the Kent Travel Saver bus pass and noted that, while scrutiny played an important role, it should not impede the delivery of essential services. Members of the public were encouraged to visit KCC's stand at the forthcoming County Show, where Cabinet Members would be present throughout the event. The forthcoming implementation of Operation Brock during the summer period was acknowledged. The Leader noted the value of public communications explaining the impact of the arrangements and clarifying that Operation Brock was a National Highways and Government-led traffic management system, in which KCC had an operational role. Appreciation was expressed for efforts to keep residents informed and to help minimise disruption during the school holiday period. The importance of securing funding through the Structures Fund for works at Galley Hill and on the Thanet Way was also emphasised, with the hope that decisions on the bids would be progressed without delay given their significance to Kent's residents and infrastructure.

8. Mr Chris Hespe (Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation) provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Hespe reported that the draft DOLGE Strategy had been completed and was due to be considered by the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on 2 July, before being presented to Cabinet on 22 July for adoption. He noted that the strategy represented the second phase of DOLGE's work, focused on collaboration between Members and officers and the delivery of local government efficiency following the setting of KCC's own budget. Thanks were extended to officers and Members who had contributed to its development.

(b) It was reported that there had been significant interest in DOLGE's work from other local authorities, with presentations delivered to a number of councils and further engagement planned through the Local Government Association Conference and with other authorities considering similar approaches.

(c) An update was provided on current activity, including continued reduction of long-term debt through treasury management, increased embedding of the Council's commercial strategy, a reduction in procurement waivers, and the introduction of key performance measures. It was noted that 62% of third-party spend was now with Kent suppliers, an increase of 4% over the previous year and above the national average.

(d) Further work was underway with senior officers to establish key account management arrangements for the Council's larger suppliers and contracts. It was reported that an incentive scheme to encourage income generation across services and directorates would be launched shortly, with initial decisions expected in September. Greater emphasis was also being placed on understanding and monitoring unit costs through Contract Management Review Group meetings to support value for money and informed decision-making. In addition, a commissioning pipeline was being developed to enable procurement expertise and appropriate scrutiny to be applied at an earlier stage in the commissioning process. Exploratory work had also commenced to identify and reduce any duplication of effort across the authority, including a review of potentially unproductive committees, building on work undertaken during the previous year

(e) With regard to Local Government Reorganisation, Mr Hespe reported that the Council was awaiting the Government's decision which was due on or around 16th July 2026. It was noted that the County Councils Network had raised concerns with Government regarding the timetable, process and potential impact on the resilience of key services. Discussions had also taken place with Essex, Suffolk and East Sussex County Councils to share perspectives and approaches.

(f) To conclude, Mr Hespe advised that Service Complexity Assessments were continuing at pace. There has been completion of 165 assessments to date, with the programme expected to conclude by the end of July. Thanks were extended to officers involved in delivering this significant piece of work. It was emphasised that preparations were continuing despite the pending Government announcement

8.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) In response to a question regarding the priority given to reducing inherited debt, it was reported that the authority had inherited long-term debt of £732 million, which had since been reduced by £142 million under the current administration. It was noted that the authority would continue to require a level of borrowing and that a balanced approach was necessary. However, reducing debt and associated interest payments had been a key priority, with reference made to debt interest costs of approximately £84,000 per day when the administration took office, and the significant reduction achieved through the Deputy Leader's efforts.

(b) The Leader welcomed the draft DOLGE Strategy, describing it as a pioneering approach to local government efficiency and noting appreciation for the contribution of officers across the authority in embedding its principles. The positive impact of the Council's commercial strategy was also highlighted, particularly the increased proportion of spending with Kent suppliers and the proposed introduction of key account management arrangements for major contracts. The importance of prioritising Kent businesses and strengthening contract management was emphasised, alongside recognition of DOLGE's role in driving improvements across the authority. Thanks were also extended to officers for their work in preparing for Local Government Reorganisation.

(c) Mr Hespe placed on record his thanks to Mr Chamberlain for his significant contribution to the development of the DOLGE Strategy. The Leader endorsed those comments and expressed appreciation for the partnership between Mr Hespe and Mr Chamberlain in progressing the DOLGE programme

9. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader of the Council) provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Collins expressed his appreciation for the support, advice and expertise provided by officers, noting the positive working relationships that had been developed over the previous year.

(b) Referring to the earlier discussion on debt reduction, he reported that the administration had reduced long-term debt by £142 million, resulting in annual savings of just under £1.2 million in debt interest. He acknowledged the work of Treasury Management officers and noted that further progress may be possible later in the year, subject to circumstances.

(c) As Deputy Leader, Mr Collins reflected positively on the progress made by the administration during its first year in office, noting the increasing confidence, expertise and effectiveness of Cabinet Members in delivering priorities and outcomes for Kent.

(d) Mr Collins also highlighted recent investment in library services, including the opening of the new Folkestone library, the first new library provision in Kent for 14 years. He noted that, although the administration had inherited proposals for widespread library closures, its approach would be to consider libraries on a case-by-case basis. Opportunities to integrate library services with hubs and other community facilities would continue to be explored where beneficial, but it was confirmed that wholesale library closures would not be pursued.

9.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) The Leader thanked Mr Collins and officers for their work in reducing the Council's long-term debt, noting that this had resulted in annual savings of approximately £1.2 million in debt interest for Kent taxpayers. The progress made by the administration over the previous year was also recognised, with particular reference to the strong teamwork, competence and delivery of outcomes demonstrated across the Cabinet and wider authority.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Members for their updates.

142. 26/00030 - Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report - Outturn 2025-2026
(Item 5)

Cath Head (Head of Finance Operations) and Joe McKay (Acting Chief Accountant) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Collins, Deputy Leader of the Council, introduced the report on the Council's 2025–26 financial outturn position. It was reported that the revenue budget had overspent by £22.7 million (1.5% of the total budget), representing an improvement of £13.8 million from the Quarter 3 forecast. The outturn included £1.1 million of roll forwards, including £0.3 million of unspent Member Grants.

   The year was described as financially challenging. Underspends had been achieved within Growth, Environment and Transport, the Chief Executive's Department, the Deputy Chief Executive's Department and Non-Attributable Costs. Adult Social Care and Health had overspent by £42.9 million due to continued demand pressures, complexity and undelivered savings, while Children, Young People and Education had recorded an overspend of £0.9 million.

   Capital expenditure for the year totalled £260.8 million, representing 69% of the approved budget. The underspend included £135.5 million rephased into future years. The report also included a review of the capital programme and proposed amendments to capital cash limits. The position on Schools' Delegated Budgets continued to reflect pressures arising from Special Educational Needs demand and would be managed through the Dedicated Schools Grant Adjustment Account.

2. Cath Head (Head of Finance Operations) noted that this was the fourth consecutive year in which the Council had recorded an overspend, and each overspend required drawdown form the reserves, therefore impacting the Council's future Medium Term Financial Plan. The importance of managing and mitigating any forecast overspends during 2026–27 was emphasised in order to support the development of the 2027–28 budget and maintain the Council's financial resilience. Mr Collins noted that the forecasts inherited for 2025–26 had been developed under the previous administration. He emphasised that the administration was now working closely with officers on financial forecasting and delivery, and stressed the importance of each directorate achieving its agreed savings targets to support the Council's financial position and resilience.

3. Mr Watts (Deputy Chief Executive) noted that, between Quarter 3 and the end of the financial year, considerable work had been undertaken across the Council, supported by spending controls, to improve the financial position. While a number of directorates had delivered underspends and the Adult Social Care position had improved from that reported at Quarter 3, he emphasised that the effort had been shared across the whole organisation. It was further noted that these measures had not been without consequence. Capacity pressures within the organisation remained significant, as highlighted in the Annual Governance Statement, particularly given the range of initiatives, statutory duties and expectations placed on the Council alongside ongoing financial challenges. Nevertheless, he

recognised the substantial work undertaken across the authority to improve the outturn position, while noting that any overspend continued to present challenges for future years' financial planning and resilience.

4. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

    (a) The Leader highlighted the reported £9 million underspend on Home to School Transport as a positive indicator that improvement measures were having an impact. The Leader also noted that, although general reserves remained below the preferred level, forecasts indicated that they would exceed 6% during 2026–27, providing reassurance that the Council's financial management was moving in the right direction despite ongoing challenges. In response, Mr Collins noted that the target range for general reserves was between 5% and 10%, ideally towards the upper end of that range. He reported that reserves were currently above the 5% threshold and that budgeted plans were in place to replenish them gradually over the year. It was further noted that strengthening reserves formed part of the wider financial strategy, alongside the reduction of long-term debt, with both contributing to the Council's overall financial resilience.

    (b) Reference was made to the DOLGE Strategy, which included a principle of avoiding unnecessary growth of the authority and maintaining an appropriate balance between priorities, resources and service delivery. It was noted that the administration had sought to achieve this balance during its first year, contributing to improved financial stability. In response, Mr Collins agreed that the focus should be on delivering efficiencies rather than reducing services wherever possible, emphasising the importance of providing the same services in a more efficient and sustainable manner.

    (c) In response concerns raised regarding the costs associated with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, it was noted that KCC bore costs relating to former unaccompanied asylum seekers beyond the age at which government funding ceased. Mr Collins commented that it would be fair for the Government to recognise these ongoing costs and provide appropriate financial support to the Council in meeting its responsibilities.

5. It was RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to:

    a) NOTE the revenue and capital outturn position for 2025-26 detailed in the report, and accompanying appendices

    b) AGREE that £0.8 million (£800,000) is rolled forward to fund existing criteria (per Appendix)

    c) AGREE that £0.3 million (£300,000) is rolled forward to fund member grants (per Appendix)

    d) AGREE the drawing down from General Fund reserves to fund the 2025-26 overspend

e) AGREE the capital slippage / re-phasing from 2025-26 will be added to the 2026-27 and later years' capital budgets (per the report)

f) NOTE the review of the capital programme

g) AGREE the proposed capital cash limit changes (per Appendix)

h) AGREE the changes made as a result of a reserves review (per the report)

143. Quarterly Performance Report, Quarter 4, 2025/26

(Item 6)

Matt Wagner (Chief Analyst) was in attendance for this item

1. Mr Wagner outlined the report for Quarter 4 (Q4, 2025/26) which covered the period up until the end of March 2026. Of the 39 KPIs reported, 18 were rated Green (the same as the previous quarter) 12 were rated Amber (three fewer than the previous quarter) and 9 were rated Red (three more than the previous quarter). With regards to Direction of Travel, 7 indicators showed a positive trend, 28 were stable or with no clear trend, and 4 showed a negative trend. Mr Wagner addressed the KPIs that were rated RED, the reasoning and the mitigating actions for these were set out in the report.

2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

   (a) A question was raised regarding the Customer Services Performance Report, specifically the KPI rated as red, and whether it was appropriate for complaints with formally agreed extensions to continue to be recorded as late. It was suggested that this did not fully reflect performance, particularly where an initial response had been provided within the 20-day target and an extension had subsequently been agreed with the customer. Clarification was sought on whether information could be provided on the number of such cases. In response, it was explained that the KPI was designed to provide a consistent measure of response times across services and therefore recorded all responses completed beyond the target timescale as late, regardless of whether an extension had been agreed. However, it was acknowledged that, particularly in Adult Social Care, some complaints were more complex and required additional time to investigate. It was further noted that agreeing an extension in advance generally provided a better customer experience than failing to communicate delays. Mr Watts (Deputy Chief Executive) confirmed that he would work with Mr Wagner to review the information available and provide a further response to the Cabinet Member. He noted that some of the data requested was not currently collected or reported in that format, but that recent discussions at the Governance and Audit Committee had considered how performance information was captured and presented.

(b) Clarification was sought on the significant increase in Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and whether this reflected increased scrutiny of the new administration, together with the implications for performance indicators. Mr Watts advised that FOI request volumes had increased significantly beyond the levels originally anticipated for the year. It was noted that, despite this increased demand, performance had improved considerably, with response rates increasing from 70% to 86% - 89%, which represented some of the strongest results achieved in recent years. Substantial work had been undertaken across the organisation to improve the handling of requests, although the volume of enquiries continued to create considerable pressure, as each request required officer time and resources to process. It was noted that, where multiple requests related to similar subjects, efficiencies could sometimes be achieved through quicker responses.

(c) In response to whether the demand for FoI requests would reduce over time as the administration became more established, it was advised that there was currently no clear evidence of a sustained reduction in request volumes. While occasional month-to-month decreases had been observed, these were often followed by new areas of public interest generating additional requests. It was further suggested that increased public awareness of FOI rights, together with the growing use of artificial intelligence tools to generate more detailed and complex enquiries, may have contributed to demand. Officers noted that many of the highest monthly volumes of FOI requests recorded had occurred within the previous twelve months and agreed to provide further detailed statistics outside the meeting.

(d) Clarification was sought on whether more information could be proactively published to reduce the number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, including the possibility of making frequently requested information more readily available. In response, it was reported that a range of measures were being explored to improve access to information and help manage demand. A searchable online disclosure log was already available and work was underway to improve its visibility and accessibility through internet and AI-assisted searches. Additional information had also been published online, with Council and committee papers now appearing more readily in search engine results. It was noted that many FOI requests were highly specific in nature, which limited the scope for a traditional frequently asked questions approach. However, officers agreed to consider this suggestion as part of ongoing work to reduce demand and improve access to information.

(e) Concerns were expressed By Mr Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) regarding a number of performance indicators rated red, particularly those relating to highways services. It was noted that performance against targets for attendance at emergency highway incidents within two hours and responses to enquiries within 28 days had been affected by exceptional demand and external factors, including severe weather conditions. Context was provided that the volume of highways-related complaints had increased significantly compared with previous years, peaking at around 580 complaints in a single month and remaining consistently above 250 per month, compared with approximately 100 per month previously. It was reported that this had placed considerable pressure on the Customer Feedback team and had impacted performance against the relevant indicators. It was emphasised that, despite these challenges, highway services continued to respond to a wide range of incidents and enquiries within existing resources.

(f) In response to comments regarding performance indicators rated red, it was noted that KPIs provided a consistent framework for monitoring performance and understanding the factors influencing service delivery. While performance figures provided an important measure of outcomes, it was equally important to consider the wider context behind the data, including service demand, organisational capacity and financial constraints. The quarterly performance report enabled Members to examine both the performance results and the reasons underlying changes in performance, supporting informed discussion and decision-making.

(g) Further explanation was provided in relation to highways performance, where it was noted that a number of indicators had been affected by periods of short, sharp and severe weather. Such events generated a high volume of emergency incidents within a compressed timeframe, making it more challenging to meet target response times than when demand was spread more evenly across a reporting period. It was also highlighted that the quarterly performance report supplemented the KPI data with narrative explanations and details of actions being taken to improve performance. These included the implementation of the new highways maintenance contract, the impact of which would continue to be monitored through future performance reporting.

(h) Clarification was sought on the timetable for the introduction of the Government's national performance framework and how it would align with the Council's existing performance reporting arrangements. In response, it was explained that the Local Outcomes Framework had been announced in February and a report would be presented to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on 2nd July, setting out the proposed national metrics, how they aligned with KCC's current performance measures, and where differences existed. It was noted that KCC reported in greater detail in some areas than the national framework would require. While a national benchmarking tool was expected to be released later in the year to enable comparisons between authorities, no confirmed publication date had yet been provided. Members were advised that the forthcoming report would also highlight any caveats associated with comparing KCC's performance with that of other authorities.

(i) Further clarification was sought on whether the introduction of the national framework would require a review of KCC's existing KPIs. In response, it was agreed that the Council's performance measures should be reviewed to ensure appropriate alignment with the national framework, while retaining indicators that were of particular relevance to Kent. It was noted that consideration would be given to where KCC already held more meaningful or detailed local measures and to ensuring that performance reporting continued to focus on priority areas requiring the greatest oversight and scrutiny.

(j) A question was raised as to whether there were measures in place to prevent Freedom of Information (FOI) requests from being used maliciously or in excessive volumes, and whether there were limits on the number of requests an individual could submit. Mr Watts advised that FOI requests were a statutory right and that the Council was required to respond to the overwhelming majority of requests received. While legislation allowed requests to be refused in limited circumstances, such as where they were deemed vexatious, this was subject to strict legal tests and applied only in a very small number of cases. It was noted that the purpose of the legislation was to ensure public access to information and enable scrutiny of public bodies. Although significantly more information was proactively published and readily available online than when the legislation was introduced, the statutory right to request information remained in place and continued to be exercised by residents.

(k) With regard to the extent of increased Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and volumes compared to the previous administration, it was reported that FOI requests had increased substantially, with some periods showing increases of between 30% and 100% compared with previous levels. It was noted that, as requests were processed without regard to the identity of the requester, it was not possible to definitively attribute the increase to any particular group or cause. However, there had been a clear rise in demand, reflecting increased interest in the Council's activities. Officers agreed to provide Members with further information illustrating trends in request volumes. It was also noted that similar increases were being experienced by other authorities and organisations, suggesting that a range of factors were contributing to the growth in FOI requests.

(l) Clarification was sought regarding the Public Health KPI relating to the number of eligible people receiving NHS Health Checks, which had continued to fall below target. Concern was expressed that this could undermine preventative health measures, and further information was requested on the reasons for the decline, including whether it reflected issues around appointment availability, public uptake, or particular demographic trends. It was also suggested that targeted public health messaging may help improve participation. In response, it was noted that the KPI measured the number of eligible people receiving NHS Health Checks rather than the proportion of those eligible who had been offered them. While there had been a 6% decrease in the number of checks delivered during the previous quarter, 92% of eligible individuals had been invited to attend a health check during the last financial year. Officers agreed that further analysis would be useful, including consideration of the eligible population, uptake rates and demographic information, and undertook to liaise with Public Health colleagues and provide additional information outside the meeting.

3. It was RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to note the Quarter 4 Performance Report and the actions being taken to address areas where performance is not as targeted.

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From: Linden Kemkaran, Leader

Chris Hespe, Cabinet Member, Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation

To: Cabinet – 22 July 2026

Subject: DOLGE Draft Strategy

Decision no: 26/00031

Key Decision : Yes – affects more than 2 electoral divisions

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: Policy & Resources Cabinet Committee – 2 July 2026

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: All - Countywide

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: This report presents the draft strategy for DOLGE. The 'Department for Local Government Efficiency' was established by the Administration in May 2025. The draft strategy is appended to this report. This report provides the context and rationale for DOLGE moving into its second phase in which it will be named 'Delivery of Local Government Efficiency', presents the components of the strategy and outlines the future collaborative nature of the DOLGE effort.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is asked to:

(a) **APPROVE** and **ADOPT** the Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) Strategy
(b) **DELEGATE** authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation, to make non-substantive revisions and updates to the strategy as appropriate during its lifetime

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Department for Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) was created by the Leader of KCC in May 2025 through the establishment of a Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and the identification of two Deputy Cabinet Members who could assist the effort. DOLGE was established to provide a new pair of eyes on KCCs budget and to seek savings and efficiencies where possible. This would be done through interrogating every line of the Council's budget, which had been set by the previous administration, to ensure that money allocated fit with the new administration's priorities, there was no obvious wasteful spending and, as the year progressed, spend and savings were on track to be delivered.

2. Key Considerations

2.1 The production of a strategy at this time is required in order to stress the required collaborative approach that should be taken across the authority in order to continue to drive efficiencies and value for money. The strategy is written in a such a way as to be a living document, able to be amended moving forward. The recommendations within the strategy have been produced to fit with existing corporate structures and processes as much as possible.

3. Background

3.1 The administration inherited an incredibly challenging financial position from the outgoing Conservative administration. The authority had long-term debt of £732 million, was paying £84,000 in debt interest daily, had a savings and increased income target for 2025/26 of £121 million, had to deal with the previous administrations' overspend of more than £20 million and ballooning spend in Adult Social Care. DOLGE was effective immediately in addressing future cost avoidance; making input into the monitoring of spend and savings; working with the Procurement team and overseeing the production of the authority's first Commercial Strategy; working with Adult Social Care to address overspends; addressing with the Chief Executive the introduction of spending controls authority-wide; supporting the Deputy Leader in debt reduction efforts; identifying savings options as part of the budget-build process; proposing the best value option for Local Government Reorganisation to provide savings for Kent residents, and proposing Committee restructuring to enhance both efficiency and effectiveness.

<u>The Second Phase of DOLGE</u>

3.2 With the Administration now managing its own budget, the DOLGE programme can shift to a more collaborative approach. DOLGE will continue to seek economies and efficiencies, identify savings opportunities, and value for money for Kent residents. However, the priorities for the authority necessitate a dynamic process, with the DOLGE concept being 'owned' by all Cabinet Members, other Members of the administration and staff. Senior staff must be involved. DOLGE is about ensuring the culture of KCC is one where all staff are conscious of all spend and the need to do it carefully, fully cognisant that it is residents' money that they are spending. In this new phase of DOLGE, seeking efficiency and better spend of taxpayers' money can not be seen as solely the responsibility of a small number of core elected Members, but rather be embedded within the organisation and its staff. Cost-consciousness must become embedded in all Directorates. Innovation and creativity must be allowed and encouraged to flourish, as this will provide the ideas and motivate staff to make best use of resources. In the second phase, the DOLGE effort has to be flexible and adaptable. DOLGE will not be about wielding a chainsaw or a salami-slicer, but about helping the authority to find and implement sensible, pragmatic solutions where efficiency is at the core. The draft strategy reflects this reality.

<u>The Draft Strategy</u>

3.3 The draft strategy for DOLGE has been produced to give clear direction and wider understanding of its function and how it will work moving forward. It provides clarity of purpose for DOLGE as it enters its second phase. The first year of DOLGE entailed a small group of elected Members scrutinising each budget line seeking to find waste or inefficiencies with view to making savings and also providing input into savings options as part of the budget-setting process. However, with the administration now having set its own budget for 2026/27, the work of DOLGE will become a collaborative effort between the administration's Members and officers. The draft strategy has been produced to provide the prioritisation for this work and a framework for the authority's efficiency efforts moving forward.

<u>Strategy Components</u>

3.4 The strategy, which aligns with the Strategic Statement, provides the background to the formation of DOLGE and summarises some of the key successes in its first year; a year in which the authority reduced its debt by £122 million; made in excess of £100 million savings; set a balanced budget with increased spending capacity for Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Growth, Environment and Transportation; whilst increasing its net reserves, taking on no additional borrowing and setting a Council Tax rate lower than 89% of County, Metropolitan and Unitary Councils in England.

3.5 In order to inform the second phase of the DOLGE work, analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for DOLGE was carried out ('SWOT'), along with an assessment of political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors ('PESTLE). Consultation was held with the authority's Leadership, Cabinet Members, the administration's backbenchers, the Chief Executive, the Section 151 Officer and the Corporate Management Team.

3.6 Four strategic areas have been identified, with recommended actions in each. Those strategic areas are:

- Efficiency and simplification
- Ensuring spend and savings are to budget
- Commercial and income generation
- Resilience and Local Government Reorganisation

3.7 A small number of top priorities for action by KCC have been identified from within the four strategic areas.

3.8 In addition, the draft strategy presents a number of ‘core principles’ for implementation across the authority and used to challenge all spend.

3.9 The DOLGE concept of seeking efficiency and value for money will be embedded in the organisation and championed by Members and senior staff, who will be responsible for implementing the strategy and its principles. The strategy builds upon existing and previous work in efficiency within KCC and the recommendations are designed to fit with existing monitoring and budget-build processes wherever possible. From immediate effect, the acronym ‘DOLGE’ will stand for ‘Delivery of Local Government Efficiency’.

Proposed Way of Working

3.10 DOLGE will continue to seek economies and efficiencies, identify savings opportunities and value for money for Kent residents. However, the priorities outlined in the strategy necessitate a dynamic process within the DOLGE concept being ‘owned’ by all Cabinet Members, other Members of the administration, and understood and delivered by staff. DOLGE is about ensuring that the culture is one where all staff are conscious of all spend and the need to do it carefully, fully cognisant that it is residents’ money that they are spending. In this second phase of DOLGE, seeking efficiency and better spend of taxpayers’ money cannot be seen as solely the responsibility of a small number of core elected Members, but rather be embedded within the organisation and its staff. DOLGE will not be about wielding a chainsaw or a salami-slicer, but about helping the authority to find and implement sensible, pragmatic solutions where efficiency is at the core.

3.11 Although the draft strategy lays out clearly the priorities for the authority in seeking enhanced efficiency and effectiveness moving forward, due to the dynamic and ambitious nature of the DOLGE effort, work has already commenced on implementing a number of its recommendations. These include establishing a ‘Star Chamber’ with senior Members and Adult Social Care staff; exploring the establishment of an account management process for major suppliers and contracts, and considering further Artificial Intelligence options for the authority. In addition, financial provision has already been made for a scheme to recognise staff who come forward with successful income generation or cost-saving ideas, and for seed-corn funding for Directorate income generation projects.

Reporting on Progress

3.12 DOLGE will report on progress and plans to staff, the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, Cabinet (and Full Council, where appropriate).

Resourcing Required

3.13 The collaborative approach, via the second phase of DOLGE, will involve all Cabinet Members and be supported by all Reform UK Members in the authority. At its helm will be the Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation and the Deputy Cabinet Member, Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation, who both authored the draft strategy. Currently, there is no additional resource requirement identified to carry out the DOLGE work or the priorities in this report, as the DOLGE concept will become a core part of the authority’s overall work.

4. Options considered and dismissed, and associated risk

4.1 Consideration was given to building Local Government Efficiency arrangements, as referenced in the Strategy, into operational level processes and activities only, utilising existing regular Executive oversight and policy direction processes. This was rejected as the logical progression for the DOLGE effort is to move the programme to a formalised, authority-wide and collaborative format via a substantive Cabinet approved Strategy.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 Currently, there is no additional resource requirement identified to carry out the DOLGE work or the priorities in the strategy, as the DOLGE concept will become a core part of the authority's overall work.

6. Legal implications

6.1 There are no legal implications associated with the proposed adoption of the strategy.

7. Equalities implications

7.1 An EqIA has been undertaken for this proposed decision and whilst no impacts have been identified, any direct decisions that may follow from the DOLGE Strategy would still be subject to relevant and separate decisions and EQIAs as necessary.

8. Data Protection Implications

8.1 A DPIA screening has been undertaken concluding that a Data Protection Impact Assessment is not required at this time.

9. Other corporate implications

9.1 The four strategic areas, the selected top priority actions and the core principles that the strategy recommends, are relevant for all parts and levels of Kent County Council. The strategy will guide senior officers and the Administration's Members in order that sound decision making on specific programmes and projects can be taken using appropriate governance routes.

10.Governance

10.1 The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee endorsed the proposed adoption of the Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) Strategy by majority on 2 July 2026.

10.2 At the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee meeting on 2 July 2026, some Members questioned whether the draft DOLGE strategy proposed significantly substantive change to the way in which the authority had previously sought to achieve savings and budget compliance. However, the draft strategy pulls together and adds coordination and prioritisation for the first time to a range of efficiency and transformational work; only some of which had been operating previously. Some Members believed that the proposed strategy was simply a branding exercise, although it was clarified that the second phase strategy was appropriate for the 'delivery' of local government efficiency now that the administration had set and was controlling its own budget.

10.3 This report seeks Cabinet approval to adopt the Strategy and to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation, to make non-substantive revisions and updates to the Strategy as appropriate during its lifetime.

10.4 Any significant amendments or changes with substantive policy or resource implications will require further formal decision-making.

10.5 It is not expected that the strategy will have significant impact upon the Officer Scheme of Delegation, as the core recommendations and principles will be implemented prior to the appropriate decision-making routes being followed. Any specific decision emanating from the implementation of the strategy will go through existing governance routes.

11. Conclusions

11.1 In its first year of operation, DOLGE was successful in scrutinising spend, making savings and identifying opportunities for greater efficiencies in KCC. With the Administration having set and now managing its own budget, the work of DOLGE will move to a second phase, where its work will require a collaborative approach and have wider 'ownership' within the authority amongst staff and Members of the administration. This paper is presented to support the draft strategy for DOLGE's work as it enters the second phase.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is asked to:

- **(a) APPROVE** and **ADOPT** the Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) Strategy
- **(b) DELEGATE** authority to the Chief Executive**,** in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation, to make non-substantive revisions and updates to the strategy as appropriate during its lifetime

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12. Background Documents

Equality Impact Assessment (included as Appendix C)

Reforming Kent 2025-2028

13. Appendices

Appendix A Proposed Record of Decision (26/00031)

Appendix B Draft Delivery of Local Government Efficiency Strategy

Appendix C Equality Impact Assessment

14. Contact details

Report Author: Chris Hespe

Job title: Cabinet Member, Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation

Email address: christopher.hespe@kent.gov.uk

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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:	DECISION NO:
Cabinet	26/00031

For publication

Key decision: YES

Affects more than 2 electoral divisions.

Subject Matter: Adoption of the Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) Strategy

Decision:

That Cabinet agree to:

(a) **APPROVE** and **ADOPT** the Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) Strategy
(b) **DELEGATE** authority to the Chief Executive**,** in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation, to make non-substantive revisions and updates to the strategy as appropriate during its lifetime

Reason(s) for decision:

The strategy for DOLGE has been produced to give clear direction and wider understanding of its function and how it will work moving forward. It provides clarity of purpose for DOLGE as it enters its second phase. The approved strategy will provide the prioritisation for this work and a framework for the authority's efficiency efforts moving forward.

Four strategic areas have been identified, with recommended actions in each. Those strategic areas are:

- Efficiency and simplification
- Ensuring spend and savings are to budget
- Commercial and income generation
- Resilience and Local Government Reorganisation

A small number of top priorities for action by KCC have been identified from within the four strategic areas.

In addition, the draft strategy presents a number of 'core principles' for implementation across the authority and used to challenge all spend.

Financial Implications

Currently, there is no additional resource requirement identified to carry out the DOLGE work or the priorities in the strategy, as the DOLGE concept will become a core part of the authority's overall work.

Legal implications

There are no legal implications associated with the proposed adoption of the strategy.

Equalities implications

An EqIA has been undertaken for this proposed decision and whilst no impacts have been identified, any direct decisions that may follow from the DOLGE Strategy would still be subject to relevant and separate decisions and EQIAs as necessary.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee considered the proposed decision to adopt the Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) Strategy at its meeting on 2 July 2026 and, following discussion, endorsed the proposed decision by majority.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Build Local Government Efficiency arrangements and processes into operational level activities only, based on existing regular Executive oversight and policy direction.

- Rejected as the logical progression for the DOLGE effort is to move the programme to a formalised, authority-wide and collaborative format via a substantive Cabinet approved Strategy.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

....

signed date

DELIVERY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY (DOLGE) STRATEGY

A Unified Approach

Kent County Council

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In its first year of operation the Department of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) was successful in scrutinising spend, making savings, and identifying opportunities for greater efficiency in Kent County Council (KCC).

With the administration having set and now managing its own budget, the work of DOLGE will move to a second phase, which will require a collaborative approach and have wider 'ownership' within the authority amongst staff and Members. This strategy has been produced to guide and inform the future work of DOLGE as it enters its second phase; and reflects the ambitions of 'Reforming Kent', the Council's strategic statement. The production of this strategy should help restore public trust in local government that it seeks best value for its spending.

The desired 'end state' of an innovative culture; a leaner, more efficient and effective Council will require a new approach for DOLGE, shifting from a Member-focussed effort to a collaborative cross-authority model. In future the acronym 'DOLGE' will stand for 'Delivery of Local Government Efficiency'.

This strategy has been guided by a SWOT and PESTLE analysis and determines strategic areas for the work; each with a number of themes within the following strategic areas:

- Efficiency and Simplification
- Ensuring Spend and Savings are to Budget
- Commercial and Income Generation
- Resilience and Local Government Reorganisation

A number of priority actions have been identified within these themes. The strategy lists a number of principles which should become embedded within the authority, and guide officers' and Members' work. The work will be monitored and evaluated, with reporting made to appropriate committees.

It should be noted that in addition to recommending key actions and principles for the organisation to implement, this strategy is a framework for those and additional actions and objectives that may arise over time.

The role of Members involved in DOLGE will be;

- Overseeing the strategy
- Monitoring implementation of the principles
- Monitoring delivery by senior officers and Members
- Reviewing and reporting on delivery of efficiencies

The government's decision on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) will have a bearing on the work of DOLGE, particularly as the authority may have to address its own exit. The strategy has been produced in such a way to be flexible around the outcome of LGR. It is envisaged that any successor authorities may wish to adopt the principles and key elements of this strategy.

The strategy has been produced as a 'living document' able to be updated as circumstances arise.

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Introduction

The Department for Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) was created by the Leader of KCC in May 2025 through the establishment of a Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and the identification of two Deputy Cabinet Member positions who could assist the effort (Deputy Cabinet Member, Finance and Cross-Cabinet Activity; and Deputy Cabinet Member, Commercial and Trading). DOLGE was established to provide a new pair of eyes on KCCs budget and to seek savings and efficiencies where possible. This would be done through interrogating every line of the Council's budget, which had been set by the previous administration, to ensure that any waste and inefficiencies could be identified and, as the financial year progressed, spend and savings were on track to be delivered.

Background

The Administration inherited an incredibly challenging financial position from the outgoing Conservative administration. The authority had a debt of £732 million, was paying £84,000 in debt interest daily, had a savings and increased income target for 2025/26 of £121 million, was facing an overspend of £20.1 million and ballooning spend in Adult Social Care.

WORK IN THE FIRST YEAR (PHASE ONE)

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Budget Lines

Early work of DOLGE entailed analysing all County Council budget lines, working with Cabinet Members and Directorates to identify opportunities for savings.

Future Cost Avoidance

This identified a number of areas where future spend could be avoided. This included scrapping the making of the property portfolio and the vehicle fleet Net Zero compliant by 2030; actions which were supported by the Council rescinding the KCC 'Climate Emergency Declaration' and thereby avoiding £39.5 million of future spend. In addition, the Council turned around the previous decision to dispose of Sessions House, resulting in a £14 million cost avoidance.

Monitoring Spend and Savings

A key priority in the first few months was to ensure that savings were on target to be achieved. At the end of the 2025/26 financial year, £100 million of those savings had been achieved.

Contracts

Much of the spend of the authority is via external contracts, so much of the DOLGE effort was in working with senior Procurement staff. This led to the production of Kent's first ever Commercial Strategy; a Supplier Day held at the County

Showground in Detling for which there were 750 applications and 300 businesses represented; a re-forming and more regular meetings of the Contract Management Review Group; the shifting of procurement expertise closer to the commissioning functions, and the introduction of a new commercial training module for KCC staff.

Adult Social Care

DOLGE saw the first quarter financial monitoring report only in August 2025 and it showed that the authority was off course to deliver against its budget in 2025/26. The most significant financial pressures were in Adult Social Care, which was anticipating a major year-end overspend. DOLGE, working alongside senior Members and officers, explored ways to address this problem, and with the appointment of a new temporary Corporate Director for Adult Social Care and Public Health, programmes were instigated to stabilise the budget which involved the introduction of caps and ceilings, keeping to frameworks, shaping market expectations, sharpening procurement principles and controlling spend. This resulted in a stabilising of the Adult Social Care spend over the final months of the last financial year. Progress will continue with the establishment of an Adult Social Care 'Star Chamber' involving DOLGE and senior staff to provide continued focus on efficiency.

Spending Controls

Work with the Chief Executive resulted in the introduction of spending controls for the last five months of the year to help achieve budget stability. The management action taken included introducing a recruitment freeze for all but essential roles, limiting staff training to in-house courses, and preventing attendance at external conferences.

Identification of Additional Savings

DOLGE identified a number of savings options, which were discussed informally with Cabinet Members and members of the Corporate Management Team. Subsequently, a further £14 million of savings were generated by Directorates through the financial year.

Local Government Reorganisation

The KCC proposal for Local Government Reorganisation was submitted to government on 28 November 2025. The option selected by KCC (Option 1A) was designed by DOLGE and subsequently worked up by officers to the DOLGE requirement. This option was assessed by external consultants working on all options submitted from Kent, and the consultants' conclusion from their full financial appraisal demonstrated that there would be significant savings to Kent from pursuing Option 1A to the tune of £460m over ten years.

Debt Reduction

DOLGE supported the Deputy Leader in work to reduce the authority's long term debt, which was reduced by £114 million over the financial year, saving approximately £1.2m in debt interest payment per annum.

Committee Structure Savings

With the Deputy Leader, DOLGE instigated a review of Committees in Kent County Council to save £75,000 and reduce bureaucracy and duplication and enhance efficiency.

Budget-setting for 2026/27 and the Medium-Term Financial Plan

A key role for DOLGE throughout the year was in contributing to the thinking and prioritisation that helped to shape the budget for 2026/27 and the Medium-Term Financial Plan. Ultimately the balanced budget for KCC that was approved by Full Council on 12 February 2026 took on no new borrowing, provided a net increase in reserves of £19 million, continued to see debt reduce, had a savings and income target significantly less than the previous year (although still challenging at £88 million), and provided an increase in spending capacity in Adult Social Care (11% increase), Children's Services (7.7%) and Growth, Environment and Transport (5.2%). In addition, the budget allowed the authority to set a Council Tax rise (3.99%) at below the maximum level allowed, for the first time in 13 years.

PHASE TWO

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SWOT AND PESTLE ANALYSIS

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats appertaining to DOLGE were assessed in the production of this strategy in order to determine future priorities and method of working.

The wider societal, political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental context within which KCC operates were considered through using a PESTLE methodology.

The summary of the SWOT and PESTLE analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

WAY OF WORKING

With the Administration now managing its own budget, the DOLGE programme can shift to a more collaborative approach. DOLGE will continue to seek economies and efficiencies, identify savings opportunities, and value for money for Kent residents. However, the priorities outlined in this report necessitate a dynamic process with the DOLGE concept being 'owned' by all Cabinet Members, other Members of the administration, and understood and delivered by staff. DOLGE is about ensuring that the culture is one where all staff are conscious of all spend and the need to do it carefully, fully cognisant that it is residents' money that they are spending.

IN THIS NEW PHASE OF DOLGE, SEEKING EFFICIENCY AND BETTER SPEND OF TAXPAYERS' MONEY CAN NOT BE SEEN AS SOLELY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A SMALL NUMBER OF CORE ELECTED MEMBERS, BUT RATHER BE EMBEDDED WITHIN THE ORGANISATION AND ITS STAFF.

Cost-consciousness must become embedded in all Directorates. Innovation and creativity must be allowed and encouraged to flourish, as this will provide the ideas and motivate staff to make best use of resources. In the second phase, the DOLGE effort has to be flexible and adaptable. DOLGE will not be about wielding a chainsaw or a salami-slicer, but about helping the authority to find and implement sensible, pragmatic solutions where efficiency is at the core.

This strategy is not recommending an authority wide culture change programme. Such a programme could interfere with the timely delivery of the actions recommended here. However, many of the recommendations and key principles of this strategy will require new ways of thinking.

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ALIGNMENT WITH THE KCC STRATEGIC STATEMENT: REFORMING KENT

The establishment of DOLGE was a key priority for the administration at KCC, and its significance is stated within 'Reforming Kent', the Councils strategic statement. Seeking value for money, driving efficiencies and making best use of every £1 spent feature strongly in the strategic statement.

Reforming Kent recognises the importance of KCC impacting positively on the quality of life of Kent's residents, and that a successful Kent County Council necessitates the organisation being focused, targeted and responsive to financial pressures. This DOLGE strategy provides that impetus.

CONTEXT FOR TAKING FORWARD THE STRATEGY

Officers' and Members' Roles

The DOLGE concept of seeing efficiency and value for money will be embedded in the organisation and championed by Members and senior staff, who will be responsible for implementing the strategy and its principles. The strategy will be 'owned' and implemented by KCC but monitored by the Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency.

Ensuring Delivery

Much work has been carried out in the past within KCC on seeking efficiencies. This strategy builds upon that foundation and provides a focal point for this work going forward rather than stating the methodology to be used against each required action. Senior management and the Corporate Management Team must find ways to ensure delivery of the priority actions, whilst enabling resilience and fitting with the acknowledged approach to budget build for 2027/28 and beyond.

Enhancing Productivity

Successful implementation of the strategy necessitates the authority continuing its work to achieve enhanced productivity from its staffing resource. Seeking to achieve best use of that resource must be a constant action for KCC if the authority is to enhance its efficiency and become more effective without having to resort to 'growing the staffing numbers'.

System and Process Re-engineering

Achieving a leaner, more efficient council will require appraisal of systems and processes, with a view to simplifying and rationalising them. This applies to commissioning as much as to direct service provision. All managers within the authority should be tasked, as a core component of their work, with revisiting all processes and systems to find efficiency and value for money. This simple approach to system and process engineering should be an ongoing and constant challenge throughout the authority. In many instances, simple 'tweaking' of processes may save considerable sums of money. There is potential for systems and process engineering to be a core part of the Service Quality Assessments being carried out in readiness for Local Government Reorganisation.

Joint Working and Partnerships

Much of KCC's work is delivered with or through partners. Significant elements of KCC's work are externally funded. The principle of seeking best value is as relevant for external spend as it is for KCC's budget, but additional sensitivities may be required when dealing with other organisations' cultures.

Statutory vs Discretionary

There is no assumption made in this strategy that KCC should only deliver, or ensure the delivery of, statutory services. Some of the most important work of the County Council is 'discretionary', and much of it supports the statutory services. The continuation of any service will remain a political choice; however, this strategy recommends that there should be greater clarity on what is statutory and what is discretionary for better decision making.

Budget Building and Treasury Management

Savings arising from actions taken through implementation of this strategy must feature within KCC's existing financial framework, processes and timescale for budget setting and monitoring.

It is acknowledged that local authority debt is a core part of treasury management and enables a sound capital programme. However, continued debt reduction will be sought where it is pragmatic and prudent to do so.

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THE DESIRED STATE

The aim of the DOLGE work should be to create a leaner more targeted, efficient and effective council where statutory and discretionary services are provided, within permitted powers, at the right scale, reflecting the needs of the residents of Kent.

A council where a culture of innovation, creativity and commercial acumen to benefit service delivery runs throughout, whilst ensuring transparency, probity and legality.

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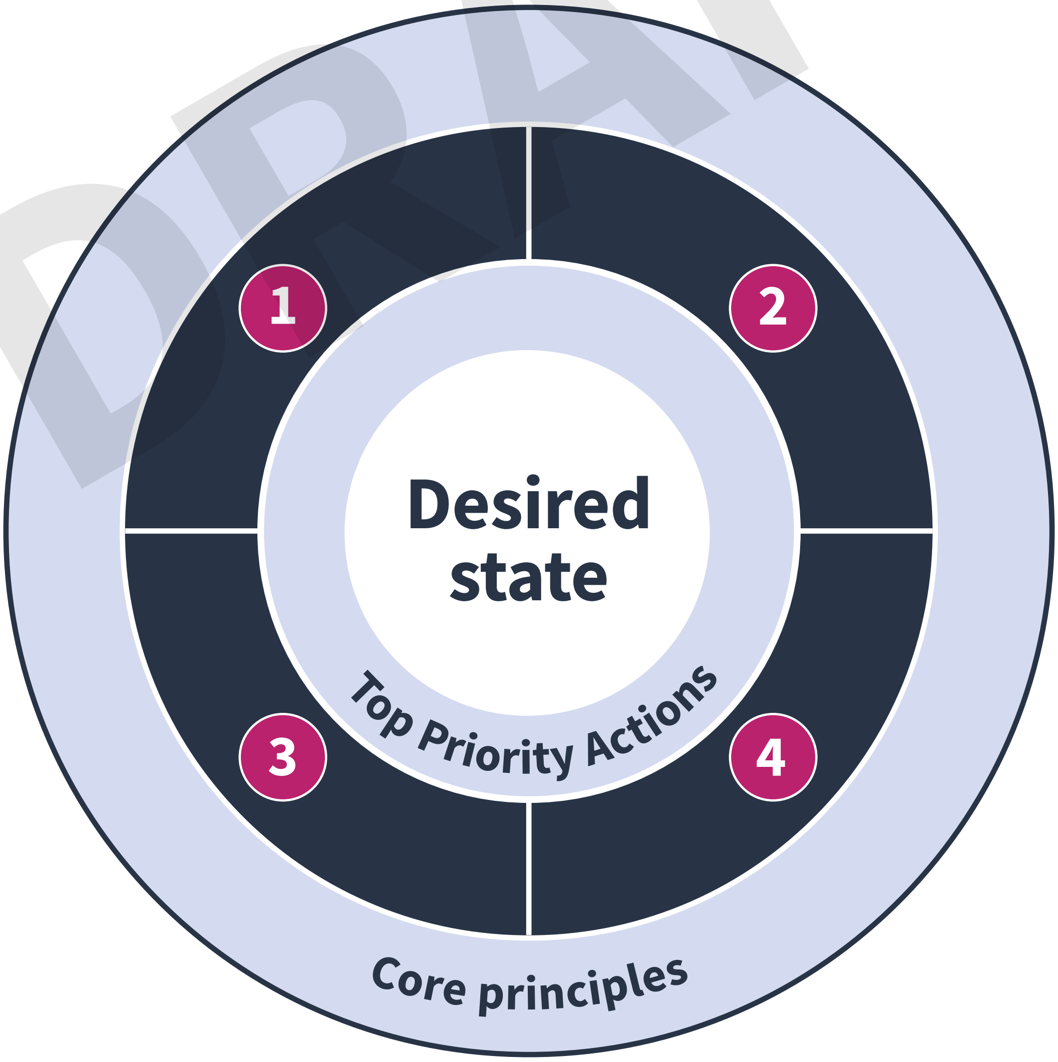
FOUR STRATEGIC AREAS

There are four strategic areas for the DOLGE work that will enable the authority to move towards its desired 'end state' of having an innovative culture and a leaner, more efficient and effective council.

1. Efficiency and Simplification
2. Ensuring Spend and Savings are to Budget
3. Commercial and Income Generation
4. Resilience and Local Government Reorganisation



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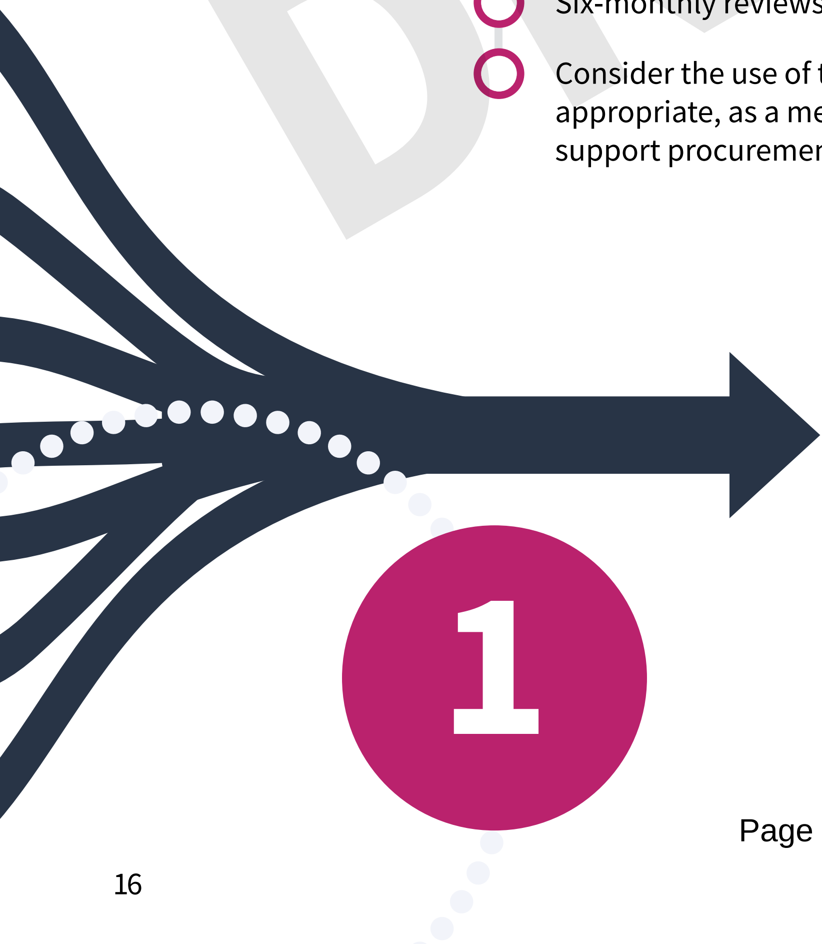
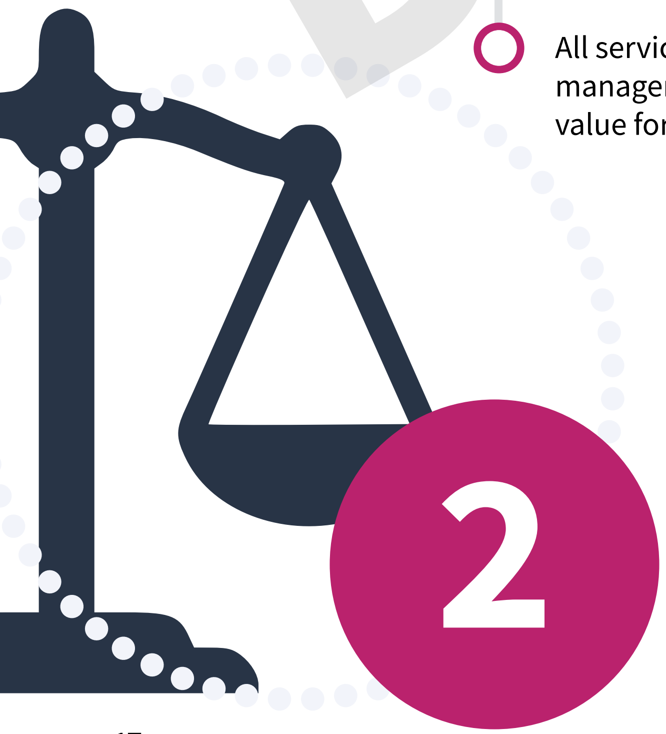
EFFICIENCY AND SIMPLIFICATION

- Review of FED process and content to enable better decision-making.
- Review of key performance indicators to fit with national requirements and areas of change for the County Council.
- Regular review of the Constitution to ensure no unnecessary bureaucratic structure or processes hinder transformation.
- Consider committee structures to prevent duplication and enhance decision making.
- Evaluate processes for financial monitoring and procurement, and re-engineer amendments particularly through the enhanced use of Artificial Intelligence.
- Contract timescales to be appropriate.
- Streamline comms effort.
- Extend training beyond simply ‘commercial’, to include income generation, budget monitoring, procurement processes etc.
- Simplify internal processes and streamline decision guiding boards.
- Six-monthly reviews of the KCC Strategic Statement.
- Consider the use of the unit costings for services where appropriate, as a mechanism to provide measurable data to support procurement and ensure value for money.



ENSURING SPEND AND SAVINGS ARE TO BUDGET

- Via the Deputy Leader, ensure balanced budget is set for 2027–2028 and the Medium-Term Financial Plan is realistic.
- Enhance flexible use of Capital receipts.
- Consider the definition and interpretation of ‘statutory and discretionary’ across all services to inform efficiency measures (can be done as part of service assessments for Local Government Reorganisation).
- Consider acceptable minimum levels of provision across all services.
- Develop ‘oven ready options’ that can be worked up as savings for speedy implementation.
- Develop ‘pre-cooked options’ that can be implemented immediately, such as recruitment freeze, freeze of external conference attendance, and other spending controls.
- Establish informal Star Chambers in high spending directorates, for progress oversight.
- Avoid future costs by challenging medium and long-term directorate plans for capital and revenue spend.
- Debt reduction where possible and pragmatic.
- Introduce staff incentives and recognition for generating income and implementing cost saving ideas.
- All services to continue to consider insourcing vs outsourcing, management contracting, partnering, and divesting to ensure value for money.



COMMERCIAL AND INCOME GENERATION

- Create ‘Innovation Hubs / Ideas incubators’ through which good ideas can be shaped as developmental projects.
- Develop projects to drive initiatives such as nuclear, road freight levy, extension of yellow box cameras, etc.
- Provide seed-corn funding for directorates to help them commence income generation projects; and encourage income generation ideas from staff.
- Ensure Directorates act as ‘One Council’ with each other in mind and consider impact across all the Council, including in work with contracted providers.
- Extend already proven successes such as Arranging Support Teams in Adult Social Care and Public Health to other directorates.
- Establish a Key Account management process for major suppliers and/or contracts.
- Development of strategies for the use of AI and technology with the purpose of increasing efficiency and effectiveness.
- Consider and review subsidy levels across all services.
- Embed the Commercial Strategy into KCC at all appropriate levels.
- Seek opportunities for invest to grow revenue streams, whilst being conscious not to grow the size of the organisation.
- Establish a deep dive review of the frequency of procurement waivers being used.
- Maximise income in the market place from KCC ‘selling’ its expertise.

RESILIENCE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

The Government's decision on Local Government Reorganisation will be a key determinant and driver for DOLGE's work. Should the Government decide to proceed with its ambitions for all local authorities in Kent to be disbanded and replaced with unitary authorities providing the full range of local authority services, this will be a challenge for KCC but also an opportunity in the planning for disaggregation and the introduction of the new authorities, potentially as early as April 2028.

It is essential though that service provision by KCC is maintained at sufficient quality right up to the vesting date in 2028; hence resilience must not be jeopardised. Core preparatory work to analyse each service within KCC and subsequent work to determine disaggregation (or aggregation from districts) will provide opportunities for KCC to arrange services in a different way or even to divest provision of some services. It is envisaged that any successor authorities may wish to adopt the principles and key elements of this strategy.

Handing over a sound financial legacy to new unitaries should be important, but so will reducing costs for current council taxpayers. In order to determine the right balance for this, DOLGE effort must be expended on the following investigations and action:

- Continued debt reduction, where appropriate.
- Consideration of the shape, remit and potential divestment of services considering Local Government Reorganisation.
- Enhancing capital receipts through increased disposals of surplus assets where no use for the new authorities is envisaged.
- Considering the merits of KCC's investment policy stretching beyond 2028, to include assessing timescales, restrictions on disposals, and investment terms and priorities.
- As part of the Local Government Reorganisation process, continue to consider alternative ways of ensuring provision of services.

TOP PRIORY ACTIONS AND CORE PRINCIPLES

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TOP PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR KCC FROM STRATEGIC AREAS

A small number of top priorities for action by KCC have been identified from within the four strategic areas. These are presented below.

All the following top priority actions should be monitored, evaluated and reported on by officers, with DOLGE Members providing oversight to ensure delivery.

- ★ Establish an account management process for major suppliers and contracts.
- ★ Establish approach of earlier commercial consideration and procurement oversight e.g. roll out of successful change of reporting of Arranging Care teams across other directorates.
- ★ Formation of Star Chambers for each directorate to ensure monitoring of spend.
- ★ Embed Commercial Strategy within KCC.
- ★ Embed DOLGE Principles from the strategy as a way of working.
- ★ Develop "oven-ready" savings options for ready implementation.
- ★ Explore options for divesting where appropriate in light of Local Government Reorganisation.
- ★ Open-mindedness for acceptance of technology to drive efficiencies.
- ★ Explore understanding of Discretionary vs Statutory vs Minimum Provision requirements as part of Local Government Reorganisation.
- ★ Address duplication across KCC (in services, back office, etc).
- ★ Introduce a scheme to encourage staff to generate income and cost saving initiatives.
- ★ Consider the use of unit costings for services where appropriate, as a mechanism to provide measurable data to support procurement and ensure value for money.

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CORE PRINCIPLES

To take the work of DOLGE forward in the authority, a number of core principles will be required to drive efficiency and value for money across KCC. These core principles have been developed following internal consultation with senior staff and through the SWOT and PESTLE analysis (see appendix). They have been produced as a direct result of assessment of the Council's financial pressures; resident expectations; systems and processes, and areas for improvement.

These core principles should be adopted by officers and Members within the authority and be used to challenge all spending:

- All staff and Members should ask the following questions:
  - Is this needed and is this spend necessary?
  - Do we have to do this?
  - Is this statutory?
  - Do we have to do all of this or can we do only part?
  - Can other organisations do it?
  - Can we do this more efficiently and effectively?
  - Can we do this differently?
- There should be no duplication of services, meetings, or committees.
- Achieve full cost recovery, whenever possible.
- Seek value for money.
- Make timely or earlier consideration of contract renewals to avoid rushed extensions.
- Ensure the correct length of service agreements in relation to cost, value, and flexibility required.
- All to act as 'One Council' to drive efficiencies and savings.
- Stop growing KCC.
- Consider and eliminate subsidies, where sensible.
- Consider the difference between 'need to provide' and 'nice to provide'.
- Simplify, and reduce complexity.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

It is important that the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's implementation does not create an industry in itself, but rather fits with existing monitoring and evaluation processes already operating in the authority.

Delivery against the "top priority actions" will be monitored through a focused Delivery Framework, aligned to financial performance and existing corporate oversight arrangements. This will keep oversight proportionate, avoid unnecessary bureaucracy, and provide clear evidence of impact as the strategy is embedded.

Members involved in DOLGE will:

- Oversee the strategy
- Monitor implementation of the principles
- Monitor delivery by senior officers and Members
- Review progress on efficiencies and report outcomes

Regular DOLGE star chambers with the directorates will be held to review progress against the strategic areas and top priority actions, identify risks and agree additional action necessary with Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors. These will be the cornerstone for monitoring and evaluating this strategy.

DOLGE will use existing reporting and governance channels wherever possible, strengthening links between performance, finance and delivery information. Oversight will remain practical, evidence-based and responsive as the strategy matures.

Reforming Kent 2025-2028 – DOLGE will support delivery of the Strategic Statement by driving a common-sense approach to efficiency, income generation and value for money. This includes systematic review of contracts, contract management and commercial opportunities, with progress reported through wider Strategic Statement updates.

Commercial Strategy 2026-28 – DOLGE will oversee delivery of the Commercial Strategy, ensuring clear accountability, consistent monitoring and measurable Best Value outcomes for Kent.

Financial Monitoring – DOLGE will review trends from the financial monitoring cycle, recommend action where required, and ensure recommendations and outcomes are reflected in financial monitoring reports.

Quarterly Performance Report – DOLGE will use the Quarterly Performance Report to track key performance trends, assess links with expenditure and recommend action to Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors where needed.

APPENDIX 1 – SWOT AND PESTLE ANALYSIS

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SWOT ANALYSIS

DOLGE's strength lies in its legitimacy, cross-cutting scope, and alignment with unavoidable financial realities. Its main risks are vagueness, over-promising, and political misinterpretation. Success depends on disciplined focus, visible resident benefits, and positioning efficiency as fairness, competence, and service protection.

Strengths

- Strong Political Legitimacy
- Efficiency is one of the few agendas with cross-party rhetorical support, even if execution differs. DOLGE can credibly claim to focus on protecting services, not cutting them.
- Clear Strategic Rationale

  KCC faces structural financial pressure, making efficiency unavoidable rather than optional. DOLGE aligns with statutory obligations to demonstrate value for money and sound financial management.
- Ability to Operate Across Silos
- Efficiency cuts across directorates, estates, procurement, IT, and governance. Unlike service departments, DOLGE can focus on system performance, not service protectionism.
- Officer Engagement Potential
- Many officers privately recognise inefficiencies but lack political cover to address them. DOLGE can provide authorisation to challenge legacy practices.
- Helicoptering – oversight that is not bogged down in specific services.
- Nimble
- Support for value for money from the public

Weaknesses

- Risk of Conceptual Vagueness
- "Efficiency" means different things to different people: cost-cutting, productivity, service redesign. Without discipline, DOLGE risks being everything and nothing.
- Limited Direct Delivery Power
- DOLGE typically relies on other departments to implement changes. Savings and improvements can be claimed but not realised.
- Cultural Resistance
- Political relationship with DOGE creates negative feelings and means DOLGE is more politically exposed than other parts of the council. Long-established ways of working are often defended as "necessary complexity." Previous transformation programmes may have created change fatigue.
- Political Sensitivity
- Efficiency proposals can quickly be reframed as: "cuts by another name," "centralisation," "technocratic overreach" or "selling the family silver."
- Process efficiencies take time to materialise.

Opportunities

- Invest-to-Save / invest to grow Programmes Estates rationalisation, energy efficiency, procurement reform, and process automation. Strong alignment with medium-term financial planning. Shift from “cuts” to “Return on Investment”.
- Visible, Resident-Facing Wins Faster processing times, reduced duplication, clearer accountability, transparency.
- DOLGE can be the place where business cases are stress-tested, savings claims are challenged, long-term costs are surfaced early.
- Cross Directorate thinking allows a “One Council” approach to efficiencies and savings.
- Income Generation
- Doing things differently e.g., resource sharing, externalization vs in house, partnering, and divesting.

Threats

- Being Used as Political Cover Risk that DOLGE is blamed for unpopular decisions made elsewhere. Efficiency language used to justify pre-decided outcomes.
- Public Misinterpretation Residents may equate efficiency with decline in visible services. Media narratives can oversimplify and/or change rhetoric negatively.
- Legal and Statutory Constraints Many high-cost services are legally mandated. Failure to respect this can lead to legal challenge or inspection failure.

PESTLE Analysis

Political Factors

Key dynamics

- Severe fiscal pressure on upper-tier councils: Adult Social Care, SEND, and Children's Services dominate political bandwidth, making 'efficiency' both attractive and politically sensitive.
- Low public trust in local government value-for-money: Creates opportunity for DOLGE but also risk of being seen as a cover for cuts.
- Cross-party appeal, uneven enthusiasm: Efficiency rhetoric is broadly popular, but implementation challenges vested interests (service silos, legacy practices).
- LGR – disaggregation of services and reorganisation of priorities

Strategic opportunity

- Position DOLGE as the mechanism that allows councilors to say "yes" to priorities without raising Council Tax or cutting valued services; driving towards a smaller state focused on residents' issues.

Economic Factors

Key dynamics

- Structural funding gap: Demand growth (especially care and SEND) far outpaces central government funding increases.
- Inflationary pressures: Contracts, energy, staff pay, and care placements continue to erode budgets.
- Local economic fragility: disparity between coastal and inland areas, and weaker commercial tax bases.
- Capital vs revenue tension: Pressure to sell assets or defer maintenance creates long-term inefficiencies.

Strategic opportunity

- Do things differently.

Social Factors

Key dynamics

- Ageing population: Increases in care demand whilst shrinking the working-age tax base.
- Rising public expectations: Residents expect private-sector levels of service responsiveness.
- Low tolerance for visible service decline: Residents will accept back-office reform, but not service reduction. Removal of unnecessary services is more difficult than whether they should have been started at all.
- Community disengagement: Many residents feel decisions are remote and unresponsive.
- Strong PR is a critical asset for explaining reform honestly.
- Reducing school rolls will result in questions about asset reallocation.

Strategic opportunity

- Frame efficiency as respect for residents' time, money, and dignity–not as abstract financial discipline.

Technological Factors

Key dynamics

- Legacy IT systems: Fragmented platforms across departments reduce productivity.
- Data quality issues: Poor interoperability undermines evidence-based decision-making.
- Automation potential: High volume, rules-based processes remain manually intensive.
- Digital exclusion risk: Efficiency through digitalisation can unintentionally exclude vulnerable residents.

Strategic opportunity

- Champion ‘boringly effective technology’: fewer systems, better data, and measurable, clear benefits in staff time savings rather than flashy transformation programmes. Use AI where clear benefits can be envisaged.

Environmental Factors

Key dynamics

- Estate inefficiency: Council buildings are often energy-inefficient and underutilised.
- Mitigation and adaptation for weather conditions: Flooding, heat resilience, and infrastructure strain add future liabilities.

Strategic opportunity

- Position environmental efficiency as financial prudence for future taxpayers, not virtue signaling.

Legal Factors

Key dynamics

- Statutory service obligations: Limit the scope for cuts in key areas (ASC, SEND).
- Procurement and employment law: Slows reform and limits flexibility.
- Judicial review risk: Poorly designed efficiency measures can be legally challenged.
- Regulatory inspection regimes: Ofsted, CQC, etc. influence priorities and risk tolerance.

Strategic opportunity

- Make DOLGE the place where ‘legally sound, financially responsible’ reforms are stress-tested before political adoption. Interrogation and definition of statutory.

Written and produced by

Chris Hespe – Cabinet Member: Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation

Paul Chamberlain – Deputy Cabinet Member: Local Government Efficiency and Reorganisation

Thanks to KCC Officers and Members

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Brian Collins (Deputy Leader)
Cabinet Members
Matthew Fraser Moat
All Reform UK Kent Members

First edition – September 2026

Kent County Council

EQIA Submission – ID Number
Section A

EQIA Title
Adoption of DOLGE Strategy

Responsible Officer
Rachel Chalmers-Stevens - CED CEO

Approved by (Note: approval of this EqIA must be completed within the EqIA App)
Ben Watts - DCED DCEO

Type of Activity

Service Change
No
Service Redesign
No
Project/Programme
No
Commissioning/Procurement
No
Strategy/Policy
Strategy/Policy
Details of other Service Activity
No

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate
Strategic and Corporate Services
Responsible Service
Deputy Chief Executive's Department
Responsible Head of Service
Ben Watts - DCED DCEO
Responsible Director
Ben Watts - DCED DCEO

Aims and Objectives

This EQIA relates to the proposed adoption of the Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) Strategy, which will be the subject of a key decision given that this is a new strategy for Kent County Council outside of the Policy Framework. The aim of this EQIA is to determine whether the proposed adoption of the strategy may affect people differently based on protected characteristics. The primary audience for the strategy is Kent County Council's staff and Members and the strategy will therefore not be subject to external/public consultation.

Any direct decisions that may follow from the DOLGE Strategy would still be subject to relevant and separate decisions and EQIA as necessary.

Section B – Evidence

Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity?
No

It is possible to get the data in a timely and cost effective way?
Yes

Is there national evidence/data that you can use?
No

Have you consulted with stakeholders?

Not Applicable
Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?
The primary audience of the proposed DOLGE Strategy is Kent County Council's staff and Members. Whilst a level of internal consultation has been undertaken to inform the development of the strategy, this will not be subject to external/public consultation. The strategy and associated key decision will be considered by the Policy & Resources Cabinet Commitee on 2 July 2026 ahead of Cabinet. Any direct decisions that may follow from the DOLGE Strategy would still be the subject to relevant stakeholder consultation as necessary.
Has there been a previous Equality Analysis (EQIA) in the last 3 years?
No
Do you have evidence that can help you understand the potential impact of your activity?
Yes
Section C – Impact
Who may be impacted by the activity?
Service Users/clients Service users/clients
Staff Staff/Volunteers
Residents/Communities/Citizens Residents/communities/citizens
Are there any positive impacts for all or any of the protected groups as a result of the activity that you are doing?
No
Details of Positive Impacts
Not Applicable
Negative impacts and Mitigating Actions
19.Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age
Are there negative impacts for age?
No
Details of negative impacts for Age
Not Applicable
Mitigating Actions for Age
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age
Not Applicable
20. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Disability
Are there negative impacts for Disability?
No
Details of Negative Impacts for Disability
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Disability
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Disability
Not Applicable
21. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Sex
Are there negative impacts for Sex
No
Details of negative impacts for Sex
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Sex

Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Sex
Not Applicable
22. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender
No
Negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Not Applicable
23. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Race
Are there negative impacts for Race
No
Negative impacts for Race
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Race
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Race
Not Applicable
24. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Religion and belief
Are there negative impacts for Religion and belief
No
Negative impacts for Religion and belief
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Religion and belief
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Religion and Belief
Not Applicable
25. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Are there negative impacts for Sexual Orientation
No
Negative impacts for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
26. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Are there negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
No
Negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
27. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

No
Negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
28. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Carer’s responsibilities
Are there negative impacts for Carer’s responsibilities
No
Negative impacts for Carer’s responsibilities
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Carer’s responsibilities
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Carer’s responsibilities
Not Applicable