



Summons to and
Agenda for a
Meeting on
**Thursday, 6th
November, 2025**
at **10.00 am**



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
SESSIONS HOUSE
MAIDSTONE

Wednesday, 29 October 2025

To: All Members of the County Council

A meeting of the County Council will be held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XQ on Thursday, 6th November, 2025 at **10.00 am** to deal with the following business. **The meeting is scheduled to end by 4.30 pm.**

A G E N D A

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests in items on the agenda
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2025 and, if in order, **(Pages 1 - 12)** to be approved as a correct record
4. Corporate Parenting Panel - Minutes for noting **(Pages 13 - 18)**
5. Chairman's Announcements
6. Questions
7. Report by Leader of the Council
8. Strategic Statement - Reforming Kent **(Pages 19 - 42)**
9. KCC's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway **(Pages 43 - 204)**
10. External Audit Annual Report (to follow)
11. Motions for Time Limited Debate **(Pages 205 - 210)**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Watts', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Benjamin Watts
Deputy Chief Executive
03000 416814

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 18 September 2025.

PRESENT: Mr J Baker, Mr B Barrett, Mr B Black, Mr A Brady, Mr M Brice, Mr M Brown, Mr D Burns, Mr C Burwash, Mr A Cecil, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr J Defriend, Mr S Dixon, Mr M Ellis, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr L Evans, Mr P Evans, Mr J Finch, Mr R Ford, Mrs B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mrs M Fothergill, Mr M Fraser Moat, Mr B Fryer, Mr M Harrison, Mr S Heaven, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Mr S Jeffery, Ms L Kemkaran, Ms I Kemp, Mr A Kennedy, Mr A Kibble, Mr P King, Mrs M Lawes, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Mr J Moreland, Miss D Morton, Mr M Munday, Ms C Nolan, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Mr R Palmer, Mr M Paul, Mrs B Porter, Mr T Prater, Ms A Randall, Mr H Rayner, Mr A Ricketts, Mrs S Roots, Ms C Russell, Mr G R Samme, Mr C Sefton, Mr T L Shonk, Mr D Sian, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE, Dr G Sturley, Mr P Thomas, Mr A Thorp, Mr D Truder, Mr R Waters, Mr N Wibberley, Mr N Williams, Mrs P Williams and Mr D Wimble

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Cook (Democratic Services Manager) and Mr B Watts (General Counsel)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

10. Apologies for Absence
(Item 1)

The Democratic Services Manager reported apologies from Mr Bradshaw, Mr Lehmann, Mr Logen, Mr Mulvihill and Mr Webb.

11. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests in items on the agenda
(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

12. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2025 and, if in order, to be approved as a correct record
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 10 July 2025 be approved as a correct record.

13. Corporate Parenting Panel - Minutes for noting
(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 1 April 2025 be noted.

14. Chairman's Announcements
(Item 5)

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman offered sincere condolences to the Royal Family on the passing of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent.

15. Questions
(Item 6)

In accordance with Sections 14.15 to 14.22 of the Constitution, 24 questions were submitted by the deadline and 21 questions were put to the Executive. 10 questions were asked and replies given. A record of all questions and answers is available [online](#) with the papers for this meeting.

16. Report by Leader of the Council
(Item 7)

- 1) The Leader explained that a Commercial Strategy for KCC was being developed which would strengthen procurement and contract management. The strategy aimed to improve efficiency, reduce waste, and ensure maximum impact from public spending. The key decision for the strategy would go to the next meeting of the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, and the formal launch of the strategy was expected in the new year.
- 2) The Leader expressed concern over the increasing number of illegal migrants arriving in Kent and the associated civil unrest across the country. Known accommodation sites in Kent included Dover, Manston, and Napier Barracks, and there may be other unknown hotels and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). The Leader had written to the Home Secretary requesting early consultation and transparency in identifying new sites in Kent but had not yet received a response. Letters were also sent to all 12 Kent council leaders requesting information on migrant accommodation in their districts and boroughs.
- 3) The Leader hosted a public meeting on 26 August 2025 to discuss safety issues affecting women and girls. Attendees, amongst others, included

representatives from the Women's Safety Initiative, Oasis Domestic Abuse Service, Rising Sun Kent, and SATEDA. The Leader received positive feedback from domestic abuse charities and said the Council would work with community groups and law enforcement to ensure that practical measures such as providing spiking detection kits in relevant venues were provided.

- 4) The Leader reiterated her commitment to restoring international Eurostar services to Kent. An event would be held on Friday 25 September 2025 to promote Kent as a destination for international rail services. The Leader hoped this initiative would influence Eurostar's decision-making and encourage future service stops in Kent.
- 5) The Leader expressed disappointment and concern over the closure of Visit Kent. She criticised government policies that she believed were harming economic growth, including high taxes and increased national insurance. The Leader had written to the Chancellor highlighting the crisis facing Kent's tourism industry and pledged to continue promoting Kent as a tourist destination and to explore options following Visit Kent's closure.
- 6) Members were reminded to promote the Council's online budget consultation, which would close on 29 September 2025. The Leader was pleased that public engagement had increased compared to the previous year and emphasised the importance of involving Kent residents in financial decision-making.
- 7) The Leader turned to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and explained that a letter had been sent to all Kent Council Leaders, advising them that the Council would be developing its own business case for its preferred option namely a single Kent and Medway unitary authority with three area assemblies. The Leader stated that this option was the least expensive, least disruptive, and most logical way forward. She explained that this decision followed the Kent Leaders meeting held on 3 September 2025, where it was agreed to progress two options for development into business cases: a three-unitary model and a four-unitary model. The Leader commented that disaggregating county services would result in significant costs to taxpayers, potentially leading to higher council tax bills and reduced service quality. Therefore, officers had been instructed to prepare a standalone business case to ensure a high-quality and cost-effective report. The Leader confirmed that KCC would continue to work with all councils in Kent and Medway, and with strategic partner KPMG.
- 8) Finally, the Leader referenced the recent assassination of Charlie Kirk in the United States. She described the incident as a tragic reminder of the importance of free speech and highlighted the importance of respectful collaboration and constructive debate within the Council.
- 9) Mr Hook, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, welcomed the announcement that the Council would adopt a commercial strategy and noted that Oxfordshire County Council, led by the Liberal Democrats, had

had a commercial strategy in place for some time. Mr Hook highlighted that a good commercial strategy should also take into account social and environmental impacts.

- 10) Mr Hook said that Merchant Navy Day was marked on 3 September 2025, recognising the contribution of 25,000 seafarers who served the country by transporting 95% of its trade. He said many councils had recognised the day and requested that the Council consider formally recognising Merchant Navy Day in future.
- 11) Mr Hook explained that a response had been received from the Secretary of State regarding reform of Blue Badge eligibility. One of the Secretary of State's Ministers had expressed interest in meeting with the relevant Members in the near future.
- 12) Mr Hook expressed sympathy for Mr Charlie Kirk's family and commented that similar acts of political violence occurred globally. Mr Hook recommended everyone read two speeches by Robert F. Kennedy Sr, including his remarks following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, which emphasised unity, compassion, and justice.
- 13) Regarding LGR, Mr Hook said that his group supported greater democracy and decentralisation, opposing the proposal for a single Kent and Medway unitary authority. He expressed disappointment that the LGR process so far had lacked meaningful public consultation.
- 14) Mr Hook expressed concern over the closure of Visit Kent, noting that 11% of Kent's jobs were linked to tourism, and called for a clear and actionable plan to market Kent and grow its tourism sector.
- 15) Mr Hook expressed support for the restoration of Eurostar services to Kent which he said was a vital link for business, tourism, and education. He commented that the Kent services stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit-related passport controls, and urged the government to reduce red tape, using Switzerland and Norway as examples of where this was done successfully.
- 16) In relation to the Leader's comments on civil unrest, Mr Hook reported incidents within his division of threats and abuse which were directed at people who had expressed differing views on the display of flags.
- 17) Mr Hood, the Leader of the Green Group, referred to the motion on violence against women and girls at the previous County Council meeting and commented that since that meeting, domestic abuse charities had written collectively to the Leader, expressing concern over her comments regarding asylum seekers.
- 18) Mr Hood expressed concern over comments made by members of the Administration questioning the number of Education, Health and Care Plans

(EHCPs) and the appropriateness of support provided to parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

- 19) Mr Hood referred to a far-right demonstration in Maidstone on 16 August 2025 and expressed disappointment that some Reform UK councillors had been present. He warned Members against associating with individuals displaying symbols of prejudice and extremism.
- 20) Mr Hood emphasised the importance of political debate within the Council chamber, noting that opposition members played a vital role in holding the Administration to account, and urged committee chairs to facilitate meaningful discussion.
- 21) Mr Hood questioned the financial logic of the Administration's decision to sell Invicta House whilst facing a £67million refurbishment cost for Sessions House. He suggested that the Administration's strategy relied on the assumption that government would push through LGR, despite recent ministerial changes within central government.
- 22) Mr Hood welcomed the Administration's commitment to replace Visit Kent and restore international rail services at Kent stations. He praised Kent's tourism potential, in particular the Kentish Riviera, High Weald, North Downs, and numerous castles and stately homes.
- 23) The Chairman reminded Members of the Nolan Principles and the requirement under the Constitution that speeches should remain relevant to the matter under discussion and not criticise the motives or behaviour of any Member or Officer.
- 24) Mr Rayner, Leader of the Conservative Group, declared an interest as the Managing Director of Phoenix Park Management Company Limited, which provided housing in Northwest Kent.
- 25) Mr Rayner addressed the issue of safety for women and girls, noting that he had worked with Kent County Council Highways over the past four years to improve lighting in the Northfleet to Ebbsfleet pedestrian tunnel. He stated that the lighting had transformed the tunnel and increased safety, especially during winter months. He also noted that the enhancements supported greater use of fast train services to London and Stratford from Ebbsfleet International. Mr Rayner supported the Leader's efforts to increase international rail services at Ebbsfleet and Ashford stations, describing the initiative as beneficial for Kent residents.
- 26) Mr Rayner stated that the Conservative Group did not support any form of LGR without devolution in the form of a mayoral combined authority. He emphasised the need for a clear and agreed high-quality mayoralty, as seen in certain metropolitan areas, and a satisfactory funding arrangement. He clarified that the previous Conservative Administration only agreed to participate in the current LGR process on the condition that it would be linked to a well-funded combined mayoral authority.

- 27) Mr Brady, Leader of the Labour Group, addressed the closure of Visit Kent, describing it as a successful organisation that supported jobs and tourism, and criticised the Administration for failing to act when Visit Kent required support.
- 28) Mr Brady explained that Labour MPs were actively working to restore Eurostar services to Ashford and Ebbsfleet, including engaging with ministers, operators, and securing support from the Prime Minister. He welcomed the Administration's support for this initiative.
- 29) Mr Brady criticised the Reform Administration's preferred option for LGR and said it was disconnected from local needs. He argued that the proposal risked creating a "mega-council" that was too large to listen and too slow to act. He called for smarter, community-led solutions that empowered local voices.
- 30) Mr Brady questioned the decision to retain Sessions House, labelling it a vanity project rather than a cost-saving measure. He warned that long-term maintenance, hidden costs, and poor planning would result in significant financial burdens for taxpayers. He commented that the financial consequences of keeping Sessions House would impact every financial decision, whilst services were cut and communities faced hardship.
- 31) Mr Brady listed examples of achievements of the Labour Government that he said would benefit Kent residents, such as renters' rights, environmental protections, rail reform, 1,000 new GPs, mental health support in every school, 1 million homes lifted out of poverty, and ending zero-hour contracts.
- 32) Mr Brady concluded by expressing concern about the Council's upcoming budget and the effectiveness of the Administration's financial planning.
- 33) The Leader responded to some of the points made by the Group Leaders. She welcomed the suggestion made by Mr Hook regarding Merchant Navy Day, and responded to comments made by the group leaders regarding Reform UK's use of the union flag and violence against women and girls.
- 34) The Leader defended the Council's preferred option for LGR and argued that it was the most democratic way of ensuring that residents were locally represented.
- 35) The Leader reiterated the importance of Kent's tourism industry and criticised the Labour Government's economic policies which she claimed had harmed growth and contributed to job losses.
- 36) The Leader defended the Administration's decision not to fund Visit Kent, stating that prudent spending of taxpayers' money was a priority. She rejected opposition claims that the funding required was minimal, asserting that every pound mattered.

- 37) The Leader welcomed cross-party support for restoring Eurostar services to Kent and expressed optimism about encouraging competition on the line to reinstate stopping services at Kent stations.
- 38) The Leader concluded by referencing the quote from Robert F. Kennedy Sr, mentioned by Mr Hook, and affirmed her own commitment to compassion towards fellow Members.
- 39) RESOLVED that the Leader's report be noted.

17. Draft Strategic Statement - Reforming Kent
(Item 8)

- 1) Ms Kemkaran proposed, and Mr Collins seconded the motion that:

"County Council comments on the draft Council Strategy, Reforming Kent 2025-2028."
- 2) RESOLVED to note the comments made on the draft Council Strategy, Reforming Kent 2025-28.

18. Senior Management Structure
(Item 9)

- 1) Ms Kemkaran proposed, and Mr Collins seconded the motion that:

"County Council is asked to:
 1. Agree the proposed changes to the senior management structure.
 2. Agree the deletion of the General Counsel and Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development posts.
 3. Agree the change in report line for the Director of Infrastructure from the Deputy Chief Executive to the Chief Executive.
 4. Agree that the Head of Law be designated Monitoring Officer within the new structure, to take effect upon implementation of the revised structure.
 5. Note the change in report lines for the Head of Law to the Chief Executive; Head of Commercial and Procurement to the Deputy Chief Executive; Assistant Director People to the Deputy Chief Executive; the Head of Health and Safety to the Director of Infrastructure and the Head of People Strategy to the Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance.
 6. Instruct the Monitoring Officer to advise on and propose changes to the Constitution to give effect to any changes agreed by this paper.

7. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to take relevant actions and make required arrangements in line with the Constitutional Personnel Management Rules to implement the revised structure, as required to implement the Council's decision."
- 2) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion in paragraph 1.
- 3) RESOLVED that Council:
 1. Agrees the proposed changes to the senior management structure.
 2. Agrees the deletion of the General Counsel and Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development posts.
 3. Agrees the change in report line for the Director of Infrastructure from the Deputy Chief Executive to the Chief Executive.
 4. Agrees that the Head of Law be designated Monitoring Officer within the new structure, to take effect upon implementation of the revised structure.
 5. Notes the change in report lines for the Head of Law to the Chief Executive; Head of Commercial and Procurement to the Deputy Chief Executive; Assistant Director People to the Deputy Chief Executive; the Head of Health and Safety to the Director of Infrastructure and the Head of People Strategy to the Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance.
 6. Instructs the Monitoring Officer to advise on and propose changes to the Constitution to give effect to any changes agreed by this paper.
 7. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive to take relevant actions and make required arrangements in line with the Constitutional Personnel Management Rules to implement the revised structure, as required to implement the Council's decision.

19. Quarterly Performance Report - Q4
(Item 10)

- 1) Ms Kemkaran proposed, and Mr Collins seconded the motion that:
"County Council notes the Performance Report."
- 2) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion in paragraph 1.
- 3) RESOLVED that Council notes the Performance Report.

20. Treasury Management Outturn 2024-25
(Item 11)

- 1) Mr Collins proposed, and Mr Hespe seconded the motion that:
"County Council notes the report."

- 2) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion in paragraph 1.
- 3) RESOLVED that Council notes the report.

21. Annual Report of Urgent Decisions - 2024-25
(Item 12)

- 1) Ms Kemkaran proposed, and Mr Collins seconded the motion that:
“County Council notes the report.”
- 2) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion in paragraph 1.
- 3) RESOLVED that Council notes the report.

22. Motions for Time Limited Debate
(Item 13)

- 1) Mr Hespe proposed, and Mr Chamberlain seconded the motion that:
“This Council resolves to:
 - (a) be open-minded but sceptical of anthropogenic climate change.
 - (b) welcome open and inclusive debate on the topic.
 - (c) always consider ways to enhance the County’s energy security and welcome a mixed economy of provision.
 - (d) consider any energy scheme proposal with an analysis of its business case; which should consider economic, social and environmental impacts and consequences.
 - (e) rescind the prior declaration of a Climate Emergency.”
- 2) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion in paragraph 1 to the vote and the voting was as follows.

For (50)

Mr J Baker, Mr B Black, Mr M Brown, Mr D Burns, Mr C Burwash, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mr J Defriend, Mr S Dixon, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr L Evans, Mr P Evans, Mr J Finch, Mr R Ford, Mrs B Fordham, Mrs M Fothergill, Mrs G Foster, Mr M Fraser Moat, Mr B Fryer, Mr M Harrison, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Ms L Kemkaran, Miss I Kemp, Mr A Kibble, Mr P King, Mrs M Lawes, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Miss D Morton, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Mr R Palmer, Mr M Paul, Mrs B Porter, Ms A Randall, Mrs S Roots, Mr T Shonk, Mr D Sian, Mr G Sturley, Mr P Thomas, Mr A Thorp, Mr D Truder, Mr R Waters, Mr N Wibberley, Mrs P Williams and Mr D Wimble

Against (20)

Mr A Brady, Mr M Brice, Mrs T Dean MBE, Mr S Heaven, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mr S Jeffery, Mr A Kennedy, Mr J Moreland, Mr M Munday, Ms C Nolan, Mr T Prater, Mr A Ricketts, Ms C Russell, Mr G R Samme, Mr C Sefton, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild MBE, Mr N Williams

Abstain (3)

Mr B Barrett, Mrs S Hudson, Mr H Rayner

Motion carried.

3) RESOLVED that Council resolves to:

- (a) be open-minded but sceptical of anthropogenic climate change.
- (b) welcome open and inclusive debate on the topic.
- (c) always consider ways to enhance the County's energy security and welcome a mixed economy of provision.
- (d) consider any energy scheme proposal with an analysis of its business case; which should consider economic, social and environmental impacts and consequences.
- (e) rescind the prior declaration of a Climate Emergency.

4) Mr Jeffery proposed, and Mr Stepto seconded the motion that:

"This Council resolves the following:

- 1) Call on the Cabinet Member for Environment to introduce and promote a new initiative which would allow residents to adopt their streets, to reduce the use of glyphosate to control weeds to areas which are not adopted.
- 2) Call on the Cabinet Member for Environment to work with the responsible Officers to investigate and consider alternatives to glyphosate.
- 3) Request that all verges which are managed for biodiversity improvements are marked with a bee symbol to ensure they are easily recognised and avoided by contractors and are not accidentally mowed.
- 4) Recognise the exceptional work that KCC Officers have undertaken to develop and manage the Plan Bee initiative to protect Kent's biodiversity, and the work of residents in engaging with the initiative.
- 5) Call on the Cabinet Member for Environment to work with the responsible Officers to investigate ways to make it easier for residents to adopt verges with an agreement to enhance and improve the biodiversity in them.
- 6) Ask that the Executive agree an ongoing commitment to fund the Plan Bee initiative."

5) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion in paragraph 4 to the vote and the voting was as follows.

For (20)

Mr B Barrett, Mr A Brady, Mr M Brice, Mrs T Dean MBE, Mr S Heaven, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mr S Jeffery, Mr A Kennedy, Mr J Moreland, Mr M Munday, Ms C Nolan, Mr T Prater, Ms A Randall, Mr A Ricketts, Mr G R Samme, Mr C Sefton, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild MBE

Against (50)

Mr J Baker, Mr B Black, Mr M Brown, Mr D Burns, Mr C Burwash, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mr J Defriend, Mr S Dixon, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr L Evans, Mr P Evans, Mr J Finch, Mrs B Fordham, Mrs M Fothergill, Mrs G Foster, Mr M Fraser Moat, Mr M Harrison, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Mrs S Hudson, Ms L Kemkaran, Mr A Kibble, Mr P King, Mrs M Lawes, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Miss D Morton, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Mr R Palmer, Mr M Paul, Mrs B Porter, Mr H Rayner, Ms C Russell, Mrs S Roots, Mr T Shonk, Mr D Sian, Mr G Sturley, Mr P Thomas, Mr A Thorp, Mr D Truder, Mr R Waters, Mr N Wibberley, Mr N Williams, Mrs P Williams and Mr D Wimble

Abstain (3)

Mr R Ford, Mr B Fryer, Miss I Kemp

Motion lost.

- 6) Mr Hook proposed, and Mr Sefton seconded the following updated motion to the motion that was published as part of the agenda. The updated motion was agreed by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, the Proposer, and the Secunder prior to the meeting.

“The County Council resolves to:

- Encourage Kent residents to ensure that they are up to date with medically recommended vaccinations and in particular, support the Director of Public Health in encouraging an uptake in the MMR vaccination (and future MMRV vaccine) to prevent an outbreak of measles and mumps.
- [Support the Director of Public Health who will lead on messaging to the wider public especially in schools, colleges and universities ensuring that the messaging incorporates best practice in these situations.](#)
- [Request that the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health continues to monitor and support the public health campaigns in this area of work throughout the year.”](#)

- 7) The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health declared a non-pecuniary interest in that she was a registered nurse.
- 8) Following the debate, the Chairman put the updated motion in paragraph 6 to the vote and the voting was as follows.

For (73)

Mr J Baker, Mr B Barrett, Mr B Black, Mr A Brady, Mr M Brice, Mr M Brown, Mr D Burns, Mr C Burwash, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mrs T Dean MBE, Mr J Defriend, Mr S Dixon, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr L Evans, Mr P Evans, Mr J Finch, Mr R Ford, Mrs B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mrs M Fothergill, Mr M Fraser Moat, Mr B Fryer, Mr M Harrison, Mr S Heaven, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Mr S Jeffery, Mr A Kennedy, Ms L Kemkaran, Miss I Kemp, Mr A Kibble, Mr P King, Mrs M Lawes, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Mr J Moreland, Miss D Morton, Mr M Munday, Ms C Nolan, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Mr R Palmer, Mr M Paul, Mrs B Porter, Mr T Prater, Ms A Randall, Mr H Rayner, Mr A Ricketts, Mrs S Roots, Ms C Russell, Mr G R Samme, Mr C Sefton, Mr T Shonk, Mr D Sian, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild MBE, Mr G Sturley, Mr P Thomas, Mr A Thorp, Mr D Truder, Mr R Waters, Mr N Wibberley, Mr N Williams, Mrs P Williams and Mr D Wimble

Against (0)

Abstain (0)

Motion carried.

9) RESOLVED that County Council resolves to:

- Encourage Kent residents to ensure that they are up to date with medically recommended vaccinations and in particular, support the Director of Public Health in encouraging an uptake in the MMR vaccination (and future MMRV vaccine) to prevent an outbreak of measles and mumps.
- Support the Director of Public Health who will lead on messaging to the wider public especially in schools, colleges and universities ensuring that the messaging incorporates best practice in these situations.
- Request that the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health continues to monitor and support the public health campaigns in this area of work throughout the year.

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL – 29 July 2025

MINUTES of the meeting held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Martin Brice, Dan Bride, Paul Chamberlain, Stephen Gray, Sarah Hammond, Stuart Jeffery, Isabella Kemp, Adrian Kibble, Kayleigh Leonard, Connie Nolan, Peter Osborne, Amelia Randall, Tracy Scott, Colin Sefton, Caroline Smith and Pamela Williams

IN ATTENDANCE: Joanne Carpenter (Participation and Engagement Manager), Connor Cruickshank (Apprentice Participation Worker), Alice Gleave (Interim Assistant Director for SEND Operations), Hayley Bodiam (Service Manager), Kevin Kasaven (Director of Children's Countywide Services), Maria Cordrey (Head of Fostering Service), Mark Vening (Fostering Service Manager), Sarah Alizadeh (QA Team Manager), Sarah Howell (Deputy Headteacher for North and West Kent), Marian Smith (Deputy Headteacher for North and West Kent), Roxanne Hills (Designated Nurse for Looked after Children) and Georgia Humphreys (Democratic Services Officer)

Election of Chair

1. Mrs Williams was nominated by the Executive to be the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
2. The Panel agreed the nomination and Mrs Williams was declared as Chair of the Panel.
3. **RESOLVED** that Mrs Williams was elected as the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Election of Vice-Chair

1. Ms Kemp proposed, and Mr Osborne seconded that Ms Randall be elected as Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
2. As there were no further nominations, the Chair declared Ms Randall as Vice-Chair of the Panel.
3. **RESOLVED** that Ms Randall be elected Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies had been received from Mrs Russell, Mrs Palmer, Mr Heaver for whom Mr Jeffery was present as substitute and Ms Sayer for whom Ms Hills was present as substitute.

Mr Sefton and Mr Brice were in attendance virtually.

Chair's Announcements

1. The Chair read out a verbal update from the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, which gave an overview of the work herself and her Deputy Cabinet Member had undertaken since their appointment.
2. The Chair advised the Panel that a minute silence would be taken at 3p.m. to mark the one year anniversary of the Southport tragedy.
3. The Chair invited members of the Panel and officers to introduce themselves.

Minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2025

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

Participation Team update

1. Ms Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, CYPE, and her team introduced the report and gave an overview of its content. The team highlighted the events held throughout the last period and collaboration between KCC Councillors and Officers and the Participation Team.
2. Ms Carpenter shared a video which gave an overview of the work of the Participation Team. Additionally, sharing a piece of artwork with the Panel which provided an insight into the thoughts and feeling of children in care.
3. Members complimented the work of the Participation Team and the piece of artwork that was shown.
4. Ms Hammond commended the number of Members present at the meeting, emphasising the importance of a 'one voice' focus on the wellbeing of young people and the duty for looked after children.
5. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. When asked if issues identified in the care system were consistent across the country. Ms Carpenter responded that there has been work done with other counties and it seemed that concerns and worries were similar.
 - b. A Member emphasised the importance of meeting the young people and understanding the importance that comes with being a Corporate Parent. Adding that the more learnt about the young people, the more pride and responsibility grew.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the Participation Team update.

Challenge Cards update

1. Ms Carpenter, Participation and Engagement Manager, CYPE, and her team introduced the report and gave an overview of its content.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the Challenge Cards progress to date.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service Annual Report

1. Ms Bodiam, Service Manager, introduced the report and gave an overview of its content. Ms Bodiam highlighted the changes that had taken place such as the introduction of additional IRO to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) due to the need to support the intake. Additionally, the Panel was given an overview of the activity from the previous year and a summary of goals for the following year.
2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Ms Bodiam shared that a reason for instability in placements was hard to pin down, there was a staged review taking place into this. It was important to take into consideration the age of those young people concerned, during difficult developmental stages some factors leading to instability were out of the control of the service.
 - b. Ms Hammond added that the low levels of young children staying in foster placements for two years or more was a positive thing as they would have either been returned to family or moved to an adoptive placement.
 - c. Ms Bodiam was to come back to the Panel with data regarding the placements of young people aged over 16.
 - d. In reference to placement stability, Mr Kasaven explained that the system was built so babies had planned moves for stability. Additionally, sharing that UASC had multiple unit moves, this was something that the Local Authority had no control over.
 - e. A Member emphasised the importance of improving transitions for young people leaving care.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the IRO Annual Report and its findings.

Kent Fostering Service Annual Report

1. Ms Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, introduced the report and gave an overview of its content.
2. Ms Cordrey, Head of Fostering Service, gave an overview of the work undertaken by Kent's Fostering Service, highlighting that there were some movements within the fostering service transferring from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to in-house fostering. Additionally, asking Members to help raise the profile of Kent fostering and fostering for the Local Authority.
3. The Panel was shown a video which highlighted the work of the Mockingbird Programme.

Mr Vening, Head of Kinship Fostering, provided an overview of the work carried out by Kent's Fostering Service. He explained that viability assessments were being undertaken to ensure that, wherever possible, children could be cared for within a kinship arrangement. Mr Vening also noted collaborative efforts with Legal Services and Children's Teams to address variations in practice and promote consistency across the service. He further reported that the service had received positive feedback regarding its performance and impact.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the information contained within the Kent Fostering Annual Report, Kinship Service Annual Report and Business Plan for 2025/2026.

Virtual School Kent Head Teacher Annual Report

1. Ms Howell, Deputy Headteacher for North and West Kent, introduced the report and gave an overview of its content.

Ms Smith, Deputy Headteacher for North and West Kent, highlighted that not all children remain engaged with education and training. She noted a gap in the availability of appropriate courses tailored to individual needs. The service is committed to supporting young people in identifying and pursuing pathways aligned with their career aspirations. Ms Smith also reported that the service conducted approximately 1,800 Personal Education Plans (PEPs), three times per year. Last year, the scope of support was expanded to include children in early years settings from the age of two.

2. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. When asked why the KPI's were going in the right direction but the academic results were not. Ms Hammond responded that the service was looking to track the same young people long term in order to spot when the expectations dip, adding that some factors that affect results were out of the control of the service.

- b. The service had prevented eleven permanent exclusions before December 2024. Pupil Premium funding was used to support students and facilitate alternative arrangements. There was effort put into relationships with school leaders, focusing on understanding behaviour rather than punishing students.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the impact of the Virtual School in relation to its performance and endorse its priorities for 2023-24.

Update on Children in Care in Oasis Reform School

1. Mr Kasaven, Director for Children's Countywide Services, provided the Panel with a verbal update on children in care in the Oasis Reform School.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the verbal update.

Missing Episodes – Performance Report

1. Ms Bride, Assistant Director, Head of Youth Justice, Adolescent Social Work, Early Help and Response Teams, & Family Hubs, introduced the report and gave an overview of its content. Ms Bride provided the Panel with an overview of the service's approach to data collection and explained how this information was utilised to gain insights into the reasons individuals go missing.
2. Ms Hammond explained that the service took every missing episode seriously, regardless of how short it was. Even brief absences carried the risk of a child being drawn into gang activity. There was a conscious effort to understand where the child had been and the circumstances that led to their disappearance. Whilst most common reasons for missing episodes were seeing friends and partners, it was important to remain alert to the underlying issues and use the appropriate tools to uncover the real reasons behind each episode.
3. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. The data indicated a relatively balanced distribution between girls and boys reported missing, Early Help figures showed that 59% of those missing were girls. Age range was identified as a potentially significant factor influencing these trends, and it was suggested that this variable be incorporated into future reporting for deeper analysis.
 - b. When asked if the service was notified when schools marked young people as missing, Ms Bride explained that schools were responsible for following up if a child left their site, including following up with family. Schools and family were expected to report children to Police, not to the Local Authority, as missing, if necessary. KCC's missing

children processes started when the police informed them of the child being missing.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted Kent's current position for Children in Care who have missing episodes, and Kent's practice response.

From: Linden Kemkaran, Leader
Amanda Beer, Chief Executive

To: **County Council – 6 November 2025**

Subject: Final draft of the Council's Strategy, ***Reforming Kent 2025-2028***.

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

Reforming Kent 2025-2028 is the Council's new Council Strategy, replacing the previous administration's Strategy, *Framing Kent's Future*. The strategy was presented as a draft to the County Council in September and has now undergone a period of engagement and is presented as a final draft. The strategy sets out the challenges facing the Council over the next 3 years and the aims and objectives of the administration to meet these.

Recommendations: County Council is asked to:

(1) **Approve** Our Council Strategy, 'Reforming Kent 2025-2028'.

1. Background

1.1 The draft of '*Reforming Kent, 2025-2028*' (Appendix A) was presented to County Council in September for consideration and has now been developed into a final draft after a period of engagement. It replaces the previous administration's strategy, *Framing Kent's Future* and sets out the aims and objectives of the administration within the context of the local government policy landscape and the legacy inherited. It is a three-year strategy given the implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the proposed creation of new council structures in Kent and Medway in 2028. It is, however, still strong in its ambition to ensure that Kent's residents feel they are heard, the services they receive are good value and that the Council is standing up for the residents of Kent on those areas which matter most to them.

2. Our Council Strategy '*Reforming Kent, 2025-2028*'

2.1 The document is not intended as an exhaustive list of everything the Council does but is focused on establishing a reformed council, the ambitions we want to meet and the objectives and priorities that will be delivered.

2.2 The Strategy is focused on 4 aims that are structured around the areas of greatest challenge and opportunity and each of these are supported by a number of objectives and priorities.

The four aims and supporting objectives are:

1. Putting Kent Residents First
2. Reforming Kent County Council
3. Supporting Residents that need help
4. Building Better Communities

For each of the objectives the document sets out the local context, why this matters to Kent, whilst outlining the priorities the Council will address.

3. Engagement and feedback

- 3.1 Following the debate at County Council in September where Members gave comments on the draft strategy, the document was placed on the Lets Talk Kent website from 30 September- 20 October inviting feedback from the general public. A total of **282 responses** were received and the feedback has been largely positive: **144 positive** (51.1%), **52 negative** (18.4%) and **86 neutral** (30.4%).
- 3.2 The positive feedback was supportive of the emphasis on value for money, the common sense approach, tackling issues such as the border challenges, supporting local businesses, the support for the countryside and rural communities and a pragmatic re-focusing of climate policy.
- 3.3 One overarching comment, which was indeed made during the County Council debate in September by Members and subsequently through our engagement, is that the strategy is only for 3 years and therefore its impact on the challenges it seeks to address will be limited. Given the challenging operating environment, with the uncertainty of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) we cannot realistically commit to a strategy beyond this time period and it is acknowledged that this is not a sufficient time to make a real impact on tackling systemic challenges. As such we have now made a more explicit reference to this in the revised strategy to acknowledge that whilst the ambition remains high and the intention strong, we cannot solve challenges that have long faced both the Council and the public sector for many years, within such timescales. However, we can make a start and we should continue to be both ambitious and committed to making the necessary changes in those areas as outlined whilst remaining realistic about what we can achieve. This is reflected further in our response on delivery plans and measuring impact.
- 3.4 Where comments were negative or raised questions even where broadly supportive of the general policy direction these have been looked at in further detail. We have set out below the constructive feedback and challenge received and our response to this.

3.5 Key themes of feedback:

- 3.5.1 Tone and political nature of the strategy** – there were some recurring comments about the strong political tone of the document and that in some areas of the strategy, particularly around supporting vulnerable people it was felt the language could be more neutral and supportive, there was some concern expressed around the emphasis on personal responsibility.

Response – The 2025 local elections saw a significant shift in the Council's political make up, with Reform winning a significant majority. The new administration has therefore undertaken to set out their ambitions and objectives as a new political group in Kent. '*Reforming Kent*', is reflective of the ambitions of the new political administration for the County and the type of Council it believes is required to meet the challenges faced- it is unapologetic in setting these intentions out clearly.

On language and tone; the strategy sets out strong support for the vulnerable in society, and a clear commitment to the safety net, which should be there to support residents when they need it. The emphasis within the aims and objectives is on early intervention and prevention, with a clear commitment to dignity and choice for residents in the support they receive. However, support from public services must be balanced against personal responsibility and the strategy sets out that we intend to support families, parents and individuals so that we can help people to live the best lives they can whilst acknowledging the significant challenges around demand for public services. The priorities on lobbying in the best interests of Kent are further commitment to supporting Kent's residents. Ensuring we get fair funding from government, for the challenges we uniquely face will help the Council to meet our resident's needs, and is testament to our commitment to ensuring that the right support is available to those that need it.

- 3.5.2 Commitment to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**- some feedback raised concerns about the strategy's ongoing commitment to the PSED.

Response- The strategy makes a clear commitment to reviewing the existing Corporate Equality Objectives of the Council, which are due to come to an end in 2026. These objectives were set for a period of 4 years by the previous administration and it is only right that these are reviewed. There is also a commitment to ensuring equality and fairness in our recruitment and that we continue to meet our commitments to PSED but in a more meaningful way, that can be supported more widely by our staff and public partners. Following the adoption of the Council Strategy, there will be a review of all our policies and this will include those that support the PSED, to ensure they are fit for purpose and align with the administration's focus on ensuring a meritocratic approach at all levels.

- 3.5.3 **Intent vs delivery-** there were a range of comments, that even if supportive of the policy direction people wanted more detail on how the aims and objectives of the strategy would be delivered. Whilst the statement of intent was supported, there was a call for more action.

Response – *‘Reforming Kent’* sets out the broad ambitions and objectives of the Council and the priorities for the next 3 years. Whilst this goes some way to setting out the policy areas that will be looked at, the strategy is not intended to set out the detail. For example, there was strong support for the direction of travel for SEND support, for school measures such as banning smartphones and a refocusing of climate change policies but a frustration that more detail was needed on how these aims will be delivered with partners, including public bodies and businesses and in the case of SEND alongside parents. A general review of all KCC policies will take place subsequent to the adoption of the Strategy, and any necessary changes to existing policy and strategy will be taken forward through the usual governance routes. This has been the custom and practice when delivering strategic statements adopted by previous political administrations in KCC.

- 3.5.4 **Measuring impact** – The feedback criticised the lack of measurables within the strategy, with a request to have more detail on how the impact will be measured and priorities tracked. There were some suggestions of providing a stronger evidence base to ensure progress could be tracked.

Response: The strategy clearly sets out our commitment to reviewing our Quarterly Performance Report to ensure that this allows us to track and monitor progress against the objectives and priorities within the strategy. This, alongside a review of our directorate performance dashboards will help the Council to track progress against our new priorities and subsequent policies. It is right that this is embedded through the performance management of the Council, which drives the accountability of our services and the management actions that are taken as a result. These metrics will be reported through the usual governance routes to allow Member oversight. It must also be highlighted, as stated earlier in this report and the strategy itself, that this is a 3 year strategy and whilst performance metrics can measure and track progress against our new priorities, we should not set unrealistic metrics against challenges, which will not be fully resolved within the life of this strategy.

4. Changes to Reforming Kent 2025-2028

- 4.1 No substantive changes have been made to the structure of the document from the version considered by County Council at its meeting in September. As such, the vision, approach, aims and objectives remain the same. There have been some minor changes to wording to improve the overall flow of the document. However, following discussion and considering the public feedback

through the Let's Talk Kent website, some notable changes to the document include:

- Reworded introduction section to reference and acknowledge the shorter timeframe for the strategy and the impact of LGR.
- An additional specific priority for the development and implementation of the Local Skills Improvement Plan.
- A specific additional priority for delivering the Kent and Medway Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy.
- Reflected the need to incrementally expand investment in highway maintenance given the scale of the funding backlog and necessary additional support required from Government.
- An additional priority to use our role as the Local Transport Authority and LTP5 to encourage planning authorities to more fully consider transport needs when considering new developments and refreshing their Local Plans.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Following adoption of the Strategy by County Council, the document will be designed and published onto the KCC website.
- 5.2 As mentioned quarterly performance reporting will allow for Member oversight of the ambitions and objectives set out through the usual governance routes. As policies are closed down, revised or replaced to reflect the new strategic direction, these will be taken through the usual governance routes for agreement.

6. Recommendations

6.1. County Council is asked to:

- (1) **Approve** Our Council Strategy, 'Reforming Kent 2025-2028'.
-

7. Relevant Director:

David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance – david.whittle@kent.gov.uk

8. Background Documents

Appendices:

Appendix A *Reforming Kent, 2025-2028*

This page is intentionally left blank

Reforming Kent 2025-2028

FOREWORD

On 1st May 2025, Reform UK won 57 out of 81 seats which gave us overall control of Kent County Council.

My fellow members and I campaigned on a promise that we would come in with fresh eyes and fire in our bellies and be unapologetic in our mission to put the people of Kent right at the heart of every decision that we make.

We are here to represent you and to make decisions that benefit you. We are here to be advocates for those in need, young and old, and to make sure that those in the middle, on whose shoulders the financial burden increasingly rests, know that we spend their money as carefully as we spend our own.

KCC's main challenge is how to do more, with less. We are facing big challenges.

As a population we are getting older. Couples are not having as many babies as they used to. The social fabric of our towns and villages has been altered by years of uncontrolled immigration and overspill from London, pressuring Kent to build more and more houses. Crime is high, and trust is at an all-time low.

More children are being diagnosed with special educational needs and crime typically goes unsolved.

There is an increased perception that the welfare system is too generous and is open to abuse with people divided into 'workers or shirkers'.

It's no wonder we are all feeling the pressure and that KCC is in debt.

But we are determined to turn it around.

As Leader, I'm putting efficiency first and have tasked a new Cabinet team with special responsibility for Local Government Efficiency with the job of carrying out a full examination of all Council procedures, procurement and employment.

As for looking after our vulnerable people and in the continued absence of a joined-up plan from Central Government, we will take a preventative approach, investing in services that reduce dependency that help people stay healthy and independent for longer. Our Adult Social Care team will embrace AI and digital tools to deliver smarter, more responsive support.

Our young people in care (which due to our legal obligations, must include unaccompanied asylum-seeking children whose costs are fully met by the Home Office), will be gradually moved out of privately run care homes into homes owned and run by KCC. This removes KCC's dependence on an increasingly expensive private sector and allows us to spend less money to look after these children to our own high standards.

To ensure our teachers receive the support they deserve, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) will prioritise prevention, early intervention, and reintegration pathways. By being closely aligned with schools, PRUs will provide targeted support for disruptive pupils who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

We will also work with the PCC to ban smartphones in Kent's schools, allowing children to concentrate on their lessons, develop meaningful, face-to-face friendships and remain free of the pressures of online life for the majority of each day.

We will ensure early years provision is there to help parents fulfil their important duties and responsibilities to the best of their abilities. This is the surest way of helping babies grow into happy, healthy children who stand the best chance of going on to be well-adjusted adults who contribute to society.

There will be new emphasis on personal responsibility and helping people to make sound choices that lead to better life outcomes. We do not believe that adults should be infantilised or treated as potential victims. KCC is here to help, not to take over residents' lives.

You will notice a change of messaging in our public health, education and social care literature to reflect our new, empowering approach.

If someone is in receipt of taxpayers' money for whatever reason, they will be made aware of that fact and encouraged to use that money wisely and frugally.

As Leader I will continue to push back against central government if I feel that the policies do not align with my own vision of what's best for Kent.

I want to remove unnecessary bureaucracy and form ticking associated with DEI and find more meaningful ways for the council to meet its Public Sector Equality duties.

On the environment we will replace the Net Zero 2030 target with an energy efficiency plan focused on financial returns and investigate opportunities to create additional revenue streams, and we will rescind the County Council's climate emergency declaration which is stifling debate.

We'll lobby government to promote Dungeness as the right site for a small nuclear reactor and we'll work with water companies to clean up our seas and rivers, develop a long-term water resources plan for Kent and ensure that drainage works to prevent flooding.

Our coastal communities, ignored for so long will benefit from a targeted Kent & Medway Business Fund for startups, high-growth, or fast-growing businesses and we'll tackle inequalities that are especially pronounced in our seaside towns that can damage hard working families' access to secure employment.

Our roads are used by all of us, every single day so to improve road quality we'll remove obstacles and inefficiencies across Kent's highways and work directly with local contractors and suppliers stripping away wasteful overheads and duplication to increase productivity.

My vision for Kent is that of a happy, thriving and tolerant society built on merit rather than enforced diversity targets. One unified county, proud of its history and optimistic for its future. A place where the residents feel safer, healthier and wealthier knowing that their political representatives try to get the best value for every pound spent.

A green and pleasant 'garden of England' where farmers feel valued in ensuring our food security, where they are recognised as custodians of the countryside *protecting our land* from excessively large solar farms and housing developments.

A county that makes the most of its unique position as the gateway into our nation and also out to the rest of the world.

In short, because Kent boasts historical buildings, picturesque towns and villages, bustling shopping centres, rolling green hills, burgeoning vineyards, excellent restaurants and pubs, miles of stunning coastline plus fast access to London, it's easily one of the best counties in the UK in which to live, work and visit.

Linden Kemkaran

Leader, Kent County Council

DRAFT

Introduction:

This strategy sets out our vision for Kent from 2025-2028.

This document is not intended as an exhaustive list of everything the Council does but is focused on establishing a reformed council, the ambitions we want to meet and the objectives and priorities we will deliver.

It is shorter in timeframe due to the Governments proposals for local government reorganisation and the creation of new council structures in Kent and Medway in 2028.

However, this shortened timeframe does not weaken or limit our ambition for Kent or for Kent County Council. Until the Government confirms its decision on local government reorganisation, and makes the necessary legislative changes, KCC must continue to serve the residents of Kent.

Some of the challenges facing KCC and Kent are systemic. To address them inherently requires more than three years, hard decisions to be made by the Government at the national level, and the collective effort of all local partners in Kent. We must be realistic as to what can be achieved with less than one-full council term as the political leadership of KCC.

But we can serve the residents of Kent by putting in place the foundations for a reformed council and reformed services today, even if that reform is then taken forward by new council structures in Kent and Medway.

Given this uncertainty and unprecedented time of change, Reforming Kent must be a live document, and as an administration we will update our strategy as necessary through Cabinet to ensure it remains relevant and useful for our residents, our partners and our staff.

OUR VISION:

Kent is a place where the residents feel safer, healthier and wealthier and know that their political representatives try to get the best value for every pound spent.

OUR COMMITMENTS TO OUR RESIDENTS ARE THAT WE WILL:

- ✓ Keep council tax increases as low as possible but will maintain the quality-of-service provision.
- ✓ Ask the difficult questions and challenge long held assumptions within the county council.
- ✓ Not accept the status quo where it fails our residents whether as service users or taxpayers.
- ✓ Have a ruthless focus on value for money, cost efficiency and common sense.
- ✓ Expect those who we support to respect the services and monies provided to them.
- ✓ Reward those who work hard and achieve on merit rather than tick boxes.

Reforming Kent – summary diagram:



AIM 1: PUTTING KENT RESIDENTS FIRST

Our objectives

1. **Make sure the people of Kent are heard, from local town halls right through to Parliament:** The victory for Reform UK in the local elections was driven by a growing sense of exasperation. A state which failed to listen to the legitimate concerns and needs of its citizens with the taxpayer receiving a diminishing quality of services. Successive Governments of all political persuasions have taken Kent for granted for too long. KCC is only one part of the public sector that needs reform, but Reform UK Kent will do all we can by bringing the people's voice to the fore in the decisions made in town halls, county hall, and in Parliament.
 - **Our priorities will be to:** Continue to work with partners at both local, regional, and the national level to resist the inappropriate placement of large-scale asylum provision in unsuitable areas in Kent - particularly where public services are already under significant pressure - and push for reform of the asylum system to remove these concerns from our local communities.
 - Lobby government to ensure that Kent does not continue to be unfairly burdened by illegal migrants and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and that dispersal is fairly distributed across the country.
 - Push back on excessively high levels of new housing proposed and inappropriate solar farm development planned for Kent which is threatening the character of many local communities.
2. **Work with the government to find long-term solutions to the challenges at the border:** It is the clear responsibility of the U.K. government to manage the border at the Kent short straits. The repeated failure of the UK Government to stop the small boats crossings directly impacts Kent's residents and security but also undermines our county's reputation nationally and internationally. Operation BROCK, the use of the M20 to hold HGVs when there is disruption at the border, impinges on many Kent residents' quality of life, but it also harms our county's economy and economic competitiveness. We will hold the government to account to deliver its obligations to the residents of Kent to better manage the border; in doing so, we also pledge to do whatever KCC can as both a highways and social care authority, to support their efforts.

Our priorities will be to:

- Ensure the Home Office manages the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) dispersal scheme in a timely and effective manner, so as not to place an unsafe burden on KCC Children's Services, impacting our capacity to support Kent children.
 - Work with the Department for Transport, and our partners in Kent to find a long-term solution to Operation BROCK, which does not impact on Kent residents or businesses day-to-day.
 - Ensure that the introduction of EES, the EU Entry-Exit Visa Scheme, operates in such a way that does not add a significant additional burden to the Kent road network, and does not require semi-permanent emergency arrangements to be put in place.
3. **Seek fair funding from Government which properly recognises Kent's unique needs:** The pressure on KCC services from being the strategic council for the UK's

gateway to Europe is a significant, additional, and unique burden on Kent council taxpayers which we believe is not fairly recognised or compensated for by the Government. Whether it is foreign HGVs on our roads or the impact of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children on our children's social services, the cost to Kent is both direct in what it costs the county council, and indirect given the wider strain it places on our budgets and services. That needs to be acknowledged and better reflected in the support the Government provides to KCC.

Our priorities will be to:

- Respond to the Government proposals to change grant distribution to local government – ensuring more money is provided to address Kent's needs.
- Lobby at national level for a revised, needs-based funding formula for children's social care that recognises the burden from Other Local Authorities placing so many of their Looked After Children into Kent.
- Call on Government to support a fairer, more sustainable funding model for road maintenance, one that allows for planning and prevention rather than just emergency fixes.
- Make the case to Government for Kent to receive its fair share of funding currently being taken by the government from the Dartford Crossing and from the HGV Road User Levy collected from foreign HGV's coming through the Kent Ports.

4. Stand up for the interests of all Kent residents in Local Government

Reorganisation: The government's policy of undertaking a wholesale Local Government Reorganisation – merging the District Councils and County Council to form new single-tier unitary Councils - is a huge and costly distraction to the real business of running local councils and delivering high quality services. We are sceptical that local government reorganisation in Kent will yield the anticipated savings and benefits expected by Government. Indeed, to the contrary, we expect it will harm service quality whilst placing huge additional increases in Kent residents' council tax to fund it.

Our priorities will be to:

- We will continue to push Government to ensure that residents interests are at the heart of LGR and that the resident voice is embedded in our proposals through local networks.
- Engage with all Kent and Medway councils transparently and respectfully throughout the LGR process, even where we disagree on LGR proposals, so all partners act in the best interests of Kent and Medway residents.
- Ensure that continuity of service provision and service quality is not put at risk by any LGR proposals, either through the development of LGR proposals, or through the implementation of any changes imposed on Kent by the Government.

5. Support local businesses to attract investment and create job opportunities for people in Kent:

The public sector cannot be sustainable without a thriving and growing private sector economy to fund it, at national or local level. The failure to deliver economic growth drives higher demand for public services, which in turn become more reliant on an ever-smaller and ever more strained private sector economy to fund them. Every area in the country needs to support economic growth to break this downward spiral in our economy and our public services. In Kent, this

means supporting local businesses, the vast majority of which are small to medium-sized enterprises to create the jobs, attract investment and upskill our workforce to drive economic growth.

Our priorities will be to:

- We will back major infrastructure projects – which bring new skilled jobs into Kent - such as the Port of Dover 2050 initiative to drive investment into the county and utilise Kent's unique geographical position.
- We will deliver the Get Kent and Medway Working Plan to reduce the 21% of the Kent working age population who are economically inactive, and through the Connect to Work programme, help up to 2900 residents who are facing barriers to employment receive personalised coaching and support to find work.
- Continue to support the development and implementation of the Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan, linking the provision of skills training to the emerging needs of Kent businesses to close the skills gap holding back growth.
- We will lobby the Government to mandate the reuse of the high-speed international train stations at Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International so as to maximise the economic and travel benefits and end the scandal of this critical infrastructure lying dormant and unused.

6. **Protect our countryside and give strong support to Kent's farmers and rural pursuits and communities:** Kent is an historic rural county and has a large population with densely populated towns. This is drawn from not only our county's unique character, but also our national and international reputation as the Garden of England, and is critical to the continued success of our tourism industry. It is imperative that we protect our rural heritage, rural businesses and rural communities and support them to thrive. Kent must not only exist to serve the needs and overspill from a growing London population.

Our priorities will be to:

- Resist Government plans to cover agricultural land in solar farms, as this will lead to long-term harm to our rural economy and tourism industry
- Work with District and Borough Councils to resist inappropriate developments on the edges of rural towns and villages.
- Support and encourage more rural public transport options to ensure rural communities remain viable places to live, work and visit
- Work with Kent Police to ensure that rural crime hotspots are patrolled and that zero tolerance to low level crime is returned

AIM 2: REFORMING KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

Our objectives

1. **Deliver improvements to the visible services that matter most to the majority of Kent residents:** Given the demand pressures on social care an ever increasing proportion of the KCC budget has been spent on an ever smaller number of high-need individuals in both adults and children's social care. Whilst KCC is legally obliged to meet the needs of the vulnerable, it cannot be right that this comes at the expense of services to the majority of Kent residents who fund KCC through their council tax. If KCC's role and spend is to be valued by the majority of its residents, they must see and feel more benefit from it.

Our priorities will be to:

- Through the budget setting process, ensuring a fairer proportion of new monies are invested in visible community services, which have been underfunded due to central government's inability to find long-term solutions for social care.
- Ensure that KCC only takes on the responsibilities which residents expect it to and which are in the best interests of Kent. The delivery of government programmes, even when directly funded, places additional pressures on the KCC management and support services, whilst distracting KCC from its core purpose.
- Improve performance management arrangements for all KCC services by reviewing current key performance indicators and targets, and develop a range of productivity measures for each KCC service, so we can target improving productivity and drive value for money.

2. **Reduce the KCC debt burden, releasing more monies back into front line services:** KCC's debt burden is significant at over £700m. This debt has been accrued over many decades by the decisions of previous political administrations. Whilst it is possible for KCC to service this debt, in doing so, it takes away vital monies from day-to-day frontline services to the tune of almost £80m a year. That is money that Kent residents need invested back into their frontline services. We do not accept that there is a need to increase the debt burden in order to facilitate and support the KCC capital budget. A better balance must be achieved.

Our priorities will be to:

- Continue to drive down KCC's overall debt burden, through a focus on debt management, asset sales and strict control of new capital expenditure.
- Ring fence any released debt servicing monies to visible community and infrastructure services through the KCC budget process.
- Maximise the use of external funding to support the capital programme, additional new KCC borrowing will be the absolute exception.

3. **Make every penny count, using a common-sense approach and DOLGE to find efficiency savings and income generation opportunities:** Many public sector organisations lose focus and expand beyond their core purpose through the layering of new activities from local politicians and governments. Nothing is ever stopped or closed only new, often unfunded, burdens are added. Because public sector budgets are guaranteed by taxation, the public sector also doesn't have the inherent drive found in the private sector to ruthlessly manage costs. The guaranteed funding of the public sector through taxation makes it inherently different to the private sector, where organisations must manage costs and take decisive action to control them. Through our Department of Local Government Efficiency, we will systematically look at every penny of KCC spend, taking learning and best practice from the private

sector to drive us to better control of costs, wherever possible. No saving is too small for an organisation facing the financial pressures KCC is facing, and we will rigorously look at each KCC department to determine if the cost base is justified by the service outcomes.

Our priorities will be to:

- Systematically undertake a review of all KCC contracts and assess whether they are delivering value for money and are fit for purpose, and reopening contract negotiations where they are not we are in a position to do so.
- Review contract management arrangements in all services across the council ensuring that there is sufficient focus and rigour on managing contracts once they've been agreed, and taking remedial action where providers are not delivering to the standards expected.
- We will use technology, AI and automation to ensure services are innovative and strip out excessive cost and time.
- We will look for new income generation opportunities from KCC services, and continue to support the 100% wholly owned KCC trading company – Commercial Services Group – to operate independently and commercially within the market, providing a strong dividend return to KCC.

4. **Use Kent's buying power to support local jobs and keep investment in the county:** KCC is a huge purchaser of goods and services, with an annual procured spend of £1.47bn. This presents an opportunity to support jobs and businesses in the Kent economy. The recently introduced changes in procurement law to broaden our supplier base with Kent businesses, keeping more of KCC's money in the local Kent economy. The voluntary and community sector plays an important role as both a service provider and a core pillar of Kent's wider civic society and we will look to strengthen our engagement and partnership with the sector. Where the market is unable to meet KCC service requirements at an affordable price, we will look at the available in-house options for ensuring service delivery.

Our priorities will be to:

- Encourage more Kent based businesses to bid for KCC contracts, with an associated increase in KCC spend staying within Kent.
- Maximise the opportunities within the Procurement Act to minimise barriers to entry for SMEs in bidding for KCC goods and services and use Social Value to drive additional benefits for local Kent communities.
- Explore opportunities to work with partners voluntary and community sector to improve the lives of residents and design services that meet their needs.

5. **Ensure the council focusses on delivering better outcomes that make a difference, not just manging process:** One of the greatest frustrations of residents is that when they want better and more responsive delivery from their public services, politicians at national and local level just offer up changed processes rather than real change. But even more frustratingly, we know these frustrations are felt as equally by our staff, who come to work to make a difference to the residents and communities they serve, not be wrapped up in unnecessary box ticking that simply gets in the way of them doing their job. We will continue to invest in our staff development, ensuring they are fully supported in delivering vital services in often challenging environment,

and removing barriers to real change. We will continue to meet our commitments under the Public Sector Equality Duty but want to do so in a more meaningful way that has wider public, partner and staff support.

Our priorities will be to:

- We will ensure that we have the right people in the right roles to deliver against our ambitions and meet the future challenges – ensuring there is meritocracy, fairness and equality in recruitment.
- We will review governance arrangements to ensure they are as streamlined as possible, reducing bureaucracy to free up staff to focus on service delivery.
- Continually review staff numbers, structures and salaries to ensure every role has a real impact for the residents of Kent, and through the People Strategy continue to invest in staff training and professionalism.
- We will devise a new set of Corporate Equality Objectives when the current objectives expire, and ensure our policies which support the Public Sector Equality Duty are fit for purpose.

6. **Scrap unattainable Net Zero 2030 and focus environment policy on direct benefits to Kent residents:** The rush to declare a climate emergency and the introduction of Net Zero targets in councils, without any thought as to the practicality or financial burden they placed on hard pressed council taxpayers was a mistake. Instead of taking a pragmatic approach needed by residents and businesses to cope with increasing costs of energy in heating their homes or running their businesses, it overly focused on carbon emissions targets which have little meaningful value to the daily lives of Kent residents. We want to refocus our approach to the environment with a stronger focus on adapting to changes in our weather, stronger environmental stewardship, visible improvements and a focus on the resident.

Our priorities will be to:

- We will rescind the County Councils Climate Emergency Declaration of 2019, which is scaring young people, adversely impacting on small businesses and stifling debate.
- We will bring forward a new Energy and Low Emissions Strategy that focusses on delivering long-term practical solutions for affordable energy and support to Kent residents.
- We will ensure there is an effective waste management and recycling service that is value for money and improves rates of recycling through a simpler and efficient process.
- We will move our focus onto helping businesses and residents adapt to our changing climate by conserving water and other natural resources.

AIM 3: SUPPORTING RESIDENTS THAT NEED HELP

Our objectives

1. **Embed a greater focus on prevention and early intervention and empowering people to take personal responsibility:** The increasing withdrawal of universal preventative and early-intervention services, whilst understandable given budget pressures, has begun to bite public services as demand soars and needs grow. These needs may have been met better and more affordably had an early intervention approach been in place. It is also right for people to take personal responsibility for their own lives and preventative services can support people to make choices that improve their health but also empower them, reducing

dependency on the state in the longer term. The short term approach has been a false economy and does not deliver best value for the taxpayer in the longer term.

Our priorities will be to:

- Give families access to the right support, intervening early to ensure wherever possible families can stay together and reducing the number of children that go into care.
- Where it is financially viable, we will invest in prevention. We will also campaign for this area to receive direct funding, especially for prevention in social care.
- Put in place practical measures that improve people's lives, intervening early to support people to help themselves and make sensible life choices without a nanny state attitude

2. **Ensure every child has the chance to grow up safe and secure, free from online harm:** Ensuring our children grow up in a safe and secure environment is an ever-increasing challenge, whether they are cared for by their parents, their wider family or the local authority. Increasingly pervasive influences from the internet, social media and peer pressure means many of our children are exposed to risks and dangers that were inconceivable just a couple of decades ago. This impacts on their mental health and drives demand for health services and disability benefits, ruining their life chances and burdening the taxpayer with excessive and unnecessary costs. Protecting childhood is critical to making sure the next generation can live a happy and fulfilling life and ensuring a safe and stable society in the decades to come.

Our priorities will be to:

- Reinstate parenting hubs to support families and help them stay together.
- Encourage parents to feed children a health nutritious diet, give them plenty of fresh air and exercise and reduce screen time to an absolute minimum.
- Work with the PCC to ban smartphones in Kent's schools, allowing children to concentrate on their lessons, and protect them from online pressures.
- We will support Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) to prioritise prevention, early intervention, and reintegration. Through close alignment with schools, PRUs will provide targeted support for disruptive pupils without and EHCP.
- Work with schools to lobby central government to redraft the curriculum to encourage rigorous teaching in the core skills of reading, writing and maths and drive out ideological social trends.
- To ensure our teachers receive the support they deserve, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) will prioritise prevention, early intervention, and reintegration pathways. By being closely aligned with schools, PRUs will provide targeted support for disruptive pupils who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

3. **To deliver good care for our most vulnerable because they deserve to be treated with dignity:** Social care services have been failed by successive governments with the absence of a coherent and sustainably funded plan to meet the vast challenges faced. Complexity of need has increased alongside the demographic pressures of an ageing population and adult social care services in particular, continue to place increasing pressure on the Council's budget. The system has simply not been modernised to catch up with the growing demand or to deliver the type of support people want. With the right support people can live independently for longer, keeping people out of residential care and in their own homes. This not only

offers greater quality of life but costs far less to the taxpayer. The use of technology is woefully underutilised both in terms of supporting people's independence and streamlining assessment processes. Outdated and costly care is not delivering the support people deserve and must be reformed, fit for the 21st Century.

Our priorities will be to:

- Look at options to use AI and tech to create efficient assessment processes, that speed up getting the right support to people as quickly and as effectively as possible.
- We will bring some Children's homes capacity back in house, where it makes financial sense, to ensure we are not paying inflated prices set by some providers.

We will work with our local workforce, providers and VCSE to ensure good care and the right support is available at a local level.

4. **Work with care providers and the NHS to ensure that the care system is more sustainable and joined up:** The demand pressures that KCC services are facing are also faced by our partners in the NHS. We want to work with our NHS partners to ensure a more joined approach to meeting the needs of our local residents. Our residents quality of life should not be compromised by the failures of successive national governments to develop a sustainable care system, which works seamlessly with the health system. We will work closely with our NHS partners to develop a local care system that is built around collaboration and partnership, not duplication and inefficiency and ensure that the resident's needs are at the heart of this.

Our priorities will be to:

- We will improve our engagement and relationship with care providers, so that both commissioners and providers can work together to ensure care markets are more sustainable.
- We will work with our partners in the NHS to develop a stronger joint commissioning programme across a range of services where we have shared clients or are commissioning from the same providers.
- We will review how Disabled Facilities Grants are managed to ensure they are accessible, fair, and responsive to people's needs, and ensuring residents are not passed around between different KCC and District authorities.
- We will hold the Government to account to ensure any recommendations from the Casey Review are funded, sensible, and subject to consultation, including any proposal for a National Care Service.

5. **Recognise and support the dedication of our county's unpaid carers:** The family is the backbone of a compassionate and caring society. Nowhere is that more evident than in the love, dedication, and support that family carers provide on an unpaid basis, often sacrificing the quality of their own life to meet the needs of their loved ones. This informal care reduces the care burden on the council exponentially, and the role of adults and young carers should be recognised, supported and celebrated given their selfless contribution.

Our priorities will be to:

- Refresh the KCC Carers strategy, and seek to join up our support for carers across health and housing services.

- Better engage with carers support groups around the support and recognition carers can be provided.
- Ensure that the life chances of young carers are not inhibited by their caring responsibilities – and they continue to enjoy the benefits of childhood.
- Work with District and Borough Councils to support planning applications where extended families wish to care for older relatives at home, and lobby ministers to explore tax breaks for adult carers who do this.

6. **Improve processes and outcomes for our SEND services while tackling the unsustainable growth in demand:** We will continue to improve our SEND service, ensuring that those families and young people who are eligible for SEND support receive it in a timely, efficient, and professional manner. At the same time we must also reduce the demands placed on the SEND budget given the existential pressure it places on the wider KCC budget, including increasingly the adult social care budget, as children with SEND need transition to adulthood. This demand is driven by a national crisis in SEND demand, which must be urgently addressed by the government, given the systemic challenges it is placing not just on children's services budgets, but on those of the NHS, schools and home to school transport as well.

Our priorities will be to:

- Deliver SEND services by increasing local provision, by expanding Specialist Resource Units.
- Improve the timeliness of undertaking EHCPs and communicating progress transparently and effectively with families waiting for decisions, utilising tools such as AI to improve efficiency and effectiveness.
- Examine each SEND diagnosis to ensure it reaches the threshold for KCC funding
- Continually review the Home to Transport delivery systems to ensure best value for taxpayer money. Enlarge the provision of Personal Transport Budgets so that parents can take responsibility for getting their child to and from school.
- Help parents to properly understand and fulfil their obligations and responsibilities towards their own children before turning to KCC for assistance.

AIM 4: BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES

Objectives

1. **Support Kent Police to keep our communities safe:** The first responsibility of the state is to keep its citizens safe, yet an increasing sense of lawlessness is blighting many of our local communities. Often it is the cumulative impact of lower-level crimes, such as anti-social behaviour and shoplifting, which often goes unaddressed and unpunished, which harms the day-to-day quality of life in our local communities. At the same time, our overstretched police officers are being asked to do more, with less, whilst under an unreasonable level of scrutiny which disempowers them from doing their job and seeks to erode public trust in our police. KCC will re-invigorate its strategic partnership with Kent Police.

Our priorities will be to:

- KCC will re-invigorate its strategic partnership with Kent Police, recognising that the KCC and Kent Police working together are a powerful force for good in our county.
- Refresh the Kent Community Safety Plan so there is a stronger focus on anti-social behaviour and work with local Crime and Disorder Reduction Units to design local interventions that have local community support.
- Lobby the Government for more funding for Kent Police to cover the additional burdens placed on Kent Police from policing the border, the current funding of which is insufficient from Government.
- Working with our partners and the VCSE sector, focus on tackling domestic abuse and violence against woman and girls, which is prevalent in too many of our communities
- We will support the role of our Community Wardens within our local communities but ensure this is refocussed on the areas that matter most to our residents, with a renewed focus on community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour.

- 2. Tackle inequality blighting many of our coastal communities:** Differences between areas of Kent contribute to the county's unique and special character. However, differences born of increasing inequality and social deprivation, especially between some of Kent's coastal communities and the rest of the county, has grown to unacceptable levels. In too many coastal communities employment, health and housing outcomes are considerably poorer. This cycle of decline is then compounded through inappropriate placements of vulnerable people i.e. children in care, former prisoners, asylum seekers from other areas into those local communities, increasing community numbers and placing additional burden on local public services. We have to end this cycle of decline in our poorest coastal communities.

Our priorities will be to:

- Enable local business to flourish, supporting economic growth and jobs - increasing the number of Kent and Medway Business Fund loans and targeting our coastal communities.
- Support the work of KCC Public Health to focus on 'Marmot' model intervention work in our coastal communities.
- Reinstate parenting hubs to support families and help them stay together.
- Work with our partners to implement the Kent and Medway Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy, focussing early intervention, and practical support for those at risk.
- Put pressure on Kent Police to prioritise patrols in seaside areas to prevent anti-social behaviour and support our coastal tourism sector.

- 3. Listen to communities and stand firm against excessively large housing and solar farm developments:** When local residents complain about new housing or solar farm developments in their areas, it isn't out of inherent NIMBYism, it is because they know the impact such developments will have on their local community. Kent has taken a huge amount of new housing in recent years, driven by central government algorithms and targets, with no reference to local circumstances or character. Too much new housing is of poor design and without the necessary infrastructure to support a decent quality of life, and often filled by London Borough overspill rather than local Kent residents. Whilst recognising that people need homes, there is no point in building new homes that destroy existing local communities.

Our priorities will be to:

- Ensure developers install vital infrastructure to support communities and community identity, rather than just bland dormitory estates
- Work with local planning authorities to examine how more housing can be reserved for people with ties to the area.
- Work with our partners to influence local housing policies to appropriately prioritise our veterans housing needs

4. Improve the quality of roads and work to reduce delays from roadworks:

Nowhere is the decline in the civic realm more obvious than in the decline of our road infrastructure over recent years. Too many Kent residents' daily lives are blighted by potholes and endless roadworks, whilst the delay and unpredictability in travel times has a direct economic impact on many Kent businesses. We will reform Kent's roads by filling more potholes, resurfacing roads and exploring every new and innovative technology that is available to improve the quality of our road assets across Kent. We will also lobby the government to reform the operation of the highways permit scheme to remove the ability of the utility companies to self-declaring road works as emergencies, which inhibits the ability of KCC as the Highways Authority to coordinate and manage works in a way that minimises the impact on residents and businesses.

Our priorities will be to:

- We will incrementally expand investment in our roads through delivering a huge maintenance programme across Kent's roads, and lobby Government for greater funding to close the gap in maintenance funding.
- Empower our local highways staff who know their local roads to take the necessary action to improve the quality of roads that most impact local residents and communities.
- Lobby government for reform of the highways permit scheme to stop utility companies excessive use of the 'emergency works' provisions to avoid seeking permits from KCC as the highways authority to dig up the road.

5. Ensure that the infrastructure needs of the county to support economic growth and quality of life are fully in place:

The scale of the growth Kent has faced over recent years has been unprecedented, which has placed significant pressure on the county's social and physical infrastructure. The failure to deliver 'infrastructure first' has not only materially harmed the quality of life, placing pressure on GPs, school and roads, but it has an economic impact on businesses who need certainty in terms staff availability, travel times and energy infrastructure to plan and invest for growth. We must break this cycle of insufficient infrastructure being delivered only after the pressure has become acute.

Our priorities will be to:

- Building on the Kent and Medway Infrastructure Framework, ensure the new Spatial Development Strategy fully captures Kent's strategic infrastructure needs and delivers a requirement into the planning system to deliver infrastructure first
- Establish a Future Energy Forum which brings together all relevant parties to identify the Kent's future energy requirements and lobby the Government to take the action now to ensure those future energy needs are met.
- We will use our role as the Local Transport Authority and the agreed Local Transport Plan for Kent to encourage planning authorities to fully consider transport needs when considering new developments and refreshing Local Plans.

- Call on the Government to use the National Infrastructure Commission to undertake an independent assessment of the future infrastructure requirements on Kent given its importance of the Gateway to Europe and outline funding routes for this nationally critical infrastructure.

6. Protect our Kent environment with practical, affordable and visible

improvements: Kent is a county of contrasts, from historic cities and market towns, to beautiful villages and countryside, our environment is often the key reason so many people want to live, work and visit our county. However, the traditional Kent landscape is increasingly under threat. Our traditional high streets risk becoming areas where people don't want to spend their time or money. Our roadside verges are increasingly covered in litter and debris which leaves the impression that the no agency is taking responsibility or delivering basic services. Our beaches and coastline have been under threat from sewage discharges. Whilst KCC may not always be the responsible body for these issues, our strategic role in Kent calls on us to convene, work with and hold to account all partners to improve our environment.

Our priorities will be to:

- Tackle the blight of litter and debris left in Kent's roadside verges – irrespective of which agency is responsible – we need a joint action across all agencies.
- Lobby the government and regulator to take stronger action to stop waste discharge into the sea which harms our coastline and visitor economy.
- Work with partners to tackle criminal fly tipping and other environmental crime, which blights rural communities and is often linked to organised crime.
- Support the regeneration and economic vibrancy of our high streets, in particular supporting planning authorities in resisting more conversions of office accommodation into residential dwellings.

This page is intentionally left blank

From: Linden Kemkaran, Leader
Amanda Beer, Chief Executive

To: **County Council, 06 November 2025**

Subject: KCC's Draft Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

This paper provides an overview of Kent County Council's draft Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway and sets out the administration's rationale for supporting a single unitary with three Area Assemblies.

Recommendations:

County Council is asked to:

- (1) CONSIDER and DEBATE the proposal as part of ensuring all-Member input to inform the proposed Cabinet Decision to approve and submit the Strategic Business Case to Government.
-

1. Background

- 1.1. Councils in Kent and Medway received a statutory invitation to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in a letter from the Minister of State on 5 February 2025.
- 1.2. Areas were required to submit their Interim Plans for LGR to Government by 21 March indicating their initial thinking and providing an opportunity to seek clarity from Government on the process.
- 1.3. On 15 May 2025, Kent and Medway councils received a response from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to their Interim Plan submissions. This was a pro-forma response sent to all county areas, with the noticeable exception of it raising concerns about the impact of the Kent ports on services such as highways and children's social care, and a request for reorganisation proposals to set out how such impacts could be mitigated through future council structures.
- 1.4. The deadline by which councils in Kent and Medway are invited to submit their final proposals to Government is 28 November 2025.
- 1.5. An indicative timeline setting out the next stages of the LGR process is provided for information as Appendix 1 to this report. It is important to note that the timings are subject to change at Government's discretion.

2. Options appraisal and business case development

- 2.1.** KCC has undertaken preparatory work since receiving the statutory invitation earlier this year, both through a joint options appraisal (completed by KMPG on behalf of Kent Council Leaders) and through an internal options appraisal conducted by KCC. The findings of the internal options appraisal were presented to the Cabinet Committee for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation in July.
- 2.2.** Having considered the findings of both the internal and joint options appraisals, it is KCC's position that it will submit an independent Strategic Business Case to Government for the single-unitary option covering Kent and Medway, supported by three Area Assemblies.
- 2.3.** The Strategic Business Case has been developed through detailed internal analysis, independent financial modelling, and active participation in the joint Kent and Medway process.
- 2.4.** The Strategic Business Case is attached as a draft and is subject to change (see Appendix 2). Some of the sections are incomplete but will be finalised in the version presented to Cabinet. This includes the foreword by the Leader and the final list of appendices. The section on public and stakeholder engagement will also be updated as engagement was ongoing when the draft was being prepared. An interim summary of the key feedback from stakeholder engagement is included in the draft (section 5) and an interim report based on the first two weeks of the public survey is provided as Appendix 3 to this report. The final Strategic Business Case will include the key findings of stakeholder and public engagement with full findings provided as appendices.
- 2.5.** Whilst KCC has developed its business case independently, consistent commitment to the joint process has remained. In line with government expectations for councils to contribute to a shared evidence base, KCC has shared information and analysis with partner authorities, to ensure that all councils have had access to information about the likely impacts of LGR on current KCC services. Equally, KCC has considered evidence provided by other councils in shaping its proposal.
- 2.6.** KCC will continue to be open, pro-active and transparent while working with partner authorities as the LGR process evolves.

3. Rationale for a single unitary

- 3.1.** The administration is clear that a single unitary for Kent and Medway is the most viable financial and strategic option to address the unique challenges that the county faces. The key reasons for supporting a single unitary are set out below.

3.2. Financial viability

Given the funding pressures facing Local Authorities, financial sustainability is paramount. The ongoing delivery of sustainable services to residents depends on future authorities being financially resilient. Financial modelling undertaken by KPMG shows that, in the five unitary option the costs might never outweigh the benefits, and in the other multi-unitary options the payback period is multiple years during which time the additional financial pressures would need to be managed within the county, potentially impacting service delivery and Council Tax rates. Conversely, KCC's proposed option of a single unitary has lower transition costs, a shorter payback period and is predicted to deliver greater savings. The administration is clear that the financial disbenefits of the multi-unitary options do not represent good value for money for Kent and Medway taxpayers.

Disaggregation risks

- 3.3.** Evidence suggests that splitting up countywide, people-based services such as social care and SEND, which represents the majority of council spend in Kent and Medway, would incur significant costs and risk disruption and reductions in service quality. Disaggregating critical services on this scale across a county as large as Kent would be incredibly challenging, both operationally and financially. Whilst shared service arrangements could be developed in an attempt to mitigate some of the risks and costs associated with disaggregation, allowing the management of key services such as social care to be retained at a county level, there are few if any successful examples of such arrangements and they are often associated with increased cost and loss of control and accountability for the constituent authorities and reduced quality of service for residents. These types of shared service arrangements would be voluntary, which means they are often difficult to agree in the first place and there is a risk that authorities could withdraw over time, especially if one partner is disproportionately affected.

3.4. Unique geography

Kent's unique geography and border position means that maintaining countywide scale is critical. As the gateway to Europe, Kent is of strategic importance, both regionally and nationally. In order to effectively manage the border, including our UAS Children responsibilities, the strategic highway network and border infrastructure must operate countywide, with Kent and Medway working with partners to manage traffic flow and port resilience. Kent and Medway has an established track record of working with partners at a pan-county level to respond to unique challenges such as these and is a responsive and reliable partner to Government to manage issues of national importance.

As a peninsula surrounded on multiple sides by 350 miles of coastline, Kent also faces economic and social challenges. This impacts on the effective provision of public services in the area, with Kent only able to look to markets in the West for the provision of services, limiting options for procurement on the most competitive terms. It is therefore important that Kent and Medway has sufficient capacity and capability within its own borders, using its scale to shape markets and develop the skilled workforce our services rely on.

3.5. Disaprities in deprivation

There are varying levels of deprivation across Kent and Medway, with areas in Thanet and Swale for example in the top 10% of most deprived areas in the country according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Conversely, there are very few of these most deprived neighbourhoods in West Kent (none in some Districts). Higher levels of deprivation results in greater demand for services, limits funds that councils are able to raise through Council Tax and can create other challenges in supporting local communities. Some of the multi-unitary options group particularly deprived areas together (e.g. Thanet and Swale), leading to significant pressure on statutory services. Splitting the county through the process of LGR also risks embedding disparities between more and less deprived areas. Meanwhile, operating as a single unitary means demand pressures, income and spend can be spread across the county rather than being concentrated in individual smaller unitaries, avoiding unmanageable demand in specific localities, whilst also ensuring that resource can be targeted where it is needed most to address any disparities.

3.6. Legacy debt

The uneven distribution of debt across Kent and Medway is a key issue. West Kent districts have significantly lower levels of debt compared to other districts across the county, which means negotiations around the fair distribution of debt would likely be challenging. It also means there is a risk that smaller unitaries may inherit high levels of debt that they are unable to manage. Operating as a single unitary, meanwhile, would ensure legacy debt is manageable by spreading it across the county.

3.7. Local identity

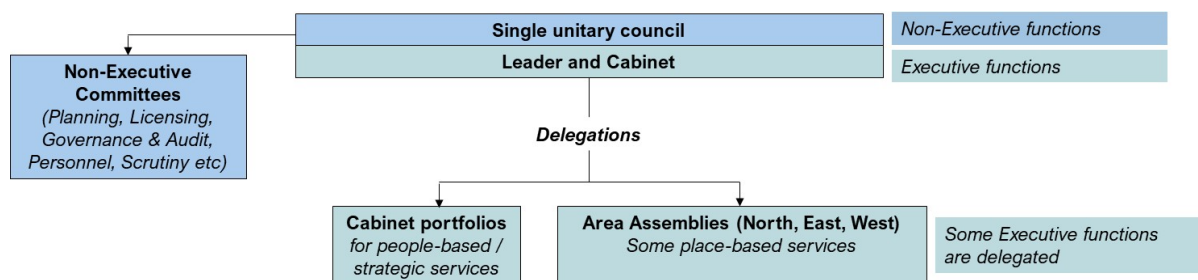
Area Assemblies will be locally responsive and have responsibility for some place-based services. The geography of the proposed Area Assemblies in North, East and West Kent reflect sub-regional identities and are consistent with residents' travel to work, education and healthcare patterns. The geographic configurations also mirror the existing service delivery footprints of key partner agencies, allowing Area Assemblies to build on established relationships and ways of working to deliver tailored, community-based services for residents.

3.8. No timeline for devolution

At present, the government has not set out a timetable for further rounds of devolution, which means the future for Kent and Medway is unclear. The creation of a single unitary ensures that there is an appropriate strategic vehicle for the county in the absence of a Mayoral Strategic Authority. Given the challenges outlined above, it is imperative that Kent and Medway retains countywide scale and critical mass.

4. How the single unitary would work

- 4.1.** The proposed governance for the Kent unitary is summarised in the following diagram:



- 4.2.** The single unitary council for Kent and Medway (the Full Council) would be the Non-Executive, strategic level decision-making body, which would set the overall county strategy and budget. The Full Council would also oversee several statutory Non-Executive committees.
- 4.3.** The Leader and Cabinet would take executive decisions and be responsible for critical *people-based and strategic services*, to maximise economies of scale and minimise disruption for residents and critical services and functions.
- 4.4.** Area Assemblies would be local-level, Executive decision-making bodies. They would be committees of the unitary council that sit at area level – divided into North, East and West.
- 4.5.** Membership of the Area Assemblies would be the councillors of the Kent and Medway unitary whose divisions are in the geographical areas that the Area Assemblies cover. The unitary council would have flexibility in how it arranges the Area Assemblies, and over time, the initial boundaries could change incrementally to reflect community/population changes.
- 4.6.** Area Assemblies would have delegated responsibility from the Leader of the Kent unitary for some *place-based Executive functions*. The table below presents a very high-level, non-exhaustive, indicative split of how the services and functions could be arranged, with further detail set out in the draft Strategic Business Case.

Countywide <i>People-based & Strategic services / functions</i>	Area Assemblies <i>Some Place-based services / functions</i>
Strategic planning (Housing / Infrastructure Strategy) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building development (Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)); Local Plan; Local Development Framework (LDF)) Housing delivery Minerals Planning applications 	Housing & Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing options service (assessing local housing needs, advice and assistance) Building control

Transport strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways & Transport (traffic management) planning & operations • Home to School Transport & Appeals; Concessionary travel & Public & Community transport • Cycle routes • Road safety • Street lighting & furniture 	Highways maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potholes etc.
Regulatory services & Licensing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trading standards & Consumer protection • Taxis • Alcohol • Public entertainment • Gambling 	Community services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museums & Arts/Culture • Leisure • Markets • Libraries and Registration • Youth services • Village halls / community facilities
Public protection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Planning & County resilience 	Public protection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community safety, including Community Wardens

4.7. The Area Assemblies would be decision-making bodies, able to take Key Decisions, and would be responsible for delegated budget/s, strategy development and oversight of services delegated to them.

4.8. The new constitution of the Kent unitary would set out the arrangements for Area Assemblies and include protections to provide long-term stability for the model.

5. Number of councillors

5.1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has advised a minimum of 30 Councillors and a maximum of 100 Councillors for new unitary authorities, and that any exceptions to this need a strong justification.

5.2. In determining the most appropriate size for the Kent unitary, it has been important to strike the right balance between ensuring effective democratic representation for the people of Kent and Medway and ensuring that the council has a workable number of councillors to support the efficient discharge of the council's functions.

5.3. As the Kent unitary will represent a large number of people, research was undertaken to compare current unitary councils with higher ratios of people to councillors. Birmingham Council has the highest, with 11,420 people per councillor. Applying this ratio to the Kent and Medway population, this would

mean 165 councillors for the Kent unitary. This is within the same range as the initial number of councillors for the Buckinghamshire unitary when it first formed (147).

- 5.4.** However, 165 councillors could fail to strike the right balance of being a workable number for a single council. Taking the mid-point between KCC's current ratio of 20,234 people to per councillor and the Birmingham figure provides a ratio of 15,874. For the Kent and Medway population, this would give 118 councillors. 118 councillors is a workable number for a large unitary, similar to the number of councillors in Somerset (110), for example.

118 councillors

15,874 people per councillor (Kent & Medway population of 1,875,893)

11,430 electors per councillor (Kent & Medway electorate of 1,348,857)

- 5.5.** At 11,430 electors per councillor, this is a reduction in the ratio of elector to councillor compared with Kent County Council's current position of 14,266. This reduction would allow capacity for councillors to cover the services and functions provided by a unitary council, which are currently separated between the two-tiers. Further detail on how Members would be supported is set out in the draft Strategic Business Case.
- 5.6.** It is recognised that a single unitary of this size and scale could be criticised as being too large and remote for residents and partners to engage with. To address these concerns, it is proposed that an Enhanced Community Engagement function would be created, which would serve as a direct and responsive link between communities and the new unitary council, ensuring that local voices are heard, needs are understood, and services are shaped around people. Further detail on how the Enhanced Community Engagement function would work in practice is set out in the draft Strategic Business Case.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1.** To support comparability of financial analysis across options, KCC commissioned KPMG, Kent and Medway's strategic partner for LGR, to provide financial modelling using data from all councils. This is an additional piece of work within the existing contract with KPMG to support the joint process at an expected cost to KCC of less than £30,000. This has ensured that the methodology used to model costs and benefits for KCC's preferred option has been consistent with that used for the other Kent and Medway options.
- 6.2.** The table below sets out the high-level unitarisation costs for each of the different options. It compares the initial transition/implementation costs associated with moving to a new unitary model, the ongoing disaggregation costs (i.e. the additional recurring expenditure that results from splitting up countywide services), and the net recurring annual savings that can be unlocked through reorganisation. It also compares the estimated payback period and the 10 year cumulative impact. Further detail on the financial assessment is set out in the Strategic Business Case.

LGR option	Implementation costs (one off) (£m)	Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m)	1a enhancement / Disaggregation costs (£m)	Recurring annual savings (£m)	Estimated payback period (years)	10-year cumulative impact of transformation (£m)
1a	(99.4)	75.0	(6.0)	69.0	3.3	457.4
3a	(127.7)	69.4	(19.7) - (29.2)	49.7 - 40.2	5.4 - 6.7	132.1 – 226.5
4b	(130.9)	67.5	(32.9) - (48.6)	34.6 - 18.9	7.8 - 14.3	(80.6) – 76.7
4d	(135.9)	67.5	(32.9) - (48.6)	34.6 - 18.9	7.9 - 14.5	(85.6) – 71.7
5a	(139.1)	65.7	(46.0) - (68.1)	19.7 - (2.4)	14.0 – no payback	(298.1) – (77.9)

- 6.3.** It is important to note that at this stage the submission of the Strategic Business Case does not require KCC to commit any financial resource. Government will first consider all of the proposals submitted by councils in the Kent and Medway area and then decide which business case will be progressed for implementation following a statutory consultation. Further Key Decisions will then be taken by KCC as necessary during the implementation phase for any specific policy proposals and service restructures, as well as for any significant savings or expenditure programmes.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1.** Kent County Council, together with Medway Council and the 12 District and Borough Councils, were invited by the Minister of State in February to submit a request for local government reorganisation by November 28, 2025. The legislative basis for this was set out by the Government in this invitation, which can be accessed here: [Letter from MHCLG](#).
- 7.2.** It is important to note that Local Government Reorganisation is a government-led process initiated by the Secretary of State. Councils are therefore unable to stop or delay LGR. The Secretary of State can decide to take forward proposals that are submitted by areas with or without modification and will ultimately make the final decision on which business case is implemented following the statutory consultation. KCC is therefore not the decision-maker.

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1.** A draft Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken on the proposed decision to submit a Strategic Business Case to government to establish a single unitary authority for Kent and Medway (attached as Appendix 4). The draft EqIA identifies potential impacts for a number of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Key issues include potential risks to service continuity, communication challenges, and visibility of local needs within a larger strategic framework. The assessment also acknowledges potential workforce impacts.

- 8.2.** Regarding positive impacts, the model is expected to improve consistency and equity in how services are planned, commissioned, and delivered across the county by consolidating governance and service delivery into a single authority. This is particularly relevant for groups who may currently experience variation in access or outcomes due to the fragmented nature of the two-tier system. A unified structure will help reduce postcode lotteries and ensure that residents with protected characteristics receive a more consistent standard of support regardless of where they live. Furthermore, unlike multi-unitary options, which would disaggregate key services such as adult social care, SEND, and public health, the single unitary model preserves the scale and integration needed to manage complex countywide challenges. This is particularly critical for older residents and children and young people who rely on consistent, joined-up support across service boundaries.
- 8.3.** The draft EqlA will be updated as necessary following public engagement to reflect the feedback received. The final EqlA will then be published as part of the Key Decision paperwork and will be included as a separate appendix within the Strategic Business Case.
- 8.4.** Further EqlAs will be undertaken as necessary for specific policy proposals, service restructures, or operational changes that emerge from the reorganisation process, ensuring that equality considerations are embedded at every stage of implementation.

9. Data Protection implications

- 9.1.** Internal advice has been sought from the Council's Data Protection team, who have confirmed that a Data Protection Impact Assessment does not need to be conducted at this stage as no personal data has been processed as part of developing the Strategic Business Case.
- 9.2.** Data Protection Impact Assessments will however be undertaken as necessary during the next stages of the LGR process. This will be particularly important during the transition phase, where it is highly likely that large volumes of client data will need to be migrated from KCC to the new successor authority/authorities.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1.** The KCC administration is clear that the most viable option for LGR in Kent and Medway is a single unitary authority. The model is uniquely designed to meet the scale, complexity, and strategic importance of the county. It delivers the benefits of reorganisation while avoiding the risks of fragmentation. Critically, it is also the most financially viable option, in both the short and the long term, helping to put Kent and Medway on a firmer financial footing.

11. Next steps

- 11.1.** Comments and feedback from Members will be reflected in the final draft of the Strategic Business Case, which will be presented to Cabinet on 19 November 2025.
- 11.2.** Following Cabinet's approval via a Key Decision (subject to call-in), KCC's Strategic Business Case will be submitted to Government in time for the deadline of 28 November 2025.
- 11.3.** The Strategic Business Case is currently being professionally designed in-house ready for publication on KCC's website following submission to Government.
- 11.4.** The business cases supported by other councils in Kent and Medway are due to be published by 05 November 2025 on the [Kent Councils Leaders website](#). Once published, a link will be sent to all Members so that they can view the other options which are being proposed across the area.

Recommendations

The County Council is asked to:

- (1) CONSIDER and DEBATE the proposal as part of ensuring all-Member input to inform the proposed Cabinet Decision to approve and submit the Strategic Business Case to Government.
-

Relevant Director:

David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance – david.whittle@kent.gov.uk

Report Authors:

Jenny Dixon-Sherreard, Strategy Manager, Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance – jenny.dixon-sherreard@kent.gov.uk

Ryan Thomas, Policy and Strategy Officer, Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance – ryan.thomas@kent.gov.uk

Appendices:

Appendix 1: LGR Process Timeline

Appendix 2: KCC's draft Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway

Appendix 3: Public Engagement Report – Interim Findings

Appendix 4: Draft Equality Impact Assessment

Background documents:

Papers to Devolution and LGR Cabinet Committee, 30 September 2025, available at <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=979&MId=9845>

Paper to Devolution and LGR Cabinet Committee, 28 July 2025, available at <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=979&MId=9870&Ver%20=4>

KCC webpage for Local Government Reorganisation and devolution, containing letters to and from KCC and government and further information regarding LGR and devolution, available at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/local-government-reorganisation-and-devolution>

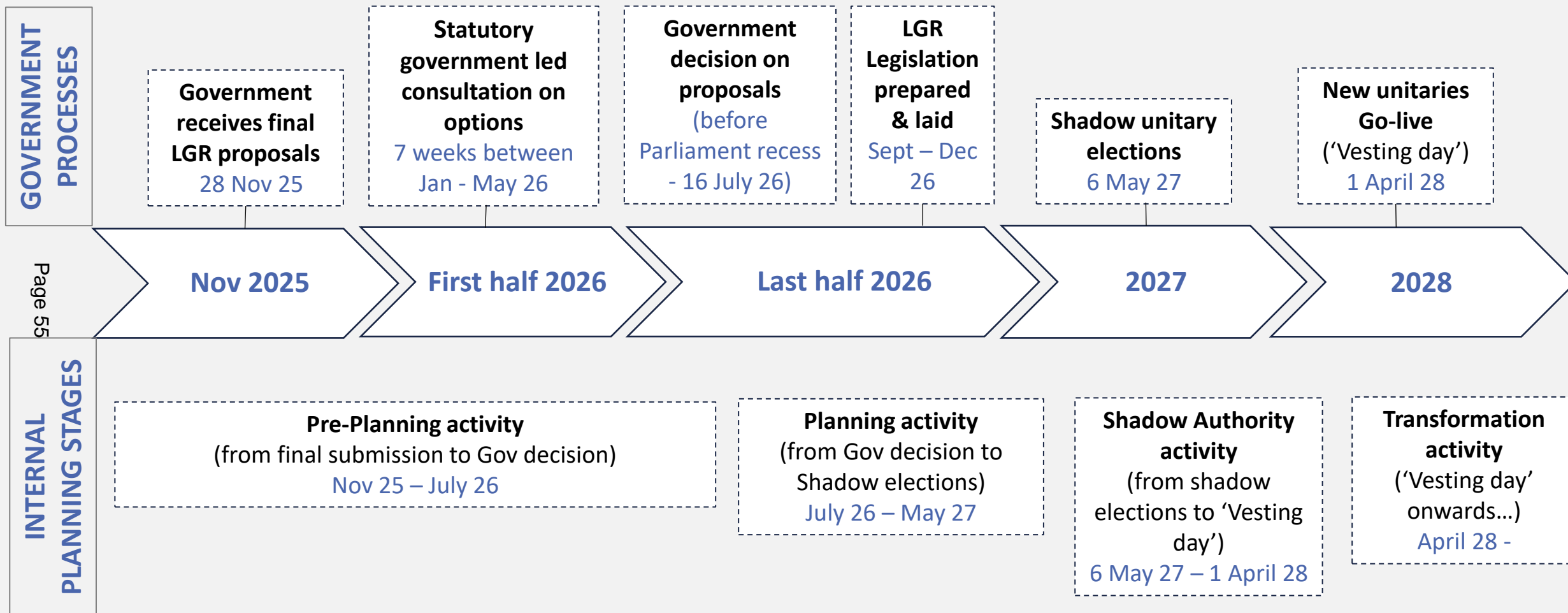
English Devolution White Paper, Power and partnerships: Foundations for growth, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 16 December 2024 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth>

English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, July 2025, available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-01/0283/240283.pdf>

This page is intentionally left blank

Timeline

Timings subject to change at Government's discretion



This page is intentionally left blank

DRAFT

**Kent County Council's Strategic Business Case
for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway**

One Kent, One Council, Our Unique County

DRAFT for County Council, 6 November 2025

DRAFT

Contents

	Page
1. Foreword by the Leader	3
2. Executive summary	6
PART ONE – INTRODUCING KENT AND MEDWAY AND OUR APPROACH TO LGR	
3. Introduction Introducing Kent and Medway How we developed the Strategic Business Case Current model of local government and public service partners in Kent & Medway Shared vision for Kent and Medway	14
4. Options appraisals KCC internal options appraisal (March – July 2025) Subsequent options appraisal for a 'hybrid' single unitary (August 2025) Joint options appraisal (September 2025)	23
5. Engagement with Kent and Medway residents and stakeholders Engagement with Kent and Medway residents – <i>to be added</i> Engagement with stakeholders – <i>interim findings</i>	32
PART TWO – THE CASE FOR A SINGLE UNITARY	
6. Financial assessment Financial assessment summary Approach Financial benefits and costs of unitarisation Other financial considerations	36
7. Assessment against government criteria	56
8. The geographic and spatial reality of Kent and Medway Kent's unique geography Challenges managed by operating at scale Disaggregation creates unsustainable financial and service demand Disaggregation impacts cannot be effectively mitigated Opportunities through single tier structure A single Kent and Medway council is the most viable and strategic option	63
PART THREE – THE NEW KENT COUNCIL	
9. Effective and efficient governance and engagement Effective governance, representation and engagement Councillor numbers and support Stronger community engagement and empowered communities	74
10. Devolution	89
11. Better outcomes for people and place Public Service Reform Better outcomes for our places Better outcomes for our people	91
12. Implementation planning Implementation Assumptions Implementation guiding principles Four phases of implementation Programme governance	100
13. Conclusion	106
14. Appendices	107

1. Foreword

Placeholder – Foreword to be included in final Strategic Business Case

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril delenit augue duis dolore te feugait nulla facilisi.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril delenit augue duis dolore te feugait nulla facilisi.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.

**Linden Kemkaran, Leader
Kent County Council
November 2025**

DRAFT

2. Executive Summary

Kent and Medway: A county of national significance

Kent and Medway is a county of scale, complexity, and consequence. As the UK's gateway to Europe, our geography is unique - bordering the capital and the continent, with the Port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel forming critical arteries for national trade and security. Our 1.9 million residents live across a diverse landscape of coastal towns, rural communities, and urban centres, with no single dominant city. This polycentric structure brings both opportunity and challenge.

Our economy is broad and resilient, generating £44 billion GVA annually, with strengths in logistics, life sciences, construction, and creative industries. Yet, we face stark disparities, particularly in East and North Kent, where deprivation, housing pressures, and health inequalities are most acute. These challenges are compounded by border-related pressures, including the arrival of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and pressure on local road networks. Kent and Medway bears the brunt, but these are national issues that impact the country's economy and resilience.

In the face of this complexity, Kent and Medway has a strong track record of partnership working. Our coterminous arrangements with key partners including Kent Police and NHS Kent and Medway, and many well-established pan-Kent and Medway partnerships, such as Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, provide a solid foundation for integrated public service delivery. These partnerships are built on trust, scale, and shared purpose and they exist at a Kent and Medway level because that is what works best here.

KCC's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation

This Strategic Business Case sets out Kent County Council's (KCC) proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Kent and Medway – a single unitary with three Area Assemblies, balancing scale and capacity with local responsiveness.

It has been developed through detailed internal analysis, independent financial modelling, and active participation in the joint Kent and Medway process. While KCC has developed this case independently, we remain committed to collaboration and transparency with our partner councils.

Our approach is rooted in a vision for better outcomes through financially sustainable, community-rooted, and digitally enabled public services. We support the design principles agreed across Kent and Medway - resident-centric, integrated, data-driven, financially resilient, and future-focused. However, our route to achieving these outcomes is distinct. For KCC, the overriding priority is the long-term financial resilience of local government in Kent and Medway. Our strategic outlook as the largest council in the area, responsible for 73% of all council spending and with statutory responsibilities to support some of the most vulnerable people in our communities means we cannot allow LGR to risk creating councils that will fail in their duties to Kent and Medway residents.

A unique county needs a unique solution: the Kent Council

Kent and Medway's geography and position make it one of the most complex and strategically significant areas in the country. Its border location, combined with deep disparities in deprivation between East and West, creates uneven demand and financial pressures that require coordinated, county-wide responses. The peninsular geography limits market options and workforce mobility, reinforcing the need for scale, resilience, and strategic coherence in service delivery.

The current county-wide model enables Kent and Medway to manage these challenges effectively. It provides the critical mass needed to maximise economies of scale, maintain service capacity, and deliver consistent outcomes. This structure not only benefits local communities but also supports national interests - Kent and Medway are a reliable partner to Government in managing issues of national importance.

Disaggregating the county into multiple unitary authorities would severely compromise this strategic capacity. It would fragment services, risking 'postcode lotteries' for residents and deterioration of service quality, particularly in high-risk areas such as social care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Increased costs would come from duplicating senior roles and back-office costs and reduced purchasing power. This would be to the detriment of the entire county, but for some areas it is an existential threat.

On top of managing the majority of the county's highest and most costly needs for council services, a smaller unitary in East Kent would be quickly overwhelmed by the statutory responsibility and financial burden of safeguarding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. The loss of scale would make it harder to absorb demand shocks and maintain service quality for all children and families. Infrastructure management would also suffer. Kent's strategic road network cannot be effectively overseen in isolated pockets. Protocols like Operation BROCK require county-wide coordination to prevent gridlock and maintain national connectivity. Fragmentation would make such coordination impractical, risking disruption not just locally but nationally.

There is no realistic way to mitigate these disadvantages. Shared service arrangements are unlikely to withstand the pressures of Kent and Medway's complexity and tend to result in poorer outcomes and higher costs. Crucially, there is currently no timeline for establishing a Strategic Authority, meaning disaggregation would dismantle the only existing structure capable of maintaining county-wide cohesion.

In short, breaking up Kent and Medway would not only weaken local service delivery, it would undermine the county's ability to respond to national challenges, destabilise critical response arrangements, and erode the strategic resilience that currently benefits the whole country.

KCC is clear: the most viable option for LGR in Kent and Medway is a single unitary authority - the Kent Council. This model is uniquely designed to meet the scale, complexity, and strategic importance of our county. It delivers the benefits of reorganisation while avoiding the risks of fragmentation.

The Kent Council would:

- ✓ Avoid the substantial risks of disaggregation of key services and loss of scale that are unsustainable given the unique challenges Kent faces – avoiding disruption that could have both a local and national impact.
- ✓ Maximise the financial savings available through the process of LGR in both the short- and long-term, putting the entire area on a firmer financial footing and quickly reinvesting into services.
- ✓ Keep Kent and Medway together, respecting our area's strong identity, protecting well-established partnerships and tried and tested service delivery arrangements.
- ✓ Provide high-quality and effective services, benefiting from a critical mass of capability and capacity across the area and ensuring a consistent service for everyone who needs support.
- ✓ Speak up for Kent and Medway with one powerful and cohesive voice.
- ✓ Shape the future growth of our county in a coordinated and strategic way, aiming for a high quality of life for all.
- ✓ Accelerate and invest in Public Service Reform, transforming how public services work for people and places.
- ✓ Through Area Assemblies, provide local responsiveness, flexibility and innovation in community services, working with local partners and people.
- ✓ Embed an enhanced community engagement approach that suits modern life and that is focused on tackling problems rather than servicing layers of governance.
- ✓ Have fewer, empowered and well-supported councillors with a meaningful role and influence, streamlining local democracy and improving accountability.
- ✓ Avoid the costly and bureaucratic addition of another layer of local government through a Mayoral Strategic Authority – the Kent Council would provide the strategic capacity for the devolution of powers and funding that Government is seeking, capitalising on Kent and Medway's existing scale and experience.
- ✓ Ensure a smooth transition, with minimal change and disruption to residents and minimal cost.

What the people of Kent and Medway and our key stakeholders think

KCC believes that any discussion about the future of local government in Kent and Medway must include the voice of our residents and the key stakeholders that work in and know the area best. Between the hurried Government process for LGR, a new administration for KCC, and the time taken to work with other councils in the joint process, time to engage with people at this stage has been short. However, this has been a priority for KCC and an intensive period of engagement has been undertaken so that the views and preferences of our residents and key partners can be included in this Strategic Business Case. We are grateful to the xxxx *(to be added)* people who completed our online survey, and the many partners who took the time to tell us their views. The most important things for people in Kent and Medway about the future of local government and LGR are:

Summary of key engagement points to be added here in the final Strategic Business Case

The most financially sustainable option for Kent and Medway

Local authorities in Kent and Medway face significant financial challenges, particularly in adult social care, children's services, and SEND. These pressures are unevenly distributed, with higher demand in East and North Kent.

A single unitary will cost less and deliver greater savings quicker

- Avoids the costs and risks of disaggregating key countywide services which could add up to £68 million per year in other options.
- Delivers the highest net recurring benefit of £69 million per year, cumulative £457 million after 10 years which is more than double the highest predicted cumulative saving for any of the multi-unitary options.
- The difference in cumulative benefit between a single unitary and the three-unitary option equates to between £340 to £478 on Band D council tax over a ten-year period (and even more for other options).
- Incurs the lowest transition costs - £99 million compared to up to £139 million for other options.
- Delivers the fastest payback period - 3.3 years compared to up to 14 years (or potentially never) in other options.

A single unitary is fairer and sustainable for the whole county

- Avoids concentrating unsustainable financial pressures on individual unitaries, particularly in East Kent. Spend per head on adult social care could vary by nearly £200 between individual unitaries, for example.
- A single rate of council tax across the county and a wide tax base, evening out disparities in revenue raising potential.
- Assuming average harmonisation, most households in a single unitary would pay less council tax than if they were resident in one of the multi-unitary options.
- Avoids unitaries inheriting uneven distributions of legacy debt, which currently varies hugely from £0 to £2134 per head in different parts of the county.

The following table provides comparison of key financial information across the options being considered for Kent and Medway.

LGR option	Implementation costs (one off) (£m)	Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m)	1a enhancement / Disaggregation costs (£m)*	Recurring annual savings (£m)**	Estimated payback period (years)	10-year cumulative impact of transformation (£m)
1a	(99.4)	75.0	(6.0)	69.0	3.3	457.4
3a	(127.7)	69.4	(19.7) - (29.2)	49.7 - 40.2	5.4 - 6.7	132.1 – 226.5
4b	(130.9)	67.5	(32.9) - (48.6)	34.6 - 18.9	7.8 - 14.3	(80.6) – 76.7
4d	(135.9)	67.5	(32.9) - (48.6)	34.6 - 18.9	7.9 - 14.5	(85.6) – 71.7
5a	(139.1)	65.7	(46.0) - (68.1)	19.7 - (2.4)	14.0 – no payback	(298.1) – (77.9)

**The range demonstrates the sensitivity of changing just one of the cost assumptions in the model between 0% and 1% for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and*

children's social care. The range is not required for 1a as there is no disaggregation of social care.

**** Recurring savings = gross reorganisation savings minus disaggregation costs**

The single unitary is the clear financial choice – sustainable, fair and quickly unlocks maximum savings to reinvest into services for Kent and Medway residents.

Right for Kent and Medway and a strong fit for Government

Kent Council is a strong fit for the government's criteria for Local Government Reorganisation. It meets all requirements for scale and efficiency, protecting service quality and enhancing engagement with our communities.

Criterion	Single unitary	Multiple unitaries
Establishing a single tier	Meets all requirements; maximises scale and equity	Creates disparities in tax yield, service quality, and financial resilience
Efficiency and resilience	Highest savings, lowest costs, fastest payback	High transition costs, low savings, long or no payback
High-quality services	Maintains scale and consistency; avoids fragmentation	Risks to safeguarding, social care, and SEND services
Local consensus	Delivers value for money and fairness; respects local identity	Reinforces East/West divide; adds complexity and variation
Supports devolution	Devolution-ready; avoids need for MSA	Adds cost; undermines strategic coherence
Community engagement	Enhanced community engagement approach and Area Assemblies	Smaller scale but limited capacity for engagement

The Kent Council – effective, efficient and fit for the future

Better for people

The Kent Council will use its scale and capacity to maximise the opportunities from LGR, giving Kent and Medway residents a council that delivers value for money, services that work for them and building communities that thrive. It will deliver better services for people by integrating public services around individuals and communities, enabling a shift from reactive crisis management to proactive prevention. With a single strategic authority, services such as social care, housing, education, and public health can be designed and delivered holistically, reducing duplication and ensuring residents receive the right support at the right time. The council's scale will allow for more effective commissioning, stronger partnerships with the NHS and Police, and better use of data and digital tools to anticipate needs and personalise services. This integration will improve outcomes, reduce long-term costs, and ensure that vulnerable residents are not lost in a fragmented system.

Better for places

For places, the Kent Council will provide the strategic capacity to plan and invest in infrastructure, housing, and economic development at the scale required to meet the county's complex and growing needs. A single council will enable coordinated spatial planning, ensuring that housing growth is sustainable and supported by the necessary transport, health, and education infrastructure. It will also strengthen Kent's voice with government and investors, attracting funding and shaping policies that reflect the county's priorities. By aligning economic development, skills, and planning strategies, the Kent Council will support thriving local economies and ensure that all communities - urban, rural, and coastal - benefit from growth and investment.

By consolidating services and governance into a single authority, the Kent Council will unlock the ability to plan and deliver visible, everyday services more effectively. From cleaner streets and better-maintained parks to more responsive local highways and accessible leisure facilities, the council will be able to reinvest savings into the services that matter most to people's daily lives. This will not only improve quality of life but also restore public confidence in local government by demonstrating clear, tangible value for money. While the scale of the Kent Council would be an inherent advantage, it is also critical that a large unitary authority remains in touch with and responsive to the diverse needs of Kent and Medway's communities and ensure that people feel represented and heard. We have therefore designed the model for the Kent Council to acknowledge and mitigate these risks, thinking beyond traditional ways of working in local government where this will allow the Kent Council to best serve its residents.

Local leadership, local decisions

The creation of three Area Assemblies in North, East, and West Kent will ensure that the Kent Council remains closely connected to the communities it serves. These Assemblies will be empowered to make decisions on how community services are run, enabling a more tailored and responsive approach that reflects the distinct identities, needs, and priorities of local areas. Aligned with natural patterns of travel, healthcare, and policing, and mirroring existing service delivery footprints, the Area Assemblies will provide a practical and democratic mechanism for local voices to influence service design and delivery. By embedding decision-making at a more local level for community services, the Kent Council will combine the benefits of strategic scale with the agility and insight needed to respond effectively to community concerns and aspirations.

Engagement and local democracy that works for people

The Kent Council will invest in a modern, practical approach to community engagement that prioritises real problem-solving over unnecessary layers of governance. Rather than replicating costly and bureaucratic structures, the council will embed engagement into the way it works—through a Strategic Engagement Framework, a dedicated Community Engagement Team, and a toolkit of inclusive methods such as citizen assemblies, digital platforms, and local partnerships. This approach will ensure that residents are not only heard but actively involved in shaping services that reflect their needs and priorities. By working with trusted local networks, including town and parish councils and the voluntary sector, the Kent Council will build strong, responsive relationships with communities, ensuring that engagement is meaningful and suits the way people want to interact with their council.

Streamlined governance will be achieved by reducing the number of councillors from 658 across Kent and Medway's current councils to a proposed 118, delivering nearly £2.5 million in annual savings on basic member allowances compared to now. This reduction strikes a careful balance- ensuring the Kent Council remains a workable size while maintaining strong democratic representation. Councillors will be supported by a dedicated Member Support Unit and a simplified committee structure, enabling them to focus on strategic leadership and community advocacy. With smaller electoral divisions than the current county council and enhanced tools to manage casework, councillors will be better equipped to serve their communities meaningfully and effectively.

A smooth transition

A single unitary model offers the most straightforward and least disruptive path to reorganisation, avoiding the complexity and cost of disaggregating services across multiple new authorities. By building on existing capacity and infrastructure, this approach enables a smoother transition with minimal impact on residents and frontline services. KCC is committed to working with the other councils in Kent and Medway and with Government to plan and implement the new arrangements, ensuring services remain safe, legal, and effective from day one. At the same time, this model creates the strongest foundation for long-term transformation - unlocking opportunities to modernise services, improve outcomes, and deliver better value for money across the whole area.

Kent and Medway stands at a crossroads. The opportunity for Local Government Reorganisation must not be wasted on models that fragment services, entrench inequality, and increase costs. The Kent Council offers a bold, practical, and financially responsible solution - one that reflects the scale, identity, and strategic importance of our county. It will deliver better services, stronger communities, and a more resilient future for all our residents.

One Kent. One Council. Our Unique County.

**PART ONE –
INTRODUCING KENT AND MEDWAY AND OUR APPROACH TO
LGR**

3. Introduction

Introducing Kent and Medway

Kent and Medway is a large, diverse region strategically placed between the UK's gateway to continental Europe and London. Covering around 1,400 square miles and 13 local authority areas, it includes large urban centres, coastal towns, market towns, and wide rural spaces. Its unique geography, natural assets, and international connections shape how people live, work, and travel. Around 1.9 million people live in Kent and Medway across 760,000 households, and both the population and housing stock are growing. Kent and Medway's identity is shaped by its role as the main gateway to Europe, through the Port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel, and by its spread of towns and communities rather than a single dominant city.

Population and demography

Population growth has been strong over the past 20 years (about 7% in the last decade and 18% over 20 years), with household growth following a similar trend. The age profile is changing as the baby-boom generation ages, but Kent and Medway still have a slightly higher proportion of children than both the South East and England averages, showing its strong appeal to families. Population and housing growth is expected to continue over the coming decades, increasing demand for housing, infrastructure, and public services.

A polycentric, connected economic geography

Kent and Medway is made up of many centres. Medway is the largest urban area, but no single area dominates. North Kent has seen major regeneration along the Thames Estuary. East Kent includes Dover, the UK's biggest passenger port, a university cluster in Canterbury, and a string of coastal towns with growing creative economies, plus Ashford as a major growth centre. West Kent has a higher share of jobs, thanks to its dynamic, service-based economy. This economic geography creates complex travel patterns, both within Kent and into neighbouring areas such as London, making reliable transport systems crucial to the economy and residents' quality of life. Between the towns, there's a diverse rural economy, including some of England's most productive farmland and important environmental sites.

Economic scale and structure

Kent and Medway's economy is significant, generating about £44 billion GVA a year. It's broad-based, with wholesale and retail, health and care, business services, construction, and hospitality sectors providing significant employment. Construction is especially strong and highly productive. Alongside everyday sectors, there are high-potential clusters across Kent: life sciences at Discovery Park and our universities, creative and digital industries, and food production and agritech. Most businesses are small or medium-sized, which brings economic resilience and entrepreneurship, but also highlights the need to support firms to invest in new technologies to improve skills and boost productivity. Employment has grown strongly but job density is still below the national average, partly due to people commuting out of Kent. Unemployment is low, but economic inactivity has risen in some coastal and estuary communities since the pandemic. Productivity is about 94% of the UK average, with West Kent performing above and East Kent below the national benchmark. These differences reflect variations in sectors, skills, transport, and housing.

Skills and productivity

Qualification levels have improved, with fewer people having no formal qualifications and more reaching NVQ4 and above. Still, there's a gap at higher levels compared to the UK average, especially in some coastal and estuary areas. This limits access to better jobs and makes it harder for businesses to recruit for growth roles. Partnerships between employers, colleges, and universities have strengthened, including through the Local Skills Improvement Plan. The focus now is on widening participation, raising attainment, and linking skills to Kent's strengths in life sciences, creative-digital, and agritech, as well as boosting innovation in small businesses.

Gateway to Europe: Dover, Eurotunnel, and the Strategic Corridor

The Port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel are the UK's main short-straits crossings for passengers and freight, vital for national supply chains and exports. They support a large local transport and logistics industry. However, when there is disruption at the border, due to poor weather, industrial action or sheer demand at peak holiday season, disruption and congestion on Kent's roads and local networks is significant. Traffic management on the M20 and nearby routes, in the form of Operation BROCK, can disrupt local journeys, public transport, and access to services, and affect town centres across the M20 corridor. Whilst the impact of border disruption has national implications, the solution is managed locally, through strong coordination between Kent partners to keep borders flowing and transport network resilient.

Infrastructure and digital connectivity

The last decade has seen major investment in transport: better junctions, town-centre links, active travel schemes, and rail improvements, including High Speed One, which has transformed access across much of Kent. But gaps remain: transport improvements need to keep up with growth, bus networks and active travel need strengthening, and we need to get full benefits from international rail at Ashford and Ebbsfleet, plus improve resilience on short-straits corridors during disruptions. Digital infrastructure has improved a lot, with superfast and gigabit coverage growing quickly, but rural and outlying areas still lag and need more attention to ensure everyone is connected.

Spatial disparities and inclusion

County-wide averages hide big differences. Disadvantage is concentrated in coastal East Kent and parts of North Kent, and can be seen in neighbourhoods in most larger towns. These areas face lower skills, poorer health, weaker access to good jobs, older and poorer-quality housing, and limited transport options. Productivity and pay are lower, economic inactivity, including due to ill-health, is higher, and outcomes for children and young people are more fragile. As of June 2025, more than 3,300 children were living in temporary accommodation in Kent and Medway. Fuel poverty affects about 10% of households in many areas, increasing health risks. The need for an inclusive approach which links skills, health, housing renewal, transport, town-centre investment, and employer engagement is necessary to change long-term prospects, especially in many coastal communities.

Housing supply

Housing supply has improved but is still below targets. From 2018 to 2023, new homes averaged about 7,277 per year, which is still 24% below Local Plan requirements (about 9,528 per year). This shortfall has limited affordable housing and increased pressure on

prices. Affordable homes have made up about 23–24% of new builds recently, but that's still well below what's needed (over 5,000 affordable homes per year). Limited supply, high prices and rents, and housing allowance rates that haven't kept up have driven homelessness and increased spending on temporary accommodation. Housing quality affects health and wellbeing, with many homes not meeting decent standards and some having serious hazards, especially in the private rented sector.

Health, housing, and wider determinants

There are strong links between housing and health: damp and mould worsen respiratory problems, cold homes increase falls and winter deaths, and climate change brings risks from overheating and flooding. Temporary and insecure housing can harm children's development, wellbeing, and education. The Kent and Medway Integrated Care system recognises the importance of housing in prevention, recovery, and discharge, and the need to align health, housing, and care to reduce pressure on acute services. As the population ages, there will be more need for specialist and accessible homes and community support to help people live independently.

Key future trends for Kent and Medway

Looking ahead, these trends are expected to shape Kent and Medway's economy, communities, and service needs over the next decade:

- **An ageing population and changing demographics:** The population will continue to grow and age, increasing demand for health, social care and specialist housing. Prevention, independence and accessibility in mainstream homes will become more important.
- **Growing social and spatial inequalities:** Without targeted action, disparities between coastal and estuary communities risk deepening, with implications for health, skills, employment and fiscal pressures across public services.
- **Education and skills:** Persistent higher-level skills gaps compared to national averages constrain productivity growth. Expanding employer-led pathways, technical education and adult upskilling aligned to growth sectors will be critical.
- **Housing demand, affordability and condition:** Continued population growth and household formation will sustain demand pressures. Accelerating plan-led delivery, with the necessary support social and physical infrastructure, to broaden the affordability and tenure mix, and tackling non-decent stock and energy efficiency will be required.
- **Digitalisation of the economy and public services:** Technology adoption will continue across sectors, changing skills requirements whilst supporting new ways to access a wider range of services and changing how services are delivered, raising the dependency on universal digital connectivity.
- **Border pressures and highways resilience:** The short-straight crossing will continue to impact Kent's strategic roads especially when there is disruption, requiring resilient, coordinated multi-agency response in the short-term, but requires long-term strategic investment to improve capacity and resilience.

How we developed the Strategic Business Case

Purpose

In February 2025, councils in Kent and Medway received a statutory invitation from government to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) by 28 November 2025. In preparation to meet the government deadline, reorganisation models for Kent and Medway were evaluated and appraised against published government criteria, supported by detailed financial and service modelling. Kent County Council (KCC) has considered options independently and as part of a joint Kent and Medway process led by Kent Council Leaders. This business case presents the rationale for KCC's preferred model, built upon detailed analysis of shared evidence.

Commitment to the joint approach

While KCC has developed this business case independently, consistent commitment to the joint process has remained. In line with government expectations for councils to contribute to a shared evidence base, KCC has pro-actively shared information and analysis with partner authorities, to ensure all councils have access to information about the likely impacts of LGR on current KCC services. Equally, KCC has considered evidence provided by other councils in shaping this proposal.

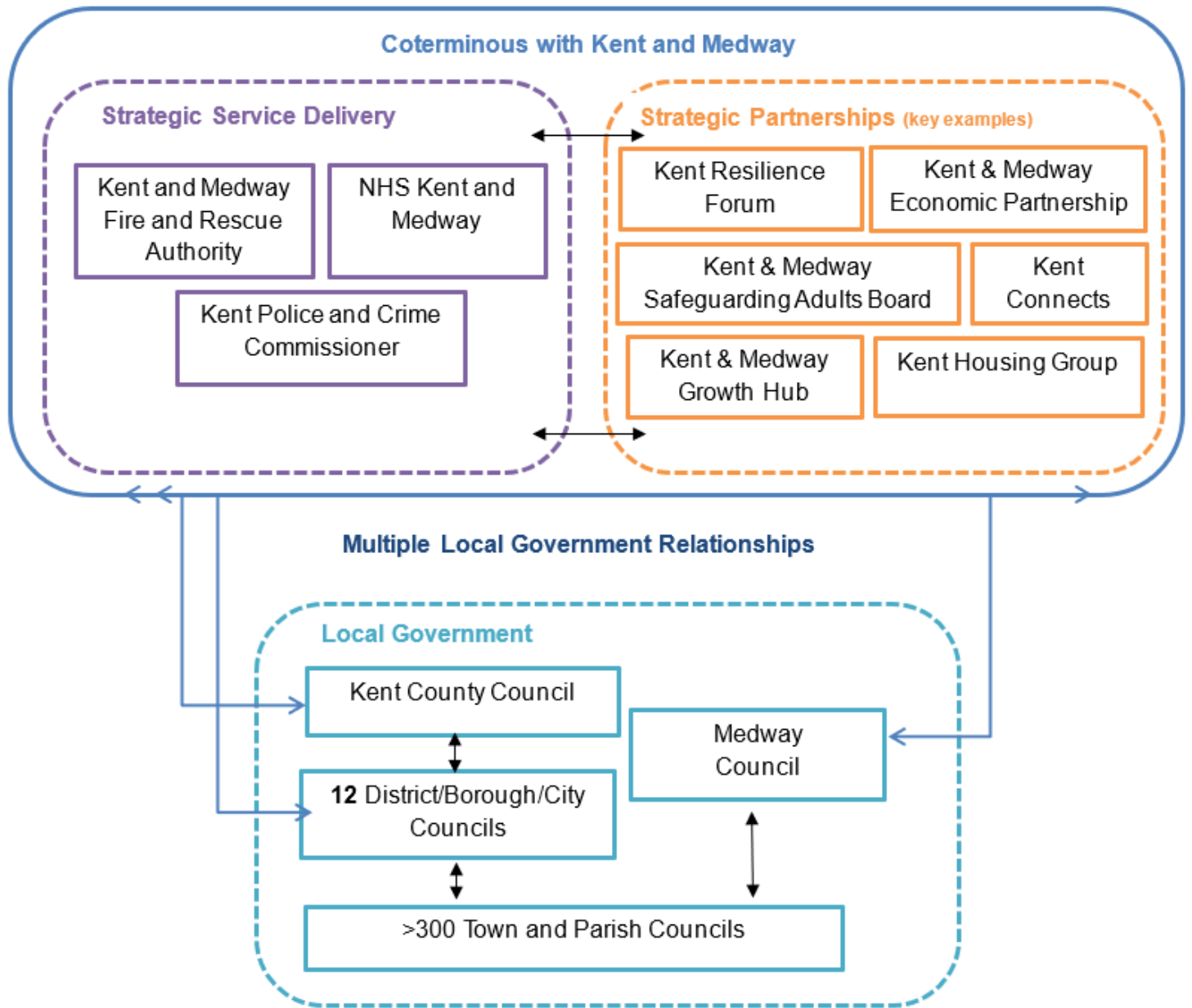
To support comparability of financial analysis across options, KCC commissioned KPMG, Kent and Medway's strategic partner for LGR, to develop the financial case using data from all councils. This ensures that the methodology used to model costs and benefits for KCC's preferred option is consistent with that used for the other Kent and Medway options. KCC will continue to be open, pro-active and transparent while working with partner authorities as we navigate LGR for Kent and Medway.

Challenging timelines

In addition to ambitious government timelines for the submission of LGR proposals, KCC's timescales were constrained further by the need to respond to significant change during the proposal development period. Not least, the KCC elections in May 2025 which marked a major political shift for the county, ending almost 30 years of Conservative control. Induction of a new administration, establishment of a new leadership and formation of governance structures has significantly impacted timelines. While contributing to the joint LGR work for Kent and Medway, KCC simultaneously supported a new administration in understanding the opportunities and challenges presented by LGR for KCC services and residents.

Running a joint LGR proposal development process across Kent and Medway has been complex given the nature and number of stakeholders involved. Complexity was compounded and timelines impacted by the submission of additional proposals from individual Kent and Medway councils at a late stage in the process. KCC's continued commitment to the joint process meant that the decision to proceed with the development of a business case independently was not made until the outcome of the joint options appraisal had been presented and fully considered by KCC Members.

Current model of local government and public service partners in Kent & Medway



The geographical area of Kent is governed through a two-tier local authority structure. KCC operates as an upper-tier authority, delivering countywide services such as social care, highways, and public health. Beneath this, twelve district, borough, and city councils function as lower-tier authorities, responsible for more localised services including housing, planning, and waste collection. Medway Council, a unitary authority, delivers both upper- and lower-tier functions within its boundaries.

Key statutory bodies responsible for delivering Police, Fire and Rescue, and NHS services operate coterminously across Kent and Medway. These organisations are well-established and play a vital role in the effective delivery of public services throughout the county. Recognising the benefits of aligning with the Kent and Medway footprint, many additional strategic partnerships have adopted the same geographical remit. This alignment

strengthens collaborative strategy development, enables more integrated and efficient service delivery, makes most effective use of resources and enhances Kent and Medway's collective national voice. Prominent partnerships operating across the Kent and Medway area include the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), Kent Housing Group (KHG), the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board and the Kent Estates Partnership.

Case study: Kent and Medway Economic Partnership

Both the previous and the current Government recognise that local and national government can play their most effective role in boosting economic growth when working across an identifiable *functional economic area*. For many years, this has been robustly proven across multiple sectors to be the Kent and Medway footprint.

[Kent and Medway Economic Partnership](#) (KMEP) has existed in various incarnations since 2009. It was established by KCC as a strategic cross-county approach to economic growth between local government and business long before such structures were mandated in the form of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) by the government in 2011. Previously part of the South East LEP, KMEP now functions as the area's Local Growth Board after the dissolution of LEPs in 2024, having endured and adapted itself to successive governments' models for locally led growth.

KMEP is led by a board comprising local authorities, business representatives, the further and higher education sectors, and is always chaired by a representative from the private sector. The partnership has overseen and facilitated numerous growth initiatives over the years, such as reviewing and prioritising projects for the Government's Local Growth Fund and Growing Places Fund to achieve maximum local economic impact. It has also provided a coherent public-private sector voice to champion the county's growth, for example supporting the Lower Thames Crossing and the campaign to bring back international rail to the county.

In terms of current and future impact, KMEP is responsible for the Kent and Medway Economic Framework, which sets an ambitious direction for the county's economic growth agenda across business, skills, infrastructure, investment and place. Supporting this, KMEP oversees partnerships and strategies to address skills gaps, employment support and health-economy initiatives across the county. It is also establishing the Kent & Medway Innovation Partnership to connect businesses with academia and local government, boosting the county's research & development sector.

All of this has long established the partnership as a trusted and open body with which the county's businesses, public sector and Government can confidently engage to drive forward projects to propel the county's prosperity and jobs creation. This trust is further enhanced by KMEP's long-established [Business Advisory Board](#), which provides essential economic intelligence to the partnership, acting as both consultative forum and dissemination network across Kent and Medway's private sector.

Case study: The Kent Estates Partnership

This strategic partnership was established in 2015 to support the One Public Estate programme, bringing together public sector partners and other stakeholders from across Kent and Medway. Partners include all District Councils, KCC, Medway Council, NHS Kent and Medway, Kent Fire & Rescue Service, Kent Police, Secamb, University of Kent at Canterbury and Parish Councils via Kent Association of Local Councils. The Partnership finds opportunities to share space ideas, service redesign and promote growth through the development and use of public sector land. To date its work has secured over £17 million across 17 projects to kick start development and housing. It has also led a nationally recognised innovation programme that has seen 10 council offices and 3 NHS sites make accommodation available to enable staff across the public sector to access accommodation throughout the county.

Shared Vision for Kent and Medway

In collaboration with Kent and Medway councils, a shared vision and supporting design principles have been developed.

Our shared vision for Kent is:

Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially sustainable and accountable local public services delivered in partnership with communities.

Our ambition for Kent's future is bold and resident-focused. We will deliver local government that is financially resilient, community-rooted, and digitally enabled, delivering services that are simpler, smarter, and more joined up.

Over the next five years, our shared aspiration for Kent is to:

- ✓ Build trusted, transparent relationships with residents through open communication and active engagement.
- ✓ Enable a seamless, resident-first experience offering the right way for each resident to engage with us, including the ability to complete transactions online—quickly, simply, and securely.
- ✓ Deliver place-based, people-centred services, focused on early intervention, prevention, and improving life chances.
- ✓ Strengthen local identity and maintain a deep sense of place and belonging.
- ✓ Use data and technology smartly to personalise support, anticipate needs, and improve outcomes.
- ✓ Work in strong partnership with health, education, police, and community organisations to meet residents' needs.
- ✓ Build community resilience to social, economic, and environmental challenges through inclusive, forward-thinking services.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment to residents, staff, and place, balancing ambition with stability, innovation with identity, and change with care.

Design Principles

To achieve our shared vision for Kent a set of guiding principles have been developed by Leaders across Kent these principles provide a blueprint for future council design.

Design Principle	Description
Service & resident centric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design services around resident needs with a "resident-first" mindset. - Maintain strong community identity and local accountability. - Ensure equity in service access and outcomes across Kent.
Integrated & collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enable seamless, joined-up service delivery across public services. - Build on existing partnerships and promote shared responsibility and budgets. - Embed co-location and community-based service design.
Data-driven & digitally enabled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in modern digital infrastructure which allows our service delivery and enabling activity to be joined up, and automated where appropriate. - Leverage data and AI to support early intervention, improve decision-making, and target resources effectively. - Ensure transparency and open data to build trust and inform priorities.
Financially resilient & efficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adopt place-based financial planning and maximise asset efficiency. - Create lean systems with fluid resource allocation based on demand. - Secure long-term funding and manage transition costs carefully
Empowered & future focused workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retain and support skilled staff through predictable roles and strong leadership. - Break down silos with collaborative problem-solving structures. - Modernise terms and conditions for a more agile, attractive public service offer.
Clear, consistent & bold leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be brave, honest, and aspirational in setting direction and expectations. - Deliver a clear, shared vision and values, internally and externally. - Ensure messages on devolution, change, and local ambition are well understood.

While KCC supports the shared vision and design principles, there is a divergence in views regarding the most effective route to achieve them. KCC is responsible for 73% of local government spending in Kent and Medway. Our scale and experience provide a countywide perspective - particularly in recognising that financial sustainability must be a core principle of any future governance model. Like councils across the country, those in Kent and Medway are facing mounting financial pressures, especially in high-cost areas such as Adult

Social Care, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Children's Services, and housing. For this reason, the financial resilience of local government in Kent and Medway and the value for money provided for our residents is fundamental to our position on LGR.

DRAFT

4. Options Appraisals

This section sets out the findings of both KCC's internal options appraisal, which was shared with all Kent and Medway councils to support business case development, and the joint options appraisal which was completed by KPMG on behalf of Kent Council Leaders.

KCC internal options appraisal (March – July 2025)

Purpose

Following local government elections in May 2025, and the formation of a new administration at KCC, it was essential that newly elected Members fully understood the opportunities and challenges presented by LGR for Kent and Medway. In line with Government guidance to adopt an options appraisal approach when assessing potential models, KCC undertook an internal appraisal to support the new administration in shaping its position on LGR. This appraisal evaluated the relative merits and risks of each option against the Government's criteria and principles for reorganisation. The findings from this initial assessment were subsequently presented to elected Members of the County Council for their consideration.

Options considered

Initially, six different options of unitisation were considered as part of the options appraisal:

- Option 1b: single unitary covering Kent and Medway
- Option 2a: two unitaries (East and West Kent)
- Option 3a: three unitaries (North, East and West Kent)
- Option 4a: four unitaries (North, East, South and West Kent)
- Option 4b: four unitaries (North, East, Mid and West Kent – *with Folkestone and Hythe in Mid Kent)
- Option 4c: four unitaries (North, East, Mid and West Kent - *with Maidstone in Mid Kent)

Please note that we have used the same numbering of options as the other Kent and Medway councils to ensure consistency and ease of comparison between business cases. A map of each option is provided later on in this section.

Options 3a, 4a, 4b and 4c were identified through the joint Kent Council Leaders' discussions and information on these options was submitted to Government by some councils alongside the Interim Plan in March 2025. These were therefore included because they were the options that were known to have been identified within Kent and Medway at that point. Options 1b and 2a were also included by KCC with the aim of ensuring that the internal options appraisal provided a broad range of options to help Members reach an informed position. Importantly, each option covers the existing Kent and Medway area and the different geographic configurations are contiguous with existing district and borough boundaries.

Approach

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data was used to support the initial options appraisal against the government criteria, drawing upon both internal and independent

analysis to ensure multiple viewpoints were considered and to avoid any potential biases. The evidence base consisted of the following pieces of information:

Government criteria	Evidence used
A. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government	Option profiles, financial assessment and housing delivery analysis
B. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	Option profiles, financial and transformation assessments
C. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services to citizens	Transformation assessment and financial assessment on disaggregation
D. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views	Engagement and democracy & local identity assessments
E. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	Devolution assessment
F. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	Democracy & local identity assessment

Financial assessment

This incorporated analysis by KCC's Finance division and externally commissioned modelling from Newton and PwC. It considered council tax yield and the distribution of spend on key KCC services in the potential new unitaries, council tax harmonisation and levels of debt and reserves. The assessment also considered the findings of the County Councils Network (CCN)/Newton report on the disaggregation impacts on people-based services. Initial financial modelling from PwC provided overall additional operational costs and benefits and initial transition costs arising from new unitary scenarios.

Engagement assessment

This assessment pulled together findings from relevant consultations in Kent including annual Budget consultations and consultations on service changes, as well as national evidence, to provide a 'proxy' engagement position to support the internal options appraisal as far as possible. A direct public engagement exercise was then undertaken later in the process as part of developing the business case to gather feedback from residents and key stakeholders (a summary of the findings is provided in section 6 of this Strategic Business Case).

Democracy & local identity assessment

This assessment provided evidence for criteria around the importance of local identity, culture and heritage in developing proposals for new unitary geographies. It considered travel to work, education and hospital flows to identify the natural travel patterns of Kent and Medway residents. It also considered the potential ratios of councillors to residents in the unitaries for the options included compared to Boundary Commission guidance, as well as opportunities for community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

Transformation assessment

This assessment considered the opportunities and disbenefits that each option could have in realising the potential for transformation, whilst also looking at the potential for wider public sector reform with partners.

Devolution policy assessment

This assessment considered the extent to which each option would support devolution and how effectively the unitary councils in each option could operate with a Mayoral Strategic Authority at a later time.

Additional pieces of analysis

In order to ensure evidence was available to cover all parts of the Government criteria, some additional evidence and analysis was collated. Options profiles with population and demographic information were developed to provide an overview of the proposed unitary areas in each option and some of the disparities between them. Analysis on housing growth was conducted based on previous housing delivery and predicted growth to identify any challenges in delivering housing that the unitaries considered might face.

Each individual assessment report has been appended to this business case so that they can be viewed in their entirety. Similarly, all data sources have been provided as appendices for transparency and ease of reference.

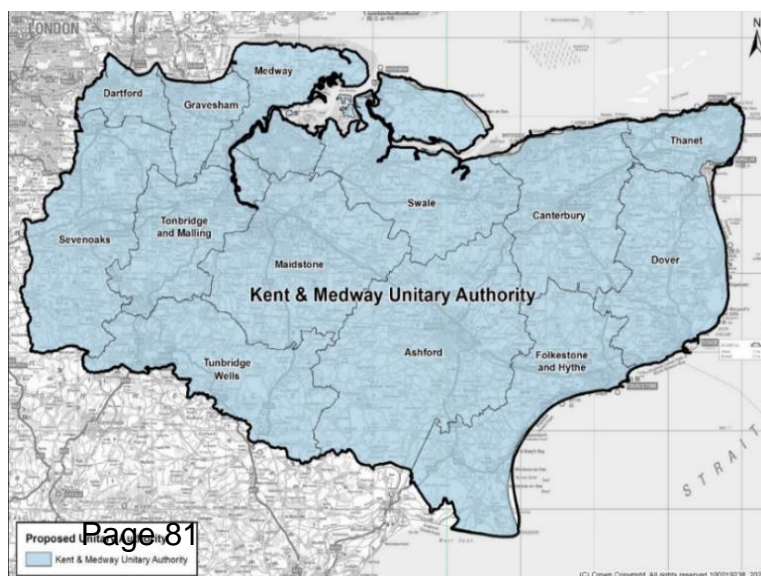
Scoring and rationale

The assessment reports outlined above were used to score each option against the Government's criteria, along with a set of sub-criteria based on Government's description. Each criterion was judged equally as the Government has been clear weighting will not be applied when considering LGR proposals. Following completion of the options appraisal, a critical friend review was provided by officers who had not been involved in developing the evidence base or options appraisal, to ensure that the process was as robust, balanced and logical as possible based on the evidence available.

The outcome of the initial options appraisal is presented below. Please note the information has been significantly summarised and a more detailed explanation can be found in the rationale document (Appendix X), which sets out the reasons why each option scored the way it did, drawing on the relevant evidence from the evidence base.

Option 1b - single unitary covering Kent and Medway

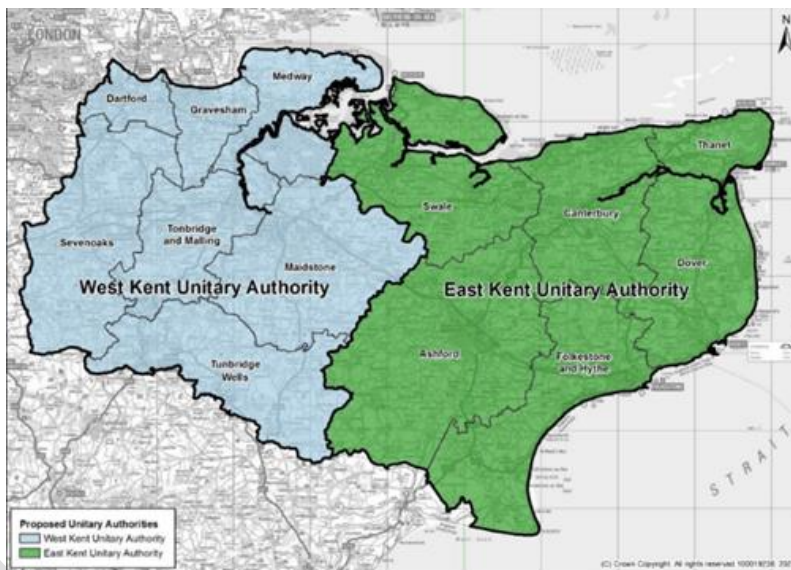
- A single unitary authority for Kent and Medway offers the most financially viable model - delivering the highest net recurring benefit (£49.4m/year), lowest transition costs (£23.2m), and fastest payback (under one year), while avoiding disaggregation costs and risks.



- This model provides the scale and resources needed to deliver high-quality public services, support invest-to-save initiatives, and manage legacy debt strategically across the county.
- Despite its strengths, due to size the model may struggle to reflect local identities or meet specific community needs, exceeds recommended councillor-to-electors ratios, and cannot support devolution arrangements due to lack of neighbouring partners.

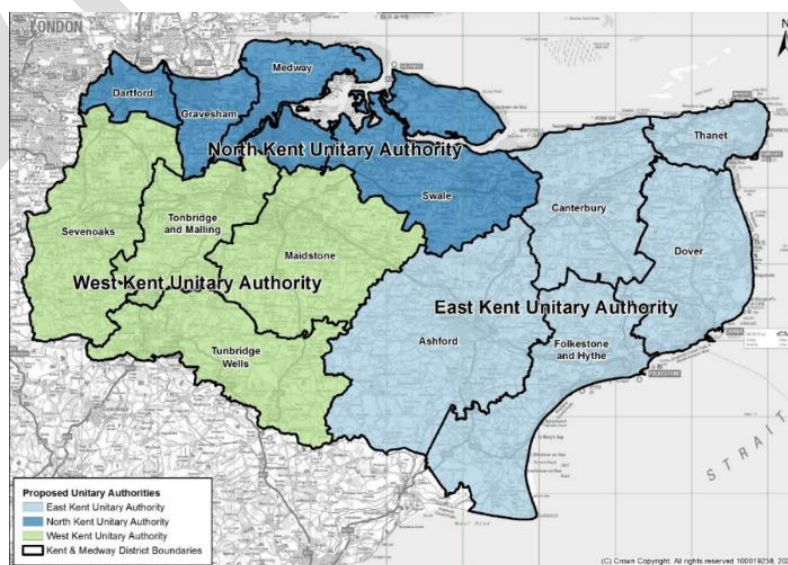
Option 2a – two unitaries (East and West Kent)

- This is the most financially viable multi-unitary option, offering a net recurring benefit of £16.5m, transition costs of £25.8m, and a payback period of 3.8 years, with the most balanced debt distribution.
- This model combines the capacity for large-scale transformation with the ability to tailor services locally, though East Kent would bear disproportionate responsibilities for border infrastructure, UASC, and coastal regeneration.
- Population disparity (23%) and higher per-resident spend in East Kent raises concerns about fairness, while the model risks creating a West vs East dynamic and may reinforce perceptions of imbalance between affluent and deprived areas.



Option 3a – three unitaries (North, East and West Kent)

- Modelling estimates initial transition costs of £42.6m, an annual net recurring benefit of £9.3m and a relatively lengthy payback period of 8.2 years. The estimated total additional costs for people-based services following disaggregation is £14.9m.
- This option best meets Government population guidelines, with the most evenly split authorities

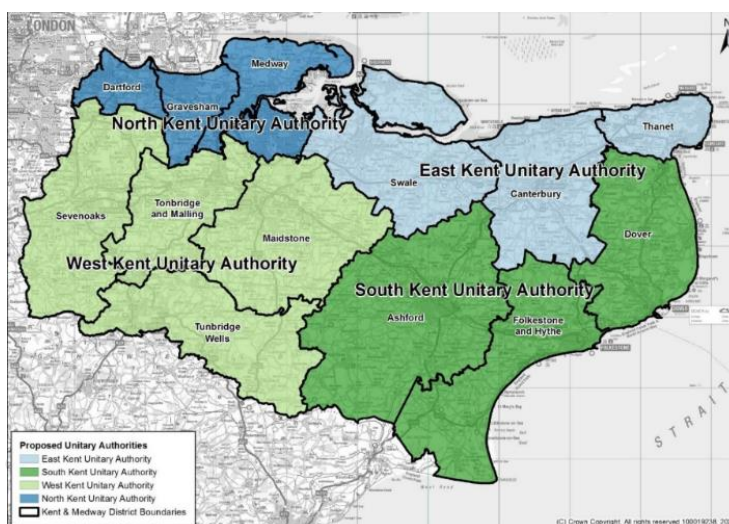


(20% disparity), and supports devolution through well-aligned functional economic areas suitable for a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

- The proposed boundaries reflect local identities and existing service patterns, but East Kent would inherit higher adult social care legacy costs and debt levels, raising concerns about equitable resource distribution.

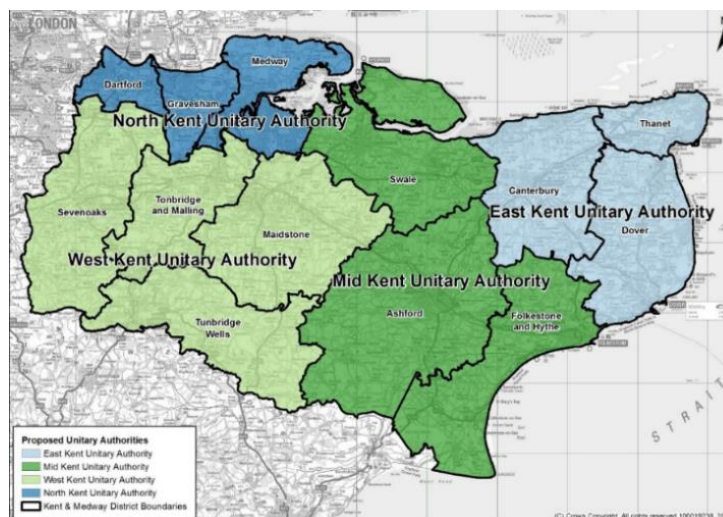
Option 4a – four unitaries (North, East, South and West Kent)

- The model incurs the highest transition costs (£54.7m) and results in a recurring net annual **loss** of £5.4m, with no payback period – i.e. the initial costs would never be paid back. Disaggregation adds £22.7m in costs for people-based services, concentrating high statutory spend in South and East Kent.
- All four proposed unitaries fall within the Government's 300k–800k population range, but show a 34% disparity between the smallest (South Kent) and largest (West Kent). This contributes to the model having the least equitable council tax distribution, with South Kent receiving £173m less than West Kent.
- This option carries the greatest risk of service disruption, diluted expertise, and market destabilisation. While it offers increased local responsiveness, it also separates key infrastructure (e.g. Manston Arrivals Centre from other border infrastructure) and introduces governance complexity.



Option 4b – four unitaries (North, East, Mid and West Kent)

- Like other four-unitary models, 4b offers no net financial benefit, incurs high transition costs, and lacks a payback period. This option creates a 27% population gap between the largest (West Kent) and smallest (South Kent) unitaries, which results in unequal debt distribution.
- Disaggregating services adds £20.8m in costs for people-based services. Although

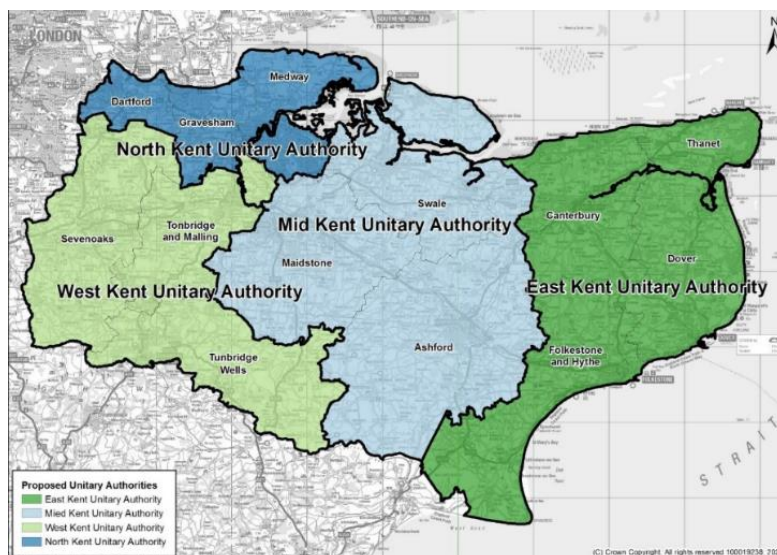


unlike option 4a, separating high-cost areas (e.g. Folkestone & Hythe from Dover and Thanet from Swale) helps spread the highest cost areas for adult and children's social care.

- The model misaligns with existing service boundaries and local identities, separates key border infrastructure, and risks inhibiting public service reform. While it improves councillor ratios and local responsiveness, it introduces complexity and fragmentation.

Option 4c – four unitaries (North, East, Mid and West Kent)

- Like the other four-unitary models, this option offers no net benefit, incurs high transition costs, and has no payback period. Disaggregation adds an estimated £19m in additional costs for people-based services.
- This option creates a 29% population gap between the smallest (West Kent) and largest (East Kent) unitaries—the second highest among all options.



It also results in the greatest disparity of debt and creates the most affluent version of a West Kent unitary while concentrating deprivation and high social care spend in East Kent, with a £928 vs £670 per-resident spend disparity.

- The model misaligns with existing service boundaries and local identities, separates key border infrastructure, and risks inhibiting public service reform. However, it supports increased local responsiveness and aligns well with recommended councillor-to-resident ratios.

Outcome of internal options appraisal – development of a new model

The findings of the initial options appraisal were presented to elected Members for consideration. It was clear that a single unitary option was the most viable for Kent and Medway in terms of financial sustainability, debt management, demand management and economies of scale compared to all other model options. Crucially, it was also the only model that mitigated the substantial risks and costs associated with disaggregation. A *detailed assessment of implications for Kent and Medway when considered alongside the county's unique position and associated challenges can be found in section 8 'The geographic and spatial reality of Kent'.*

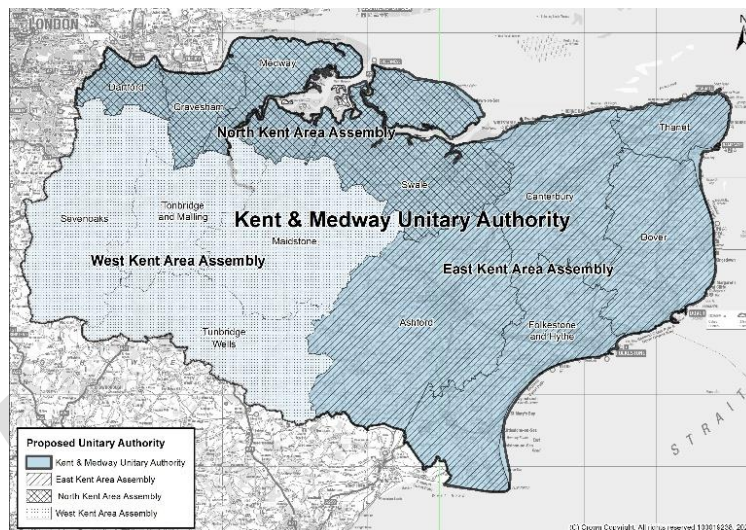
However, it was also accepted that the model presented limitations around enabling community engagement and ability to reflect local identity (which were particular strengths of the three-unitary option). In recognition of this, a new model was proposed: **the creation of a single unitary for Kent and Medway, with three Area Assemblies in North, East and West Kent.**

Subsequent options appraisal for a 'hybrid' single unitary (August 2025)

To assess the viability of this new proposed option, KCC conducted a separate options appraisal using the same methodology and assumptions that were applied to the other options in the initial options appraisal. As with the other options considered and as set out by government, the six criteria were weighted equally. The outcome of this initial assessment is summarised below.

Option 1a - single unitary covering Kent and Medway with three Area Assemblies

- Like option 1b, this model is also likely to offer lower transition costs, higher net benefits, and a shorter payback period than the multi-unitary options. It also avoids £16.2m in annual disaggregation costs by keeping social care and SEND services countywide, and spreads legacy debt evenly across Kent and Medway.
- A single unitary paired with Area Assemblies balances strategic capacity with local responsiveness. Assemblies in North, East, and West Kent reflect travel, education, and healthcare patterns, supporting local identity without fragmenting services or infrastructure.
- Despite its strengths, this model does not support devolution arrangements due to its single-authority footprint and could require significantly more elected Members than recommended by the LGBCE.



Joint Options Appraisal (September 2025)

Ten potential options were raised at the start of the joint options appraisal process, but Kent Council Leaders jointly agreed to rule out three options, leaving seven remaining in scope for the options appraisal:

- Option 1a – single unitary covering Kent and Medway with three Area Assemblies in North, East and West Kent
- Option 3a: three unitaries in North, East and West Kent
- Option 4a: four unitaries in North, East, South and West Kent
- Option 4b: four unitaries in North, East, Mid and West Kent (*with Folkestone and Hythe in Mid Kent)
- Option 4c: four unitaries in North, East, Mid and West Kent (*with Maidstone in Mid Kent)
- Option 4d: four unitaries in North, East, Mid and West Kent (with boundary changes)
- Option 5a – five unitaries in North, East, Mid, South and West Kent (with boundary changes)

Approach

Working with council partners, KPMG assessed each proposed option against the government's criteria, using a scoring matrix of High, Medium and Low. With direct reference to the government criteria and linked guidance, 14 evaluation criteria were defined for options to be assessed against. For each evaluation criteria, a series of metrics were identified, with a statement of "what good looks like" agreed as well as a definition of 'High', 'Medium' and 'Low'. All options were then scored against all metrics with average results for each criterion presented in an overall dashboard (see Appendix X).

Scoring and rationale

Although different methodologies were used for scoring, the overall findings of both options appraisals (KCC's and the joint one) were broadly similar. To avoid duplication, the remainder of this section does not individually assess how each option scored in the joint options appraisal; rather, it summarises where the two options appraisals agree, and where they differ.

Similarities:

- The joint options appraisal noted that an advantage of option 1a is that it 'retains the economic area of Kent and maximises the existing tax base for allocation across Area Assemblies'.
- It identified, as KCC's did, that the 'biggest driver of additional transition complexity and cost are the number of unitary authorities being proposed'. It also concluded that option 1a had the most potential to 'deliver efficiencies through larger economies of scale'.
- Option 1a scored highly in the joint options appraisal for delivering sustainable public services, as a single unitary could 'potentially avoid service fragmentation entirely by maintaining a single top-tier authority. It ensures continuity of service delivery, simplifies governance, and reduces transition risk'.
- The joint appraisal acknowledged, as KCC's did, that option 1a 'minimises ongoing costs of disaggregation through a single approach to people services' (Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and SEND). It also anticipated 'lower implementation costs due to low levels of disaggregation'.
- Similar to the KCC's conclusion, the joint appraisal acknowledged that option 1a helps manage legacy debt by pooling 'reserves and assets in a single unitary to be allocated across Kent and Medway'.
- It similarly recognised that option 1a 'aligns with existing NHS Kent and Medway ICB boundaries and the footprint of many partners, including Kent Police', potentially aiding public service reform.
- The joint appraisal identified, as KCC's did, significant challenges for option 1a around 'addressing local concerns with either a very low member: elector ratio or a very large number of members'.
- Regarding devolution, the joint appraisal agreed with KCC's assessment that option 1a provides only 'one constituent member which would therefore require an exception from Government to secure a devolution deal'.

Differences:

- The joint options appraisal scored local identity lower than KCC's options appraisal did because of the 'size and scale of the single unitary', although it did acknowledge that the

structure does 'represent the historic boundaries of Kent'. It argued that 'whilst Area Assemblies might help retain some place-based connection, concerns were raised about dilution of local voices'.

- Regarding community engagement, the joint appraisal scored option 1a lower than KCC did, stating it was 'to be determined how Area Assemblies would engage with and empower communities'. It argued that with a large population, there would be a 'risk that community engagement and empowerment would be lost through operating too remotely from residents and partners'.

However, KCC's administration concluded that these issues could be sufficiently managed through design of the model option, especially given the enhanced capacity that the single unitary would have to invest in community engagement.

The joint appraisal also considered two further options that KCC did not model in the internal options appraisal – options 4d and 5a. Both of these options introduce boundary changes, extremely complex in the case of 4d, which makes it very difficult to provide an accurate data-based assessment of the viability of these two options. It is important that any future model for local government in Kent and Medway is respectful of established natural communities and existing service delivery arrangements – both options 4d and 5a cut across these boundaries. Options 4d and 5a are also not compatible with the KCC administration's position that financial sustainability is paramount, with modelling undertaken by KPMG showing that both options would carry the same inherent financial risks as the other four unitary options, but with added costs for boundary changes. Option 5a would also incur additional disaggregation costs by creating an extra unitary.

Critically, nothing material within the joint options appraisal contradicted KCC's initial assessment or changed the view of KCC that a single unitary is the right solution for Kent and Medway.

5. Engagement with Kent and Medway residents and stakeholders

In the final Strategic Business Case, the headline findings from KCC's public survey on LGR will be included here (with the full report as an appendix).

Stakeholder Engagement

As part of the development of this business case, engagement activity has been undertaken with over 160 key stakeholders in Kent and Medway. This includes representatives from health, education, police, and fire services, the voluntary sector, local businesses and Kent and Medway MPs. The purpose of this engagement has been to gather initial feedback on KCC's preferred option for LGR in the limited time available at this stage, so this can be included in the Strategic Business Case to Government.

This interim summary outlines the responses received to date, highlighting initial themes and observations. It will be updated as further contributions are received to ensure a complete and accurate reflection of stakeholder feedback.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback

Stakeholders felt there could be opportunities for Kent and Medway of a single unitary authority along the following themes:

Identity and geography of Kent

Some respondents noted that Kent's historic identity and geography could be undermined without county-wide administration and leadership. It was the view of some that local government requires a clear lead figure, such as a Council Leader or Mayor, to represent and lead on county-level issues. A number of respondents also expressed a strong attachment to place that they felt a single-unitary model honoured.

Strategic planning

It was suggested that certain services, such as planning and transport/highways, would benefit from being managed at a county-wide level. Some respondents felt that a single unitary authority could enable stronger alignment across housing, transport, health, social care, education, and utilities, supporting an "infrastructure-first" approach.

Reducing duplication and competition

Several respondents felt that the current two-tier system leads to unnecessary duplication of governance, bureaucracy and competition between statutory bodies for centralised funding, which a single unitary model could help to eliminate.

Clarity for residents

Some respondents believed that a single unitary authority would provide greater clarity for residents regarding service responsibilities. It was suggested that simplifying local government structures could improve outcomes, accountability, and integration for communities.

Efficiencies and cost savings

It was the view of some that dividing the county into multiple authorities could exacerbate

economic disparities, particularly in the east. A single unitary model was seen as more equitable and capable of delivering cost savings through reduced duplication. Some respondents also identified advantages in merging smaller authorities to enhance purchasing power and improve value for money in procurement and commercial activity.

Governance

Some respondents felt that a single unitary authority would enable councillors to make more strategic decisions with a county-wide perspective, reducing the influence of narrow or localised agendas and focusing more on broader benefits.

Attracting talent

It was suggested that a single unitary authority could be better positioned to attract high-calibre applicants and create more appealing career opportunities. Some respondents believed this model could support top-level recruitment and help secure scarce expertise to drive meaningful change.

Some stakeholders expressed reservations about specific elements of the proposed single unitary model. These concerns broadly fell into the following areas:

Impacts on local identity and community engagement

Some respondents were concerned about potential risks to local accountability and a reduction in local knowledge, particularly in coastal and rural areas. It was the view of some that a single unitary authority could be less democratic and less representative of Kent's diverse communities, placing neighbourhoods further from decision-making processes. For this reason, some stakeholders indicated a preference for smaller unitary authorities that are closer to local issues. It was suggested that any single unitary model must include a robust approach to community engagement to mitigate this perceived distance.

Potential disruption and delays to services and decision-making during transition

Some respondents noted the risk of disruption to existing services during the transition period. It was felt that certain services, such as housing and regeneration, could be deprioritised within broader corporate restructuring. There were also concerns that, in other areas, LGR has been used to defer difficult decisions to newly formed authorities, resulting in substantial delays.

The following specific elements of the process, proposal or service delivery were covered in a number of stakeholder responses received so far:

Area Assemblies

Stakeholder views on the Area Assembly model were mixed. Some respondents saw potential for Assemblies to mitigate risks to local accountability and knowledge within a single unitary structure, particularly if they are well-resourced, clearly empowered, and build on existing partnerships. Others felt more clarity was needed on how they would work, and cautioned that without a robust structure, Assemblies risk becoming ineffective or duplicative. Some suggested that strengthening Town and Parish Councils may offer a more locally grounded alternative.

Coterminosity of services

Stakeholder views on coterminosity were mixed. Some respondents supported the single unitary model, noting alignment with other organisations operating across Kent and Medway and welcoming the potential for streamlined partnership working. Others expressed concern that the model may not reflect existing organisational structures within their services.

Housing and infrastructure

Some respondents identified a strong case for a county-wide strategic approach to housing and infrastructure under a single unitary authority. It was felt that services such as planning require consistent policy and coordination at scale, and that a single authority could unlock opportunities for increased council housebuilding, more effective use of public land, and stronger engagement with national partners. However, concerns were raised about potential disruption to local delivery capacity during the transition, particularly at a critical time for housing supply.

Many stakeholders expressed interest in being involved in the implementation of the new unitary arrangements which is welcomed – working with stakeholders will be a key principle of our approach to a successful transition.

PART TWO – THE CASE FOR A SINGLE UNITARY

6. Financial assessment

Financial assessment summary

Local authorities in the Kent and Medway area face a number of significant financial challenges, in particular the rising demand, cost and complexity of providing crucial adult social care services to a growing and ageing population with pressures on social care providers, high cost of children's social care placements, and the rapidly increasing cost of SEND services. These challenges are in the context of an uneven distribution of demand for services and deprivation across the Kent and Medway area, with higher levels of need in Northern and Eastern areas compared to Western areas. There are also significant disparities in the distribution of service providers with higher concentration of provision in some areas compared to others. Currently KCC's scale and county-wide responsibilities mean that these challenges can be mitigated, and inequalities are lessened through the distribution of spend and resource.

A single unitary authority has lower transition costs and delivers greater savings

With LGR, there will be transition costs to set up new councils and additional costs to disaggregate county-wide services in multi-unitary models, as well as the ongoing annual costs to run these services in their new geographic areas. As is set out below, the financial modelling conducted by KPMG clearly indicates that multi-unitary models result in higher LGR transition costs and deliver lower annual savings, compared to a single unitary authority for the Kent and Medway area.

- In a single unitary authority there will be **no disaggregation costs for people-based services.**
- There will be significant **recurring annual savings of £69m.**
- A single unitary authority will **avoid substantial implementation costs** and will achieve **good economies of scale.**
- The estimated '**payback period**' following transition is **3.3 years.**
- After 10 years, the single unitary model is forecast to achieve **savings of £457.4m.**

The following table provides comparison of key financial information across the options being considered for Kent and Medway.

LGR option	Implementation costs (one off) (£m)	Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m)	1a enhancement / Disaggregation costs (£m)*	Recurring annual savings (£m)**	Estimated payback period (years)	10-year cumulative impact of transformation (£m)
1a	(99.4)	75.0	(6.0)	69.0	3.3	457.4
3a	(127.7)	69.4	(19.7) - (29.2)	49.7 - 40.2	5.4 - 6.7	132.1 – 226.5
4b	(130.9)	67.5	(32.9) - (48.6)	34.6 - 18.9	7.8 - 14.3	(80.6) – 76.7
4d	(135.9)	67.5	(32.9) - (48.6)	34.6 - 18.9	7.9 - 14.5	(85.6) – 71.7
5a	(139.1)	65.7	(46.0) - (68.1)	19.7 - (2.4)	14.0 – no payback	(298.1) – (77.9)

**The range demonstrates the sensitivity of changing just one of the cost assumptions in the model between 0% and 1% for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and*

children's social care. The range is not required for 1a as there is no disaggregation of social care.

*** Recurring savings = gross reorganisation savings minus disaggregation costs*

A single unitary authority is financially sustainable and fairest for the entire county

As well as having higher transition costs and lower savings potential, multi-unitary models would lead to significant financial disparities between councils. New local authorities in Eastern and Northern areas could inherit unsustainable financial challenges due to a combination of high levels of need, limited revenue raising potential and large debts.

- In a single unitary authority, there would be a **single rate of council tax** for the entire area. Whereas, in a multi-unitary model, some residents would have to pay more.
- In a single unitary authority, **council tax would be raised from across the entire area** and distributed where needed. Whereas in multi-unitary models the West Kent unitary authority would have much greater revenue raising potential compared to unitary authorities in Northern and Eastern areas.
- **The level of debt currently held by councils in Kent and Medway is unequal**, with low levels of debt in Western areas and higher levels in Northern and Eastern areas. In any of the multi-unitary options, these debts could be concentrated in smaller councils which could prove very challenging for them to service.
- **The levels of reserves currently held by councils are also unequal**, with higher levels of reserves in Western areas. Low levels of reserves could impact the ability of new unitary authorities to pay the implementation costs of LGR and to service inherited debts.
- **The costs of people-based services are unevenly distributed, with particularly high costs for ASC and CSC in Northern and Eastern areas.** In a multi unitary model these costs would be concentrated in smaller councils which could prove unsustainable.
- As well as being unevenly distributed, **the overall costs for people-based services would be higher in a multi-unitary model.** Modelling by Newton estimated that annual costs for people-based services in a single unitary model would be £16.2m lower than the baseline, whereas the costs in a four unitary model would be £20.8 higher, **a difference of £37m.**

A single unitary authority is viable, efficient and fair - it is the responsible choice

A single unitary authority is the most financially resilient option and provides the greatest value for money for the residents of Kent and Medway. While there will still be spending challenges, a single unitary authority will ensure that no area in Kent and Medway is at a financial disadvantage or receives lower quality services, compared to other areas following reorganisation.

- It is **the most efficient** as it avoids duplication of roles and services and ensures a consistent standard of delivery across the whole area.
- Even allowing for enhanced investment in community engagement and the proposed Area Assembly model (explained further in Part three of this Strategic Business Case), the running costs are lower than in any of the multi-unitary options. The single

unitary model therefore **strikes a balance between being reflective and responsive to local communities and strengthening financial resilience.**

- A single unitary authority benefits from being able to **raise revenue from across the entire area** and is **the fairest for council taxpayers** as there will be a single rate of council tax.
- **Inherited debt and the ability to service the debt will be distributed across the entire area rather than concentrated in smaller councils.**
- Demand for people-based services will be met by revenue and resources drawn from the entire area, ensuring that **no part of the county faces unsustainable spending pressure to deliver vital services.**

Approach

As part of KCC's commitment to joint working with the other 13 councils in the area, KCC has contributed to the development of a shared evidence base, including for the financial sustainability analysis. The evidence presented in the 'Financial benefits of unitarisation' section is from this work carried out by KPMG and is part of the shared evidence base, meaning that it has been carried out on a like-for-like basis and is directly comparable to other business cases.

Collaborative working on finance across Kent councils

All fourteen S151 Officers are members of the long-standing Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG) and for LGR have been responsible for the following key activities:

- Developing working relationships and shared understanding of finances, which will be a key enabler of successful LGR
- Informing a shared financial baseline
- Reviewing and collectively updating assumptions behind a base case model for inclusion in proposals to Government.

Approach to modelling the financial impact of LGR

Appendix X provides more detailed description of assumptions, approach and results of the financial modelling.

All finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have collaboratively reviewed and informed the financial modelling to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to Government.

The financial model aims to:

- Quantify the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options.
- Compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings, costs, and payback.

The financial model estimates savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs calculated with reference to a series of benchmarked LGR business cases, the characteristics of the options being put forward and the characteristics of local government in Kent.

Whilst being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all Kent Finance officers agree that LGR does not in itself provide the solution to the scale of the financial challenge faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG) have collectively agreed on the following position on the analysis carried out:

- LGR, whilst generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.
- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be funded.
- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new authorities may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new authorities.

This financial case for the single unitary model includes further analysis by Newton and by KCC Finance Officers relating to disaggregation of people-based services. It also includes analysis by KCC Finance Officers on council tax harmonisation, debt, reserves and value of investments based on publicly available data. This is in the section 'Other financial considerations'.

Financial benefits and costs of unitarisation

KPMG's financial model is made up of three calculators –

- Implementation costs – estimates the one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model
- Disaggregation costs – estimates the additional recurring expenditure that results from moving to a new unitary model
- Reorganisation savings – estimates the annual high-level savings potential from efficiencies that can be unlocked through reorganisation (e.g. workforce, governance, systems etc.)

The following table provides comparison of key financial information across the options being considered for Kent and Medway.

LGR option	Implementation costs (one off) (£m)	Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m)	1a enhancement / Disaggregation costs (£m)*	Recurring annual savings (£m)**	Estimated payback period (years)	10-year cumulative impact of transformation (£m)
1a	(99.4)	75.0	(6.0)	69.0	3.3	457.4
3a	(127.7)	69.4	(19.7) - (29.2)	49.7 - 40.2	5.4 - 6.7	132.1 – 226.5
4b	(130.9)	67.5	(32.9) - (48.6)	34.6 - 18.9	7.8 - 14.3	(80.6) – 76.7
4d	(135.9)	67.5	(32.9) - (48.6)	34.6 - 18.9	7.9 - 14.5	(85.6) – 71.7
5a	(139.1)	65.7	(46.0) - (68.1)	19.7 - (2.4)	14.0 – no payback	(298.1) – (77.9)

**The range demonstrates the sensitivity of changing just one of the cost assumptions in the model between 0% and 1% for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care. The range is not required for 1a as there is no disaggregation of social care.*

*** Recurring savings = gross reorganisation savings minus disaggregation costs*

Implementation costs

The estimated one-off implementation costs for transitioning to the single unitary model are **£99.4m**. This is substantially lower than the implementation costs for any of the multi-unitary models, which have been estimated between **£127.7m** for the three unitary model and **£139.1m** for the five unitary model. The costs associated with implementing the single unitary model are broken down in the table below.

One off implementation costs for the single unitary model

Category	Description	Mid Case (£000)
Workforce - Exit	Compensation paid to employees because of restructuring/redundancies, including redundancy payments, pension strain, TUPE, salary harmonisation, and other contract termination fees.	41,194
Workforce - Development	Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities.	4,478
Transition - Team	Implementation programme team including Legal, Contract Negotiation, Project and Programme Management, and specialist support.	12,873
Transition - Culture and Communications	Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. This should inform the public, stakeholders, and employees of proposed changes and address concerns.	3,582
Transition - Processes	Work required to harmonise processes and facilitate effective service transition. This includes specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition, and new policies and procedures.	8,731
Consolidation - Systems	Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration, commonality of cyber security, and training for new systems.	6,269
Consolidation - Estates and Facilities	Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases.	5,731

Contingency	Additional 20% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates.	16,572
Total		£99,429

The single unitary model avoids some of the major costs associated with implementation that would occur in a multi-unitary model. This includes avoiding costs associating with disaggregating current KCC systems compared to the other models and an assumed £3m implementation cost per additional unitary authority.

Implementation costs in the single unitary model are phased over a shorter period of time compared to the multi-unitary models, with most costs incurred within three years, as set out in the table below. This is because the transition process will be materially different in that it will be a centralisation programme rather than a disaggregation programme. This means that payback will be achieved sooner, resulting in greater savings at the 10-year mark.

Implementation costs phasing for single unitary model

Category	Shadow year – 27/28	Year 1 – 28/29	Year 2 – 29/30	Year 3 – 30/31	Year 4 – 31/32
Workforce - Exit	5%	15%	40%	40%	
Workforce - Development	10%	50%	40%		
Transition - Team	25%	40%	30%	5%	
Transition - Culture and Communications	20%	50%	30%		
Transition - Processes	5%	25%	40%	30%	
Consolidation - Systems	5%	25%	40%	30%	
Consolidation - Estates and Facilities		5%	25%	30%	
Contingency	10%	30%	30%	30%	

1a enhancement / Disaggregation costs

In the single unitary model, there is no disaggregation of people-based services. In comparison to the multi-unitary models this produces a major recurring saving. The estimated recurring costs of **£6.0m** in the single unitary model relate to the costs to run the three Area Assemblies, and the place-based services which they will have responsibility for, and the enhance community engagement function as set out in the table below. These costs are not phased as they are assumed to be incurred from day 1.

The costs for the Area Assemblies were estimated using the jointly agreed methodology for disaggregation which was jointly agreed to by the 14 councils, with data provided by KCC. The same modelling assumptions and cost categories were used as the other LGR options, including management, IT, and commissioned spend.

While these are not strictly disaggregation costs as they will still be run by a single unitary authority, they are an extra recurring cost which will be incurred due to the structures of the single unitary authority. They have therefore been included alongside the disaggregation calculation for comparison and transparency.

Enhancement costs for the single unitary model

Category	Description	Mid Case (£000)
Cost of community navigators	As part of the additional community engagement team it is expected there will be 27 additional community navigators. These are expected to be KCC grade 10 posts.	1,100
Cost of supervisors	Also, as part of the additional community engagement team, there will also be three additional supervisors at KCC grade 12.	164
Enhanced contact centre	To support the 1 unitary, the existing contact centre will be enhanced. This is currently a contracted and it is assumed that the scope of the contract will be extended.	1,000
Enhanced consultation team	Also to support the 1 unitary, the consultation team will also be enhanced by adding 3 additional FTE to the existing team of 4.	221
Area Assemblies	Additional costs associated with Area Assemblies – relating to highways maintenance, economic development, family hubs, community services, environmental management and community safety.	3,509
Total		6,024

As well as ensuring the continuity of critical services, maintaining people-based services at the county-wide level has clear financial benefits. This will guarantee the financial sustainability of these services, particularly in light of geographic disparities in demand for services (as is detailed under 'Other financial considerations').

While there is an additional cost to run the Area Assemblies and place-based services in our model, as well as the enhanced community engagement function, these costs are immaterial in comparison to the substantial disaggregation costs that the multi-unitary models will incur. The single unitary model therefore strikes a balance between being reflective and responsive to local communities and strengthening financial resilience.

Reorganisation savings

The estimated recurrent savings that would be achieved for the single unitary model is **£75.0m**. These savings are higher than would be achieved in any of the multi-unitary models. This is because a single unitary would achieve maximum economies of scale, whereas with each additional unitary authority the potential savings are eroded. A detailed breakdown of the savings for the single unitary model is included in the table below.

Reorganisation savings for the single unitary model

Category	Description	Mid Case (£000)
Optimising Leadership	Reviewing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication and enhance operational efficiency, by merging similar responsibilities into fewer and more impactful positions.	10,838
Right Sizing the Organisation	Determining the right size of the organisation, proportionate to the services that are being delivered, offset by the costs of new technology and upskilling individuals. Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation.	20,843

Consolidating Corporate Services	Consolidating back-office functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT) to streamline operations, enhance efficiencies and unlock savings.	8,337
Procurement & 3rd Party Spend	Centralising procurement to determine resultant costs/savings through relative purchasing power and renegotiating terms with suppliers. Where appropriate, consolidating similar contracts for service delivery, presents an opportunity to renegotiate terms and achieve economies of scale with suppliers.	12,506
Service Contract Consolidation	Understanding current and joint service arrangements between Councils, and what savings (or costs) may be incurred on consolidation. Determining the optimum sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced. This will need to consider both financial and operational efficiency and will consider existing arrangements with third parties.	10,421
Proportionate Democratic Services	Reviewing the costs of democratic services (elections, committee support, etc.) to be proportionate to the new authority. Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (e.g. committees, elections).	2,918
Improved Digital & IT Systems	Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes, can lead to significant time and cost savings. Unified platforms and systems rationalisation reduce licensing, support, and admin overheads.	5,002
Asset & Property Optimisation	Reviewing property portfolio to ensure alignment with the council's overall objectives and community needs.	7,503
Customer Engagement	Enhancing customer contact facilities, determining the needs of citizens in the new authority and developing a proportionate customer contact centre, where appropriate including self-service through digital channels, to improve customer engagement, satisfaction and drive operational efficiencies and cost savings.	2,501
Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes	Exploring consolidation of fleets and any route efficiencies, to reduce costs and minimise environmental impact. Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs.	2,501
Contingency	10% contingency included to allow prudence in estimates	-8,337
Total		75,035

As with implementation costs, the phasing of these savings are delivered over a shorter period than in the multi-unitary models, mostly within three years as set out below, meaning that the full benefit of reorganisation will be realised sooner.

Reorganisation savings phasing for the single unitary model

Category	Year 1 – 28/29	Year 2 – 29/30	Year 3 – 30/31	Year 4 – 31/32	Year 5 – 32/33
Optimising Leadership	10%	40%	40%	10%	
Right Sizing the Organisation	10%	40%	40%	10%	
Consolidating Corporate Services	10%	40%	40%	10%	
Procurement & 3rd Party Spend	10%	20%	30%	20%	20%

Service Contract Consolidation	10%	20%	30%	20%	20%
Proportionate Democratic Services	80%	20%			
Improved Digital & IT Systems	5%	30%	30%	30%	5%
Asset & Property Optimisation	10%	15%	25%	25%	25%
Customer Engagement	20%	40%	40%		
Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes		20%	45%	35%	
Contingency	15%	30%	30%	20%	5%

Net recurring annual saving, payback period and 10-year cumulative impact

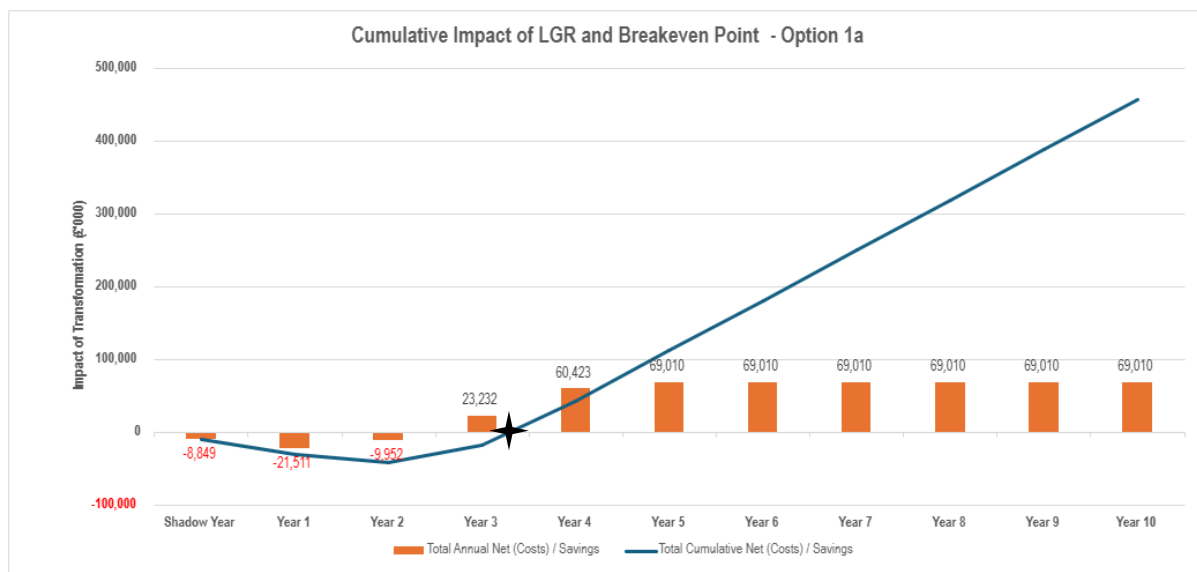
The net recurring saving, once all implementation costs and savings have been phased in, for the single unitary model is **£69m per year**. This is a greater recurrent saving than would be made in any of the multi-unitary models with estimates ranging from £49.7m saving in option 3a to a potential additional cost of £2.4m in option 5a.

In the single unitary authority, the estimated payback period, allowing for phased costs and savings, is **3.3 years**. This is far quicker than any of the multi-unitary options, in particular options 4b and 4d which could take over 14 years to payback, and option 5a which may never achieve payback.

For option 1a, the 10-year cumulative impact of transformation is a saving of **£457.4m** which is more than double the highest estimated saving for the multi-unitary options even at the higher end of the range (option 3a). The 1a impact is broken down over the 10-year period in the table and graph below.

10 year impact for the single unitary model

(£000s)	Shadow 27/28	Yr 1 28/29	Yr 2 29/30	Yr 3 30/31	Yr 4 31/32	Yr 5 32/33	Yr 6 33/34	Yr 7 34/35	Yr 8 35/36	Yr 9 36/37	Yr 10 37/38
Implementation costs	-8,849	-24,366	-35,609	-28,312	-2,293	0	0	0	0	0	0
1a enhancement costs	0	-6,024	-6,024	-6,024	-6,024	-6,024	-6,024	-6,024	-6,024	-6,024	-6,024
Reorganisation savings	0	8,879	31,681	57,568	68,740	75,035	75,035	75,035	75,035	75,035	75,035
Annual net savings	-8,849	-21,511	-9,952	23,232	60,423	69,010	69,010	69,010	69,010	69,010	69,010
							Cumulative impact of transformation after 10 years				£457,405



The difference in cumulative benefit between a single unitary and the multi-unitary options on Band D council tax over a ten-year period is:

- 3a – between £340 and £478
- 4b – between £560 and £791
- 4d – between £567 and £799
- 5a – between £787 and £1,111

Other financial considerations

For the following analysis conducted by Newton and by KCC Finance Officers, options 4d and 5a have not been included as part of the comparison. For the Newton analysis, this is because the analysis was conducted prior to these options being proposed. For the analysis conducted internally by KCC, this is because the boundaries for these options do not align with existing district boundaries.

When calculating 'per head of population' measures, the KCC internal analysis used [mid-2023 projections of population per district](#).

Council tax harmonisation

Council tax harmonisation is the process of aligning council tax rates across different areas when multiple councils merge into a single unitary authority. Under our proposal for a single unitary authority this process would apply to all 14 councils in the Kent and Medway area, meaning that there would be a single rate of council tax covering the entire area. This is in contrast to the current situation or to any of the multi-unitary models, in which there would be multiple council tax rates across the area, with some residents paying more than others depending on where they live.

Council tax harmonisation is a legal requirement for new unitary authorities and they must set a uniform level of council tax by year 8 of their existence. The approach to council tax harmonisation will be a decision for the new unitary authority. They may choose to harmonise in year 1 or gradually, by incrementally increasing and decreasing rates in

different areas towards a uniform level. They will also need to decide the rate at which they harmonise to, whether that be to the lowest predecessor rate, or at an average point between the different predecessor rates. A gradual approach would mean smaller changes in council tax rates for residents in some local areas, but it would also mean there would be a period in which there are different rates of council tax in different areas within the single unitary authority and depending on the approach taken could lead to lower council tax yields compared to harmonising in year 1.

The table below sets out the current Band D council tax rates for the 14 councils and their taxbase for 25/26. In two-tier areas the rates are combined to give an overall amount. In the Kent and Medway area the highest Band D rate is in Folkestone & Hythe at £1,966 and the lowest is in Medway which is £1,834 – a difference of £162.

Band D Council tax rates and taxbase 2025/26

Council	25/26 Band D Charge	25/26 Combined Band D Charge	25/26 Taxbase (net band D equivalent dwellings)
Kent CC	£1,691.19	-	(587,921.91)
Medway UA	£1,834.27	-	92,100.20
Ashford	£193.58	£1,884.77	49,332.00
Canterbury	£247.05	£1,938.24	55,053.98
Dartford	£188.64	£1,879.83	41,702.34
Dover	£220.77	£1,911.96	42,119.72
Folkestone & Hythe	£304.81	£1,996.00	41,413.64
Gravesham	£237.96	£1,929.15	35,442.89
Maidstone	£301.68	£1,992.87	68,085.50
Sevenoaks	£251.01	£1,942.20	53,008.33
Swale	£206.64	£1,897.83	50,518.20
Thanet	£271.05	£1,962.24	48,260.89
Tonbridge & Malling	£245.30	£1,936.49	53,849.82
Tunbridge Wells	£211.20	£1,902.39	49,134.60
		Total	680,022.11

Source – MHCLG Council Tax Statistics (published annually)

In the single unitary model, the harmonised Band D tax rate at a weighted average level would be £1,919.86. This is lower than the weighted average Band D rates in most of the other unitary authorities in the multi-unitary models, where rates range from £1,865.37 to £1,947.49. At these rates, most households in a single unitary model would pay less council tax than if they were resident in one of the multi-unitary models. As explained above, the approach to harmonisation will be a decision for the new unitary authorities and these figures are for illustrative purposes. For the modelling set out below we have assumed that council tax would be harmonised in year 1.

Weighted average Band D council tax rates, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary	3a – three unitaries	4b – four unitaries
Kent and Medway	£1,919.86	-	-
North	-	£1,872.83	£1,865.37
East	-	£1,937.42	£1,938.59
Mid	-	-	£1,922.05
West	-	£1,947.49	£1,947.49

The table below forecasts the overall tax yields for new unitary authorities if harmonising at these levels in year 1, and for comparison also sets out the council tax yield per head of population. In the multi-unitary models, when harmonising at an average point, there is a disparity in the amount of council tax raised per resident between the West Kent unitary authority and the other authorities, with West Kent having greater revenue raising potential. This reflects the higher property values in the districts which would make up the West Kent unitary authority.

Council tax yield if set at weighted average in year 1, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary		3a – three unitaries		4b – four unitaries	
	Total council tax yield	Council tax yield per head	Total council tax yield	Council tax yield per head	Total council tax yield	Council tax yield per head
Kent and Medway	£1,305.6	£688	-	-	-	-
North	-	-	£411.6m	£613	£315.7m	£613
East	-	-	£457.6m	£685	£281.9m	£673
Mid	-	-	-	-	£271.5m	£670
West	-	-	£436.4m	£783	£436.4m	£783

Debt

Following unitarisation, in any of the multi-unitary models KCC's debt would need to be apportioned to the new unitary authorities and the debt of the other 13 councils will be inherited by the successor authorities. As a share of the total debt in the 14 councils, KCC holds just under a third (31%) of the total debt of the 14 councils. How the KCC debt is apportioned and the servicing of debt will be decisions for the new unitary authorities. This would be a complicated and likely contentious process, particularly as KCC's debt would need to be distributed across the new authorities.

As the tables below demonstrate, the level of debt across Kent and Medway is unequal, with low levels of debt in Western areas and higher levels in Northern and Eastern areas. This means that the creation of multiple unitary authorities would likely result in two authorities inheriting a potentially unsustainable level of debt from the outset of their existence.

Whereas in a single unitary authority for Kent and Medway, all of the debt of the 14 predecessor councils would be inherited by the new unitary authority meaning there would be no area-based disparity in the amount of debt. Additionally, the ability to raise revenue from across the entire area would mean the single unitary authority would likely have greater capability to service the debts in comparison to some of councils in the multi-unitary models. The figures set out in the tables below are based on published information about total borrowing as of the end of the 2024/25 financial year.

Council borrowing

	Total borrowing (£000s)	Debt per head
Kent CC	732,563	£455
Medway UA	612,129	£2,134
Ashford	260,857	£1,886

Canterbury	182,589	£1,142
Dartford	26,888	£223
Dover	102,378	£863
Folkestone & Hythe	107,562	£969
Gravesham	176,131	£1,635
Maidstone	65,000	£353
Sevenoaks	13,999	£115
Swale	13,000	£83
Thanet	37,138	£264
Tonbridge & Malling	0	£0
Tunbridge Wells	0	£0
Total	2,330,234	£1,228

Source – MHCLG Borrowing and investments live table (published quarterly)

The table below shows the levels of debt that the new unitary authorities would inherit if KCC's debt was apportioned based on population share across the 12 districts the debt of the other 13 authorities allocated to successor areas. Please note, this is for illustrative purposes only. The process for apportioning KCC's debt would be negotiated and decided upon by the new unitary authorities.

Inherited debt based on population share, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary		3a – three unitaries		4b – four unitaries	
	Total inherited (£000s)	Debt per head	Total inherited (£000s)	Debt per head	Total inherited (£000s)	Debt per head
Kent and Medway	2,330,234	£1,228	-	-	-	-
North	-	-	1,002,994	£1,494	919,072	£1,784
East	-	-	994,534	£1,488	512,710	£1,224
Mid	-	-	-	-	565,746	£1,396
West	-	-	332,706	£597	332,706	£597

Exceptional financial support

In the financial year 2025/26 Medway Council has been granted a capitalisation direction of £18.5m under the Government's Exceptional Financial Support.

Through LGR an agreement would need to be found to manage responsibility for servicing the debt and taking action to put the whole area on a firmer financial footing. This will require a proportion of total revenue and in the context of reorganisation and disaggregation of county wide services, the relative scale of the challenge becomes greater. A large single unitary authority will be in a better position to absorb the debt and will avoid the complexities and costs of disaggregation, ensuring that the council is financially resilient.

Reserves

It is likely that reserves will be utilised (at least partly) to fund the transition costs of reorganisation. As with debt, in a multi-unitary scenario KCC's reserves would need to be apportioned to the new unitary authorities and the debt from the other 13 councils would be

inherited by the successor authorities. The 2024/25 reserves for each of the 14 councils is set out in the table below.

Council reserves

	Net Revenue Reserves (excl. schools and DSG) (£000s)	Net Revenue Reserves (excl. schools and DSG) per head
Kent CC	334,176	£208
Medway UA	37,519	£131
Ashford	36,516	£264
Canterbury	35,714	£223
Dartford	81,341	£674
Dover	45,990	£388
Folkestone & Hythe	20,555	£185
Gravesham	19,324	£179
Maidstone	45,428	£247
Sevenoaks	25,887	£213
Swale	20,313	£130
Thanet	10,204	£73
Tonbridge & Malling	39,374	£291
Tunbridge Wells	20,880	£178
Total	773,221	£408

Source – Provisional 2024-25 Revenue Outturn (RO – published annually)

The table below shows the amount of reserves that the new unitary authorities would inherit if KCC's reserves were apportioned based on population share. Please note, this is for illustrative purposes only. The process for apportioning KCC's reserves would be negotiated and decided upon by the new unitary authorities.

Inherited reserves based on population share, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary		3a – three unitaries		4b – four unitaries	
	Total inherited (£000s)	Reserves per head	Total inherited (£000s)	Reserves per head	Total inherited (£000s)	Reserves per head
Kent and Medway	773,221	£408	-	-	-	-
North	-	-	238,257	£355	185,591	£360
East	-	-	287,661	£430	178,857	£427
Mid	-	-	-	-	161,469	£399
West	-	-	247,304	£443	247,304	£443

On this basis, in the multi-unitary options, Western areas would inherit higher levels of reserves per head of population than other areas. When considering this alongside significantly lower inherited debt, a West Kent unitary authority would likely be in a stronger position to finance reorganisation and be more financially resilient compared to other parts of the county.

Assets

As well as through council tax and reserves, another way in which new unitary authorities could choose to service debt is through income generated from assets. The tables below set out the value of the cash investments held by the 14 councils in Kent and Medway as of the

end of 2024/25, and the amount that new unitary authorities would inherit in the different scenarios, if investments were apportioned based on population share. Please note, this is for illustrative purposes only. How these investments are apportioned will be for the new unitary authorities to decide. Also note that physical assets have not been included in this analysis.

Value and type of investments held by councils in Kent and Medway (£000s)

	Total value	Banks	Public corporations	Debt Management Account	Money Markets	External Funds	Other	Local Authority Loans
Kent CC	481,566	11,71	0	27,890	187,76	126,74	127,44	0
Medway UA	53,734	14,14	0	0	39,591	0	0	0
Ashford	36,398	0	0	0	17,398	19,000	0	0
Canterbury	12,624	267	0	0	12,357	0	0	0
Dartford	183,169	614	0	0	56,059	112,42	14,069	0
Dover	57,087	111	0	0	7,885	49,091	0	0
Folkestone & Hythe	18,590	180	0	0	18,410	0	0	0
Gravesham	28,048	0	0	0	3,927	14,121	0	10,000
Maidstone	33,985	11,71	0	0	187,76	126,74	127,44	0
Sevenoaks	53,734	604	6,334	0	5,700	5,164	6,384	0
Swale	11,032	122	0	0	10,910	0	0	0
Thanet	35,392	2,386	0	0	31,006	2,000	0	0
Tonbridge & Malling	53,965	6,050	0	0	16,524	4,250	27,141	0
Tunbridge Wells	47,000	25,00	0	7,000	0	0	0	15,000
Total	1,070,442	61,365	6,334	34,890	416,346	332,802	168,705	50,000

Source – MHCLG Borrowing and investments live table (published quarterly)

KCC own close to half of the total value of investments held by the 14 councils (45%) in Kent and Medway. This is a higher ratio than the amount of debt that KCC holds (31%), so how this is apportioned in a multi-unitary model will be even more significant than how debt is apportioned in such a scenario. As with the apportioning of debt, this could be a complicated and contentious process which would be avoided in the single unitary model.

It is notable that the value of Dartford's investments is significantly higher than other district councils in Kent and Medway. This has an impact on the value of investments which would be inherited by the new unitary authorities in the multi-unitary models. In option 3a, it evens out the value of investments between the unitary authorities as there is little disparity, but in option 4b the impact is that the North Kent unitary authority would inherit a notably larger share of the value of investments, and the Mid Kent unitary authority would have a relatively low share of the value of investments.

Inherited value of investments based on population share, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary		3a – three unitaries		4b – four unitaries	
	Value of investments (£000s)	Value per head	Value of investments (£000s)	Value per head	Value of investments (£000s)	Value per head
Kent and Medway	1,070,442	£564	-	-	-	-
North	-	-	390,921	£582	333,268	£647
East	-	-	359,939	£539	230,401	£550
Mid	-	-	-	-	187,192	£462
West	-	-	319,582	£573	319,582	£573

Net revenue

The table below sets out net revenue figures compiled by KPMG as part of the shared evidence for 2025/26 for the 14 councils in Kent and Medway. KCC's net revenue of £1.7bn is 73% of the combined total of the 14 councils. This clearly demonstrates the size of KCC, both in absolute terms, and when compared to the other 13 councils. It also indicates that, to a large extent, the capacity and capability required to operate at the scale of a single unitary authority for the entire area, already exists within KCC.

These net revenue figures also show that disparities in spending power per head exist between areas. In particular, between Medway, where there is lower spending power per head of population, and the districts within Kent – net revenue per head in Medway is £1,185, compared to a combined figure of between £1,202 in Canterbury and £1,295 in Dartford.

Net revenue

	Net Revenue (£000s)	Net Revenue per head	Net revenue per head – combined
Kent CC	1,698,857	£1,055	-
Medway UA	339,910	£1,185	-
Ashford	26,710	£193	£1,248
Canterbury	23,580	£147	£1,202
Dartford	29,009	£240	£1,295
Dover	28,274	£238	£1,293
Folkestone & Hythe	22,886	£206	£1,261
Gravesham	17,943	£167	£1,222
Maidstone	28,323	£154	£1,209
Sevenoaks	21,978	£181	£1,236
Swale	30,335	£195	£1,250

Thanet	21,979	£157	£1,212
Tonbridge & Malling	22,521	£167	£1,222
Tunbridge Wells	17,909	£153	£1,208
Total	2,330,214		£1,228

The table below sets out the inherited net revenue for the unitary authorities in the different proposed options, based on apportioning KCC's revenue by share of population. There is relatively little disparity between the unitary councils in any of the options. This is because KCC's share of net revenue is so large that it evens out any disparities when distributed. Within a single unitary authority, there would be no disparity at all, and the relatively strong spending power that would be inherited by KCC would compensate for the lower spending power inherited from Medway.

Net revenue based on population share, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary		3a – three unitaries		4b – four unitaries	
	Net revenue (£000s)	Net revenue per head	Net revenue (£000s)	Net revenue per head	Net revenue (£000s)	Net revenue per head
Kent and Medway	2,330,214	£1,228	-	-	-	-
North	-	-	822,674	£1,226	627,868	£1,219
East	-	-	828,447	£1,240	515,856	£1,231
Mid	-	-	-	-	627,828	£1,252
West	-	-	679,093	£1,218	679,093	£1,218

Disaggregation and demand on services

KCC commissioned Newton to conduct an analysis to forecast the costs of disaggregating people-based services, specifically for - Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and services for children with SEND. Their approach was based on a hybrid model including both disproportionately inherited costs on day one (using a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios rather than detailed financial analysis) as well as additional future costs. This work was conducted in May 2025, using up to date data provided by KCC. It is separate to the work carried out by KPMG for the shared evidence base.

The results of this analysis clearly point to the single unitary option being the most advantageous for people-based services, from a cost perspective. Of all the scenarios modelled, the single unitary was the only one in which there would not be a significant cost of disaggregating these services, in fact, it was found to have a cost saving of £16.2m in the first year against the baseline spend in 2025. **Whereas in option 3a there would be an additional cost of £14.9m in the first year, and in option 4b there would be an additional cost of £20.8m. In the single unitary model, this equates to a saving on these services of £31m compared to the three unitary model and £37m compared to the four unitary model.**

Change in spend on people-based services from baseline in 2025

	1a - Single unitary	3a – three unitaries	4b – four unitaries
Spend in year 1	£1.48bn	£1.51bn	£1.52bn
Change from baseline	-£16.17m	+£14.87m	+£20.83m

As well as resulting in lower costs overall, the single unitary has the advantage of being able to spread the costs and manage demand across the entire Kent and Medway area. Demand for people-based services in Kent and Medway is unevenly distributed across the area, with particularly high demand in Eastern and Northern areas. As set out in the tables below, there are higher costs per resident for people-based services in the East, Mid and North unitary authorities compared to the West unitary authority. This would potentially put these new unitary authorities under unsustainable pressure to meet the costs of these services, particularly as they also have lower revenue raising potential and higher debts than a West unitary authority would have.

For comparability, the results have been shown as an amount per head of population.

Cost per resident for people-based services, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary	3a – three unitaries	4b – four unitaries
Kent and Medway	£759	-	-
North	-	£729	£730
East	-	£885	£894
Mid	-	-	£829
West	-	£693	£693

Cost per resident for Adult Social Care, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary	3a – three unitaries	4b – four unitaries
Kent and Medway	£419	-	-
North	-	£353	£356
East	-	£533	£530
Mid	-	-	£472
West	-	£401	£401

Cost per resident for Children's Social Care, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary	3a – three unitaries	4b – four unitaries
Kent and Medway	£118	-	-
North	-	£136	£138
East	-	£131	£137
Mid	-	-	£129
West	-	£91	£91

Cost per resident for SEND, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary	3a – three unitaries	4b – four unitaries
Kent and Medway	£222	-	-
North	-	£241	£236
East	-	£220	£227
Mid	-	-	£227
West	-	£200	£200

Additionally, KCC Finance Officers conducted internal analysis of the 'legacy' costs for Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care which would be inherited by the proposed new unitary authorities from KCC and Medway. The analysis was based on allocating KCC's forecast/actual net spend for 2024/25 according to the geographical area where costs are incurred with the result percentages applied to relevant spending identified for social care in Kent's Revenue Outturn (RO) 2024/25, and the same costs included in Medway's Revenue Outturn return have also been added in. This ensures consistency across Kent and Medway. This is not a precise measure of Ordinary Residence as would apply to Adult Social Care but does give a good indication of where costs would be incurred.

The results showed the same pattern as Newton's analysis with higher spend in Northern and Eastern areas for these services, compared to the West. There are two main reasons which explain the uneven distribution of costs for people-based services. Firstly, there is a high cost per resident of Adult Social Care in Folkestone & Hythe and in Dover districts due to the high proportion of the County's care placements for vulnerable adults in these districts. And secondly, because the costs for Children's Social Services correlate with levels of deprivation, with particularly high costs per resident in Thanet, Swale, and Folkestone & Hythe districts.

Legacy costs per resident for Adult Social Care, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary	3a – three unitaries	4b – four unitaries
Kent and Medway	£430	-	-
North	-	£349	£343
East	-	£539	£523
Mid	-	-	£491
West	-	£395	£395

Legacy costs per resident for Children's Social Care, per proposed unitary authority

	1a - Single unitary	3a – three unitaries	4b – four unitaries
Kent and Medway	£181	-	-
North	-	£230	£229
East	-	£197	£198
Mid	-	-	£210
West	-	£102	£102

Fair Funding review 2.0

The points above clearly indicate financial disparities in all the proposed multi-unitary models. A West Kent unitary authority would inherit a more sustainable level of debt to

reserves, higher revenue raising potential, and lower costs per resident for people-based services than the other unitary authorities. While new unitary authorities which cover other parts of the county will likely face significant spending pressures to deliver statutory services.

Current Government policy is to review and update the formula to determine funding allocations for local authorities. One of the aims is for funding to more closely match levels of relative needs and resources taking account of differential costs of delivering services and the revenue raising abilities of local authorities. This should result in areas with high levels of need and limited spending power receiving more funding.

Currently, the full impacts of the Fair Funding Review 2.0 are unknown, but it is unlikely that changes in funding levels that occur will fully mitigate financial disparities between new unitary authorities that would be created in a multi-unitary model.

DRAFT

7. Assessment against government criteria

KCC's preferred option of a single unitary is a good fit for the criteria on which Government will assess LGR proposals, as set out below.

Note: Relevant findings of KCC's public and stakeholder engagement will be added to this table in the final Strategic Business Case.

Criterion	Arguments for a single unitary in Kent and Medway	Arguments against multiple unitaries in Kent and Medway
Criterion A: A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A single unitary would be the most effective way to ensure that the taxbase is appropriate for the area and there is no undue advantage for one part of the county over another. ✓ Would keep Kent and Medway together as a single, functional economic area. ✓ Demand pressures, income and spend can be spread across the county rather than being concentrated in individual smaller unitaries, avoiding unmanageable demand in specific localities. ✓ A single unitary would maximise the available area over which to manage housing demand, helping to overcome spatial constraints and removing authority boundaries that can hamper housing delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Internal KCC analysis shows that, at the average rate of harmonisation, there would be disparities in tax yield per head of population, with West Kent able to raise more council tax due to higher property values. This could further entrench existing socio-economic disparities between the West and other areas. ✗ West Kent would inherit markedly lower legacy costs for Adult's and Children's Social Care compared to other areas of the county. This would disadvantage North and East Kent. ✗ The overall tax yield between different authorities varies considerably in some of the four unitary options. ✗ Modelling of multiple unitary options suggests that there will be significant disparities between unitaries in the cost of social care and SEND, which is exacerbated in some options by the location of major adult's residential social care providers and concentrations of deprivation in proposed unitaries. ✗ The multi-unitary options would likely face more



		challenges in housing delivery compared to other options due to the introduction of multiple local authority boundaries.
Criterion B: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	<p>✓ A single unitary is the most financially viable option. It delivers the highest net recurring benefit (£69m), the lowest transition costs (£99m), and has the shortest payback period at just over three years. Operating as a single unitary would generate efficiency savings, financial resilience and would deliver better value for money for the Kent taxpayer.</p> <p>✓ There would be no disaggregation costs for critical countywide services such as social care and SEND, avoiding millions of pounds of additional ongoing cost each year compare. There are also savings from aggregating these services across Kent and Medway – saving an estimated £16.2m per year to provide these services (CCN/Newton people-based services report).</p> <p>✓ The local Area Assemblies will enable a balance of efficiencies against the need for local responsiveness for place-based services which make sense to be delivered locally.</p> <p>✓ A single unitary is best placed to deliver strategic transformation through unified governance and economies of scale. It would be able to support large-scale invest-to-save projects and would have the capacity to implement</p>	<p>✗ The creation of multiple unitaries leads to higher unitarisation costs, which would have a likely impact on council tax and/or service provision.</p> <p>✗ Multiple unitaries score relatively poorly when considering efficiency and value for money, with lower net recurring benefits, high transition costs and payback periods of between over 5 and over 14 years (or potentially never).</p> <p>✗ Multiple unitaries have high disaggregation costs – between £20 million to £68 million per year.</p> <p>✗ Multiple unitaries results in uneven debt distribution, with West Kent inheriting significantly lower levels of debt compared to North and East Kent.</p> <p>✗ Opportunities for transformation would be significantly limited with multiple unitaries, especially those that would create smaller authorities. The smaller scale of each authority would reduce financial resilience and the ability to absorb upfront costs associated with invest-to-save projects. It would also be harder to deliver consistent transformation across the county as</p>

	<p>strategic, countywide transformation initiatives, whilst Area Assemblies would be able to facilitate more localised transformation programmes that are tailored to the individual needs of communities.</p> <p>✓ It offers the most fair and manageable solution to managing the county's debt as all debt and reserves would be evenly distributed.</p>	<p>different unitaries would have varying levels of service demand and financial capacity.</p> <p>✗ High disaggregation and transition costs would constrain limited resources for small unitaries, whilst the fragmentation of services would increase the risk of duplication and inefficiencies.</p>
<p>Criterion C: Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services to citizens.</p>	<p>✓ Avoids the risks and costs associated with disaggregating critical, countywide services such as social care, SEND and safeguarding. Modelling shows that the probability of an authority achieving a good or outstanding Ofsted rating for children's services reduces as the size of the authority shrinks. Equally, for adult social care, CQC quality reporting data indicates an increased likelihood of a good CQC rating for larger local authorities.</p> <p>✓ Provides the necessary scale and capacity to manage Kent's nationally-significant border issues while meeting Kent and Medway needs.</p> <p>✓ This option creates fully balanced service demand levels for both adult and children's social care through continued countywide management.</p> <p>✓ A single unitary would benefit from increased purchasing power, greater capacity and more market influence, allowing it to shape more resilient and responsive</p>	<p>✗ Multiple unitaries may have implications for service delivery if they cut across partner boundaries. It would also therefore make public service reform more difficult and complex as there would not be co-terminosity with partners.</p> <p>✗ The impact of disaggregation on critical services such as social care, safeguarding and SEND would likely be significant. Disaggregation would lead to the fragmentation of well-established and performing services, with less capacity for central functions like quality assurance, whilst also leading to the duplication of systems and infrastructure.</p> <p>✗ With reduced buying power and limited market shaping ability, it is likely that smaller authorities would struggle to absorb cost surges or withstand market volatility, whilst a lack of scale would lead to increased service delivery costs. This would make it particularly</p>

	<p>markets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ With increased resources and funding, a single unitary would be able to invest more heavily in specialist roles, targeted training and advanced technologies, enabling the development of expertise across key service areas. ✓ A single unitary would have the necessary funding, expertise, infrastructure and data to deliver successful prevention initiatives, whilst also having the necessary capacity and strategic oversight to be able to develop strategies linked to prevention. ✓ A single unitary, supported by three Area Assemblies, would be able to deliver high-quality services by balancing strategic capacity with local responsiveness. The single unitary would have the necessary financial capacity to be able to deliver sustainable social care services whilst the Area Assemblies would be able to focus on the delivery of place-based services for local residents. ✓ The geography of the Area Assemblies aligns well with the service delivery footprints of partner agencies, therefore providing opportunities for public service reform. For example, community safety partnerships could work in partnership with the police to tackle antisocial behaviour and crime and disorder. Area Assemblies are well aligned to work with partners to address the wider determinants of 	<p>challenging to deliver sustainable social care services. Scope to invest beyond this would therefore be limited, e.g. in prevention or wider visible services as these authorities would likely be all consumed by high-cost critical people services over which they would have limited control. It would also add a level of unnecessary competition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ There would also be a diluting of expertise, significantly increased cost through the duplication of systems, risks associated with data transfer, disparity in service offer leading to a feeling of 'postcode lottery' for residents. ✗ Multiple unitaries would risk disrupting the established countywide arrangements for managing border challenges, splitting the necessary infrastructure across unitaries and concentrating unsustainable pressures in the East Kent area.
--	--	---

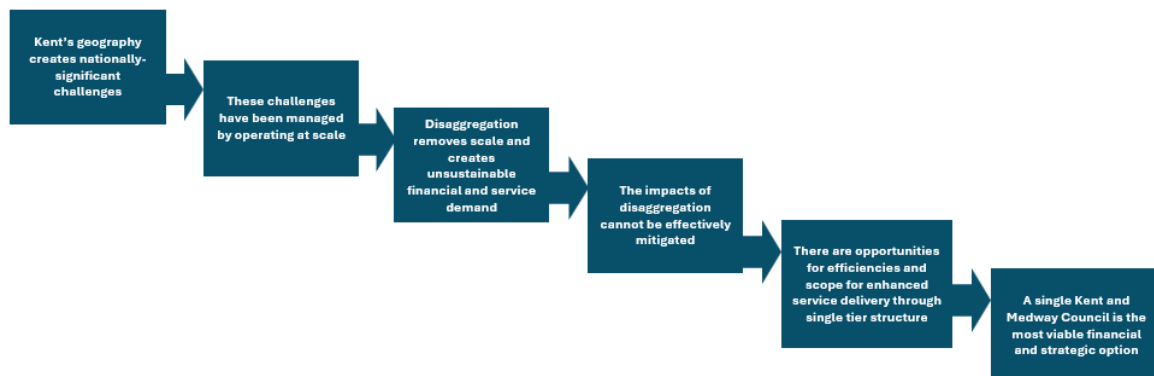
	<p>health.</p> <p>✓ This option would ensure that Kent and Medway retains a strong, unified voice when working with partners in other public sector services (e.g. the NHS and the Police) and with Government, particularly on Kent-based issues which impact critical services – such as issues relating to the border with the EU.</p>	
<p>Criterion D: Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.</p>	<p>✓ The single unitary scores highest for efficiency and value for money, which is likely to prove popular with residents. Other options are more costly and these costs would likely be borne by the Kent taxpayer.</p> <p>✓ Having a single unitary would ensure there would be no disparities in council tax levels across the county, avoiding issues of potential unfairness. The introduction of Area Assemblies focused on place-based priorities also means residents would be able to see more easily where their council tax is being spent for those services.</p> <p>✓ Operating as a single unitary would ensure that the Kent and Medway county identity is maintained whilst the establishment of three Area Assemblies (North, East and West) is reflective of local identity and the way people live (i.e. it is consistent with travel to work, education and hospital flows).</p> <p>✓ Equally, the geography of the Area Assemblies align well with the existing service delivery footprints of partner agencies,</p>	<p>✗ The increased disaggregation and transition costs associated with the creation of multiple unitaries would impact financial viability and value for money. These increased costs may be passed on to residents, which is unlikely to be welcomed.</p> <p>✗ There would be discrepancies in council tax charges, which some residents might consider to be unfair.</p> <p>✗ The creation of multiple unitaries would lead to service fragmentation and there would be less capacity for the strategic planning of services - e.g. coordinated infrastructure and transport links (services which we know are important to residents).</p> <p>✗ The introduction of multiple unitaries might mean residents are charged to use services/assets across local authority boundaries, which is again unlikely to be welcomed by residents.</p> <p>✗ Similarly, partnership working would also be more complex,</p>

	<p>allowing partners to build on established relationships and ways of working to accelerate tailored, community-based integration and reform.</p> <p>✓ Area Assemblies and the enhanced community engagement approach set out can counter any perception of remoteness and provide local decision making on visible services.</p>	<p>with partners having to work with councils across their existing service delivery boundaries.</p>
<p>Criterion E: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.</p>	<p>✓ A single unitary would provide the strategic capacity for the devolution of responsibilities and funding that Government is seeking to embed.</p> <p>✓ Kent and Medway is already operating at the appropriate scale and has proven experience to deliver the functions and powers included in the Devolution Framework.</p> <p>✓ Overlaying a mayor across a single unitary would avoid complex and costly aggregation procedures as most of the new MSA functions (e.g. transport and planning) would already operate at a strategic/countywide level as part of the single unitary.</p> <p>✓ The single unitary would have the capacity and collective voice to advocate on behalf of the whole Kent and Medway area and to lobby Government on important regional issues.</p>	<p>✗ Adding an additional layer of governance through a Mayoral Combined Authority for Kent and Medway will add cost and delivery complexity.</p> <p>✗ A Mayor for Kent and Medway could spend a disproportionate amount of time and resource attempting to facilitate the management of border pressures on the East Kent unitary with government.</p> <p>✗ Multiple unitaries may be more focused on local priorities, rather than contributing to the delivery of strategic ambitions as part of devolution. They may not also have the necessary financial resilience and organisational capacity to deliver on MSA priorities.</p> <p>✗ The creation of multiple unitaries would inevitably lead to the disaggregation of many countywide services, including transport and strategic planning. These types of strategic functions would naturally sit at Mayoral Strategic Level, which means the services would have to</p>

		be aggregated back upwards following potential future devolution. This not only seems illogical but would also be both costly and complex.
Criterion F: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	 The single unitary would have the capacity and resources to create an enhanced model of community engagement and be able to operate closer to communities and support place-based decision making through the Area Assemblies for those services where this makes sense.	 Whilst smaller unitaries would operate closer to communities, it is likely that they would lack the necessary resource capacity to run effective community engagement and to address the local issues that are raised through these mechanisms.

8. The geographic and spatial reality of Kent and Medway

In coming to a decision on the best option for LGR in Kent and Medway, the reality of the county's geography and position in the country cannot be overlooked. LGR risks dismantling decades of well-established and effective countywide service delivery and response arrangements, which would bring significant costs and risks to Kent and Medway and ripple out across the country. In coming to its preferred option, KCC's administration has developed the following rationale which sets out why it believes that a single unitary is the most viable option in the context in which Kent and Medway operates.



Kent's unique geography creates nationally-significant challenges

Gateway to Europe

Kent's geographical location places it at the forefront of the UK's interface with continental Europe. The county serves as the primary entry corridor for both passenger and freight traffic. In 2024, the Port of Dover and Channel Tunnel handled over 11 million passenger crossings and 3.5 million freight vehicles, and these volumes are increasing every year. The Channel Tunnel alone handles a quarter of UK-continental trade, the Port of Dover is the UK's busiest international ferry port and a quarter of all food imports from the EU pass through the Short Straits crossings. This makes our highways network an integral part of the nation's transport system and we manage some of the busiest roads in the country. When there is disruption or higher volume at the borders, either due to unexpected events or regular peaks such as school holidays, effective traffic management is essential to avoid parts of the county coming to a standstill, which has a cost to the Kent and Medway economy and impacts day-to-day life for our residents.

Our position also brings the international humanitarian crisis of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children (UAS children) to Kent's shores through small boat crossings and the border points. As the High Court Judgement in 2023 confirmed, Kent County Council is under statutory duty to accommodate all UAS children who arrive in the area until they are appropriately assessed and transfer arrangements made. In 2024/25, KCC accommodated 2685 UAS children as Looked after Children, and over 10,000 in total since 2016. Children arrive spontaneously and often in large numbers – on a single day in July 2025, 70 UAS children arrived into Kent. Due to delays in the National Transfer Scheme and also in processing asylum claims, Kent is too frequently shouldering the burden of supporting UAS children and care leavers for too long with insufficient funding.

The impact on public services and the wider economy and community of Kent and Medway of these unique pressures is substantial. However, the impacts do not stop at the Kent and Medway border - what happens in Kent has a direct impact on the rest of the country. If border pressures are managed well, passenger and freight journeys flow effectively, securing critical UK supply chains, enabling international trade and underpinning the country's economy. If they are not managed well, wider transport networks quickly become congested, the economy suffers and risks to border resilience and safeguarding of vulnerable people are heightened. People across the country notice what happens at Kent's borders and this impacts perceptions of national security and prosperity.

In Kent and Medway's feedback letter to the Interim Plan submissions for LGR in March 2025, MHCLG has acknowledged the unique considerations for LGR in the area due to Kent's border position. This has been a central factor in determining KCC's position on LGR.

Disparities in deprivation

Kent and Medway's unique position between London and the coast has shaped the significant diversity of places within the county, from urban centres in the North neighbouring London, more affluent commuter towns and rural areas in the West and coastal communities in the East.

This diversity drives one of the most significant and pervasive disparities seen within the county - the wide variation in levels of deprivation. Of the local areas (Local Super Output Areas) in Kent that are in the top 10% most deprived in the country according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, 53% of them are found in Thanet and Swale. Conversely, there are very few of these most deprived neighbourhoods in West Kent (none in some Districts).

Higher levels of deprivation result in greater demand for services, limit funds that councils are able to raise through council tax and can create other challenges in supporting local communities. In Kent, financial modelling shows a distinct East/West split, with the West of the county experiencing lower service demand, higher council tax income and lower debt levels. KCC's internal modelling of the impacts of separating countywide services into multiple unitaries has highlighted the areas where spend on services is concentrated, which is primarily in the East and to a lesser extent in the North of the county. In adult social care, spend is significantly higher in Folkestone & Hythe and Dover, due to the location of major providers of residential care for adults in those areas. In children's social care, spend is greatest in the areas of greatest deprivation, particularly Thanet and Swale. Splitting the county through the process of LGR risks embedding disparities between more and less deprived areas, which will be most pronounced in the difference between East and West Kent.

Peninsular county

As a peninsula surrounded on multiple sides by 350 miles of coastline, Kent faces economic and social challenges. This impacts on the effective provision of public services in the area - Kent can only look to markets to the West for the provision of services, limiting options for procurement on the most competitive terms. It is also one of the causes of persistent and systemic recruitment and retention challenges in the county, particularly in coastal areas. There are thousands of vacancies in the adult social care sector alone across Kent and

Medway. The area's proximity to London means that it is difficult to compete with the attractive salaries offered just a short distance into the capital. It is therefore important that Kent and Medway has sufficient capacity and capability within its own borders, using its scale to shape markets and develop the skilled workforce our services rely on.

These challenges have been managed by operating at scale

Across all of the challenges that Kent and Medway's geography brings, the county's scale has allowed pressures to be managed and local and national risks to be largely mitigated. As the largest county council in the country, our countywide services provide capacity and flexibility so they can balance disparities and unique concentrations of demand across our large geography. This provides financial resilience and supports the provision of high-quality service provision, as resources can be targeted to meet needs in different geographical areas. For example, KCC plays a strategic role in the management and allocation of school places and the associated infrastructure which requires careful coordination and planning across all stages of education. Capital funding from the DFE is currently allocated by KCC based on highest need rather than geographic location across the county. Kent has a large and diverse family of schools and established infrastructure in place to support the 300 plus maintained schools for which it is responsible, a high proportion of which are small primary schools serving small rural communities. These schools currently benefit from access to KCC's aggregated buying powers and specialist expertise to ensure the safety of children across the county.

As a large county council, we have been able to invest capacity in corporate functions that support our services to manage demand, such as infrastructure, analytics and transformation. We also benefit from reduced employer overheads through centralised functions such as payroll and Occupational Health.

Kent's scale and its critical mass of capability and capacity is the reason it has been an effective and reliable partner to Government in managing the national border issues that fall to our area, as the following case studies show.

Case study: Strategic Resilience Team

KCC Highways & Transportation has set up a Strategic Resilience Team (SRT) to manage the impacts of changes at the UK-French border. This has included EU Exit leading to additional checks for freight, border closures due to COVID-19, the introduction of the EU Entry Exit System (EES) and forthcoming European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) with the SRT's involvement primarily around the impact on Kent's road network (including the Strategic Road Network). The SRT also takes a lead role in the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF), coordinating the implementation of traffic management measures (Operation Brock) when there is planned/unplanned disruption at the portals.

KCC is the lead authority because of the strategic approach that can be taken - the SRT can make a strategic decision without bias to any one area of Kent, given the impacts are countywide but variable by area. Decisions on when to implement traffic management protocols are also based on demand data from the port operators. This data is shared with

KCC because it is a trusted partner and a single entity, meaning commercial sensitivity can be more confidently maintained.

Given the strategic and national importance of keeping trade flowing between the UK and Europe, this issue is best managed at a countywide level to ensure unbiased decisions can be made to minimise any disruption to trade whilst keeping Kent moving.

Case study: Delivering national projects

KCC has played a critical role in delivering major national projects, including the construction of the Sevington Inland Border Facility for the Department for Transport, Border Control Posts at Sevington and Whitfield for Defra, and the readiness of Manston Airport as a contingency lorry holding site in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

Kent County Council (KCC) has a long-standing track record of delivering multi-million-pound capital projects across transport, infrastructure, and resilience. Its scale, supply chain access, and established frameworks allow it to respond quickly to urgent national requirements. KCC's ability to act decisively and at scale has been key to delivering critical infrastructure on time. Strong relationships with partners such as National Highways and central government departments further enhance its ability to lead and coordinate complex, cross-agency delivery.

Case study: Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

KCC operates a countywide network of Reception Centres that play a vital role in safeguarding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children arriving through national border points in Kent. These centres are part of the Reception and Safe Care Service (RaSCS), which provides immediate care and assessment before children are transferred under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).

KCC's scale enables it to manage this complex infrastructure effectively. Reception Centres are strategically located across the county, allowing for rapid response and flexible deployment of resources. The council's ability to coordinate across district boundaries ensures continuity of care and avoids fragmentation in service delivery.

Specialist teams—including social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, and Practice Development Officers—are embedded within this system to ensure each child's needs are properly assessed and met. These roles require advanced skills and are difficult to recruit and retain, particularly in high-demand areas like East Kent. KCC's countywide reach supports workforce stability and service resilience.

KCC's scale and infrastructure enable it to manage spontaneous, high-volume arrivals, and despite delays and funding gaps in the NTS, KCC has worked closely with the Home Office to develop a workable solution.

KCC's county-led delivery has ensured we can flexibly respond to national pressures effectively and continue to safeguard vulnerable children.

It is also an advantage under the current arrangements that all of the infrastructure that exists in the county to manage the movement of goods and people across the border (including Eurotunnel, Port of Dover, Sevington Inland Border Facility and Manston Arrivals and Processing Centre) and the Reception Centres for UAS children are within KCC's area, meaning that Government has a single point of contact in local government to work with on border issues. Some of the facilities are however spread across district boundaries, which could complicate the response if multiple unitaries are created.

Underpinning our effective response is the county's strong and well-established partnership arrangements at a Kent and Medway level. The Kent and Medway Resilience Forum allows for a coordinated response between key partners including Police and Fire & Rescue to implement traffic management measures when there is planned or unplanned disruption at the Channel Ports. Previous sections of this Strategic Business Case set out Kent and Medway's partnerships around the economy, housing and other areas. The challenges that face our county have forged stronger and closer working across the Kent and Medway area, which have capitalised on the coterminosity of the majority of public services on a Kent and Medway footprint. Through these partnerships and because of the scale of Kent and Medway as a place, we are able to ensure that the needs of the area are heard by government departments and our public sector partners.

Disaggregation removes scale and creates unsustainable financial and service demand

The greatest risk of LGR for Kent and Medway is the loss of scale and capacity that splitting the county up will bring and the resulting financial and service demand pressures that would fall to individual unitary councils. The councils in Kent and Medway have a responsibility to ensure that any LGR proposal put forward works for the entire area and does not leave some parts of the county with unsustainable cost and demand pressures.

As the Financial Assessment has set out, modelling shows that the costs of disaggregation of key services in Kent are significant and would challenge the financial sustainability of the new unitaries from day one, with up to £68 million per year of estimated additional costs from disaggregation (option 5a). Separate modelling in the Financial Assessment by KCC and Newton shows that due to the disparities in demand and spend for social care and SEND services, there is also a risk of concentrating the highest cost areas into individual unitaries, posing significant risks to their financial sustainability that would not be mitigated by funding. This is more pronounced in some of the options being considered for Kent and Medway, but will be an unavoidable consequence of LGR for the East of the county in any option that creates multiple unitaries. Unequal levels of debt and reserves will also add to an unsustainable financial position for some areas of the county.

Along with the financial costs, there are significant risks to service delivery from disaggregating countywide services:

Commissioning

Splitting large countywide contracts for critical services such as domiciliary and residential care and waste disposal and for support functions such as IT systems into smaller contracts will weaken the ability for councils to benefit from economies of scale and bulk purchasing

power. Different requirements from different neighbouring authorities will make it more complex, and therefore more expensive, for the local market to provide the services that councils need. Central capacity to drive high standards in commissioning and contract management will be reduced, and the ability and influence of the councils to shape markets will be weakened. These disbenefits are greater in Kent and Medway where our market options are limited by our peninsula geography. Disaggregation would also dismantle the joint commissioning arrangements that KCC and Medway Council have established with NHS Kent and Medway in areas such as hospital discharge and children's mental health, create a more complex landscape for future joint arrangements and put unitaries in a less favourable position to agree shared funding arrangements.

Service quality and consistency

Disaggregation would remove the countywide support functions and arrangements that maintain high service quality. Performance, quality assurance, management information, technology and transformation functions would need to be duplicated across the unitaries, reducing their capacity to drive high standards. This is on top of the duplication of the back-office functions that keep our services running – finance, HR, IT, property and many more. Disaggregation would also introduce disparities in the service offer and processes for referral, assessment and provision of services across the county.

Case study: One Front Door for children's services referrals

KCC's children's services is proud to be rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. A key component is Kent's single countywide Front Door, which provides timely triage of referrals to children's services, consistent decision making and appropriate response to child protection enquiries. In addition, the Out of Hours service provides a robust response to urgent safeguarding enquires for both children and adults across Kent and Medway.

Putting in place a countywide approach has been a key component of our children's services journey from Ofsted Improvement Notice to Outstanding, ensuring that there is no wrong door for referrals and thresholds are applied consistently across the county. Due to its scale, the Front Door benefits from stable staffing, strong management oversight, and a robust learning culture. Innovations such as the "no name consultation" offer for professionals and a new telephony system have improved accessibility and responsiveness for professionals and the public. Countywide delivery also supports strategic partnerships such as with Kent Police, health providers, and education ensuring shared training, improved referral quality, and coordinated safeguarding responses.

The Front Door and Out of Hours services have demonstrated measurable improvements in referral quality, timeliness of decision-making, and multi-agency engagement.

Case study: Commissioning Speech, Language and Communication Needs services

KCC has transformed its approach to commissioning therapy services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), replacing fragmented, locally-driven arrangements with a strategic, county-wide model.

Historically, therapy services, particularly for speech, language and communication needs, were accessed through three different NHS providers, which resulted in unequal access and a 'postcode lottery' for families.

Following a comprehensive commissioning review in 2022 which identified geographical gaps and unclear accountability, KCC and the NHS adopted the Balanced System® framework and aligned their commissioning strategies. From October 2025, a county-wide offer is in place: Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy are now delivered directly by KCC, while Speech and Language Therapy is provided by a single NHS provider across the whole of Kent and Medway.

This unified model replaces fragmented arrangements with a consistent, equitable service offer, ensuring that all eligible children, regardless of location, have access to high-quality therapy provision. It eliminates duplication, strengthens governance, and improves accountability. By commissioning at scale, KCC has created a coherent and inclusive framework that supports better outcomes, delivers value for money, and improved experience for Kent families.

Safeguarding

Multiagency safeguarding arrangements work on a countywide basis and new arrangements would need to be made with individual unitaries. This will cause disruption to referral processes, data sharing and shared learning from case reviews. Ofsted has praised the countywide response that allows children at risk of harm to receive tailored outreach and responsive support. Arrangements in adult social care around Deprivation of Liberties and the Mental Capacity Act will need to be sustained to ensure the safe and legal care of very vulnerable people.

Case study: Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board

The Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board brings together four strategic partners and over 30 relevant organisations. It plays a vital role in coordinating efforts to prevent abuse and neglect, raise awareness, and promote individual wellbeing. Its unified structure across Kent and Medway enables consistent safeguarding practice and shared accountability, while still allowing for localised planning and responsiveness. Recent examples include the development of a countywide Multi-Agency Risk Management Framework and a shared threshold tool for safeguarding concerns. Countywide delivery helps ensure that no individual is missed or underserved due to fragmented services, differing local boundaries, or unclear lines of accountability.

Resilience

The scale of countywide services provides inherent resilience to withstand shocks such as emergencies or market failure, minimising impact on people who rely on our services. This enhanced resilience also allows services to cope with peaks in demand, flexing and

reprioritising as needed. Without this capacity, smaller unitaries could be overwhelmed – for example it might only take a small number of children with very complex support needs to provide real threat to a smaller unitary's budget.

Workforce

In an already challenging environment in which to recruit and retain the staff with the skills and experience needed to deliver our services, disaggregation would introduce competition between the unitaries as employers. This is likely to have most impact in the East of Kent where workforce shortages in key roles such as social workers, carers and Occupational Therapists are already a challenge, and where there is greatest need. Disaggregation will reduce the capacity and influence of councils to work with education and skills providers to grow the talent that is needed, and will make it harder to offer attractive career pathways to retain staff. Workforce disaggregation will mean that leadership and specialist roles across countywide services need to be duplicated, which may not be possible from the existing countywide pool of staff.

Disaggregation risks undermine care for the vulnerable - County Councils Network

Our analysis of disaggregation impacts is in line with the report by the County Councils Network (CCN) and Newton in October 2025 on people-based services. It warns that breaking up county councils into smaller unitary authorities could severely damage the quality and sustainability of people-based services, particularly social care. The proposed reorganisation risks a "triple whammy" of worse services, higher costs, and staffing shortages, with modelling showing that councils serving populations below 500,000 could face up to £270 million in additional annual care costs and require up to 1,100 new senior roles, which may be impossible to fill. Smaller councils are also more likely to experience extreme concentrations of care demand, threatening financial viability and service quality. The report urges government to avoid fragmentation - *"Put simply, reorganisation plans could make or break care services unless the government gets these reforms right."* – Cllr Matthew Hicks, Chair of the County Councils Network.

Along with inheriting disproportionate demand and financial pressures due to Kent's disparities, a unitary council covering the East Kent area would bear the burdens of Kent's border pressures. It would inherit the statutory responsibility for accommodating all UAS children and for traffic management in response to border changes, as well as pressure on other services such as Trading Standards for port testing. It is not feasible for a unitary council of the scale suggested by Government through LGR to manage this alone and they would very likely lack the financial resilience and specialist expertise to cope with the demand and cost pressures. Especially given the delays and underfunding of the current arrangements for UAS children and Care Leavers who were UAS children, a smaller authority would have insufficient resource to manage the demand. Even at KCC's scale, experience and capability of managing the incoming UAS children demand, the safe level has previously been breached. It is also impractical for small unitaries to manage traffic issues related to the border in isolation. Moreover, what is needed going forward is a permanent workable solution to the issues that the border brings. Disaggregation risks not only disrupting the carefully managed solutions that mitigate the worst of the impacts now, but also setting Kent and Medway back in working with Government on a proper long-term

solution that reduces the detriments to our area's economy and quality of life, and the wider risks to the country.

The impacts of disaggregation cannot be effectively mitigated

Once the strength and scale of countywide services and arrangements has been split up, there is no readily available method to effectively mitigate the disbenefits and risks of this.

Firstly, as Kent and Medway was not included on the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and there is no current timeline in place for future rounds of devolution, Kent and Medway cannot be confident that a Strategic Authority will be in place in the short or medium-term. This means that the area must plan on the basis that LGR will happen in Kent and Medway with no concurrent development of a strategic cross-county vehicle. As set out, it is not viable to manage Kent's unique challenges without strategic, county-level oversight and coordination, and this would have local and national risks.

Secondly, it is the position of KCC, informed by service experts across the council and learning from other areas, that disaggregation cannot be mitigated by shared service arrangements. In theory, these structures could allow the management of key services such as social care to be retained at a county level and mitigate the costs and impacts of splitting service provision into separate unitaries. In practice, there are no successful examples of such shared services arrangements and they are often associated with increased cost and loss of control and accountability for the constituent authorities and reduced quality of service for residents. While this would be a challenge in any area, given the disproportionate demand and cost pressures that the East of the county would face through disaggregation, it seems highly unlikely that any voluntary shared arrangement would be robust enough to keep all the unitaries involved over the long-term, if such an arrangement could even be agreed in the first place. The energy and resource needed to establish and manage shared services arrangements within the county is a distraction to the opposing national policy direction for shared working over a larger regional footprint, including Regional Adoption Agencies and the consolidation of Integrated Care Boards.

There are opportunities for efficiencies and scope for enhanced service delivery through single tier structure

KCC's administration is of the view that LGR is a distraction that has been forced upon local authorities when they need to be focusing on delivering for their residents. However, given that it is Government's policy to pursue LGR, it is in the best interests of Kent residents that we ensure the process delivers the maximum benefits for our area. As the Financial Assessment has shown, there are clear opportunities for financial efficiencies through consolidating Kent and Medway's 14 authorities into a single unitary. Given the existential financial threats to local government and particularly to some of Kent and Medway's councils, this opportunity cannot be allowed to pass by. Unrestricted from the burdensome ongoing costs of disaggregating major services and with the lowest possible transition costs, the Kent unitary would be able to quickly reinvest maximum savings into services so the people of Kent and Medway see the benefits as soon as possible.

Creating a single tier can provide a more coordinated, streamlined and accountable local government. It opens opportunities to drive up service quality and restore faith that councils

are providing good value for money and delivering for their residents. It can enhance the ability of councils to act as place-shapers and local leaders, creating stronger communities and better quality of life. The primary end goal of LGR is to facilitate Public Service Reform, finding new ways to meet the needs of our residents and communities, integrating support around real life and taking a preventative approach because it is better for people and a more efficient way to manage public resources. A single unitary would maximise the scale, capacity and capability to accelerate this, using the opportunity to tackle some of the long-standing challenges that Kent and Medway is facing and creating a stronger and more prosperous county. Section 11 'Better outcomes for people and place' sets out the priorities that a single council for Kent and Medway could get started on reforming straight away, working with partners and communities.

A single Kent and Medway council is the most viable financial and strategic option

Having considered all of the evidence, both internally, jointly with our partners and considering the national context in which we operate, KCC is clear that the most viable option for LGR in Kent and Medway is through a single unitary – the Kent Council. We are a unique place, and we need a unique solution. The rest of this Strategic Business Case will set out not only how this option would avoid the alarming risks and costs of splitting our county, but would be a positive force for change, seizing this once in a generation opportunity to create local government in Kent and Medway that works now and into the future.

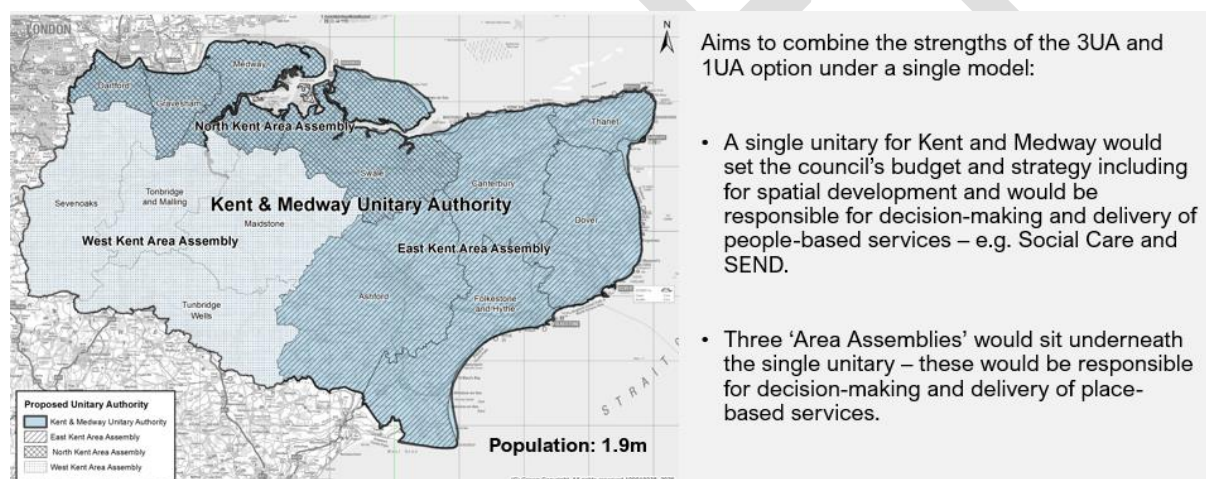
PART THREE – THE NEW KENT COUNCIL

9. Effective and efficient governance and engagement

This proposal is for a single unitary authority covering the Kent and Medway area – the Kent Council. The proposed model replaces the current two-tier structure in Kent and the current unitary in Medway.

The reasons why KCC considers this to be the most viable option for LGR in Kent and Medway have been made clear. However, in considering and developing the option, we fully recognise the potential risks of a large unitary authority being too remote and not responsive enough to meet the diverse needs of Kent and Medway's communities or ensure that people feel represented and heard. We have therefore designed the model for the Kent Council to acknowledge and mitigate these risks, thinking beyond traditional ways of working in local government where this will allow the Kent Council to best serve its residents.

The Kent Council will include three Area Assemblies covering North, East and West Kent and comprised of the unitary councillors for those areas. They will be empowered to make decisions on community services in a way that suits the needs and circumstances of the local area.



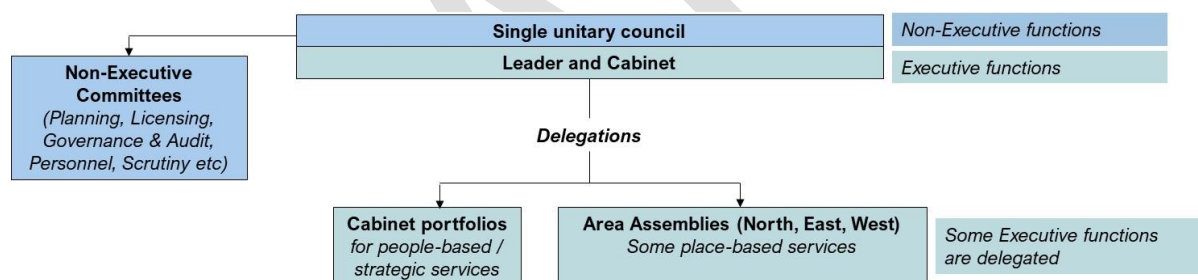
This section of the Strategic Business Case sets out how the Kent Council would work and later sections set out the outcomes it would deliver.

Effective governance, representation and engagement

Our starting point in designing the Kent unitary model has been to look at the functions of the council. The responsibilities of Local Government are separated into Non-Executive and Executive functions, both of which have differing arrangements for delegations. The Kent Council model will maintain the distinction between the two.

Non-Executive	Executive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Non-Executive’ functions are powers and duties that are the responsibility of the Full Council. The power to exercise these is either <i>reserved</i> to Full Council or delegated by them to committees or officers. • For example, <i>reserved powers</i> include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agreeing county strategy, Policy Framework and budget ○ Oversight of delegations that are statutory including Town and Country Planning and development, highways ○ Regulatory, and statutory, functions including planning, licensing, transport appeals, standards, personnel, governance and audit and pensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Leader is responsible for the exercise of all Executive functions. The Leader may arrange for these functions to be <i>discharged</i> by Cabinet Members, through their Cabinet Portfolios, or Senior officers. Executive decisions are taken in accordance with, and to implement, the Budget and Policy Framework. • Under the Local Government Act 2000 a Council Leader, may also <i>delegate</i> Executive council functions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A committee of the Executive ○ An Area Committee • The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 also specifies which functions are and are not the responsibility of the Executive.

The proposed governance for the Kent Council is summarised in the following diagram.



A single unitary council to maximise economies and minimise disruption

The single unitary council for Kent and Medway (the Full Council) would be the Non-Executive, strategic level decision-making body, which would set the overall county strategy and budget. The Full Council would also oversee several statutory Non-Executive committees.

The Leader and Cabinet would take executive decisions and be responsible for critical *people-based* and strategic services, to maximise economies of scale and minimise disruption for residents and critical services and functions. Cabinet Portfolios would be set for these countywide service areas.

County scale, local delivery

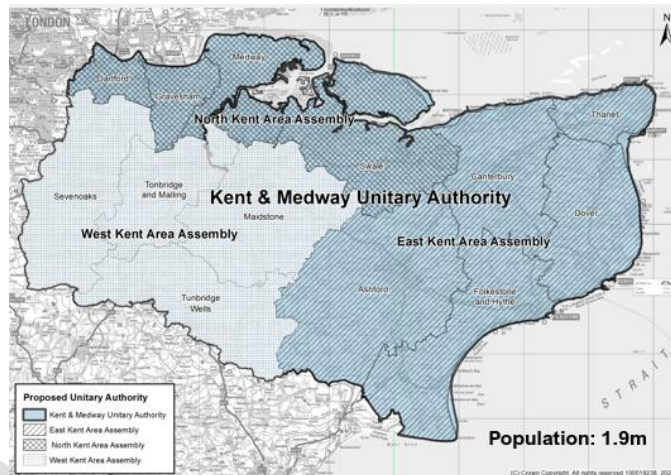
While the new council would operate at a countywide scale to ensure strategic oversight, resilience, and efficiency, local responsiveness would remain central to service delivery. Building on Kent County Council's proven model, the new council would continue to tailor services to local needs through area-based teams and embedded staff, enabling flexible, place-based delivery supported by countywide infrastructure. This approach reflects existing

practice in services such as district-based children's social work teams, adult social care community and neighbourhood teams and SEND provision, which are already delivered at a place-based level to reflect the needs of different communities. Operational delivery would, by default, follow the North, East, and West groupings of the Area Assemblies, ensuring alignment and simplicity while maintaining locally grounded service provision across Kent and Medway.

Locally responsive Area Assemblies

Area Assemblies would be local-level, Executive decision-making bodies. They would be committees of the unitary council that sit at area level – divided into North, East and West.

- North: Dartford, Gravesham, Medway & Swale, with a population of 663,111.
- East: Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe and Thanet, with a population of 661,559.
- West: Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks, with a population of 551,223.



Membership of the Area Assemblies would be the councillors of the Kent Council whose divisions are in the geographical areas that the Area Assemblies cover. Area Assembly Chairs would be selected by the Full Council.

The Kent Council would have flexibility in how it arranges the Area Assemblies, and over time, the initial boundaries could change incrementally to reflect community/population changes. For example, through large-scale housing development.

Area Assemblies would have delegated responsibility from the Kent Council Leader for some *place-based* Executive functions.

The services delegated to Area Assemblies could operate as Community Services Directorates with individual Community Services Strategies. Having a place-based approach would allow flexibility about how services are provided in different parts of Kent and Medway, so they can best meet the needs and views of local communities.

The Assemblies would be decision-making bodies, able to take Key Decisions, and would be responsible for delegated budget/s, strategy development and oversight of services delegated to them. Key Decisions would be discharged/signed by the Chair of the respective Area Assembly. In cases of no agreement, the ultimate decision would be taken by the Council Leader.

The new constitution of the Kent Council would set out the arrangements for Area Assemblies and include protections to provide long-term stability for the model.

The Area Assemblies would be rooted in the local areas that they serve. Their proposed geographical boundaries are therefore based on KCC's assessment of local identities and how people live their lives. This information is provided in detail in the Democracy and Local Identity assessment that KCC conducted to support its initial options appraisal (Appendix X). A North / East / West split was found to be the best way to bring together the existing building blocks of the districts in natural groupings. North Kent is characterised by the Thames Estuary, proximity to London, greater religious and ethnic diversity and strong maritime and cultural heritage. There are close connections between Medway and Swale. West Kent has affluent commuter towns and rural villages, with an entrepreneurial service-based economy and strength in agriculture. East Kent is home to Kent's coastal communities, with key sectors including creativity, life sciences, logistics. There are clear connections and shared identity across the main towns in the East Kent area. Analysis of travel to work, school and hospitals follows the same North / West / East patterns.

The Area Assemblies also mirror existing service delivery footprints, with most countywide council services currently delivered across East, North and West Kent. Importantly, the boundaries align well with the service delivery arrangements for key partners including the NHS Health and Care Partnerships (reflecting the close working between the Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley HCP and the Medway and Swale HCP in the North), and the three Kent Police Command Units. While economies of scale, resilience and capacity for transformation are better served by keeping statutory people-based services at the countywide level, practical opportunities for integration and prevention also exist at operational level, aligning services in localities and neighbourhoods. Many of the foundations of wellbeing and prosperity, such as the wider determinants of health and community safety and cohesion, can be more easily and quickly influenced at that level, bringing opportunities to prevent the escalation of needs and improving quality of life. By aligning the Area Assemblies with our key partners' operational teams, Area Assemblies will be empowered to work with partners to design and deliver local transformation projects to support wider Public Service Reform.

Case Study: Local responsiveness - Community Wardens

The Community Warden service was established over 20 years ago, working with partners such as Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue to address local crime and disorder. This service provides a locally responsive support within our communities in recognition that the geography of Kent is vast and local intelligence and presence is important to communities.

The wardens' trusted, community-based presence is highly valued not just by the public but also by partner agencies who rely on wardens' local knowledge and relationships, especially when engaging with residents who may be reluctant to speak with police or social services. This local trust had led to the expansion of their role to support KCC's responsibilities under the Care Act 2014, particularly in promoting wellbeing and preventing care needs

Public consultation has shown strong support for maintaining a community-based model with wardens across Kent's communities. This ensures local knowledge, strong links with

Community Safety Units (CSUs) and community groups, and the ability to respond quickly in crises. Wardens receive core training which also enables them to flexibly support county-wide needs during crises such as extreme weather, flooding, and emergencies like water outages.

Operating across a large scale geography allows for cross-boundary working and sharing of best practice; during the pandemic, wardens played a vital role in identifying local needs early, supporting isolated residents, and coordinating with Community Hubs, charities, and councils to deliver food, medicine, and hardship support. Their knowledge allowed parish councils and community groups to be supported at the neighbourhood level, whilst warden teams coordinated with district councils, and the service was supported and directed centrally from the County Council.

More recently, Parish Councils have begun sponsoring wardens to secure their presence locally. This model allows the service to grow despite financial pressures, with Parishes preferring the benefits of a centrally managed, well-trained and well-connected team that can effectively engage both locally and with wider services.

The Wardens service is an example of the County Council already operating at scale and at the local level, through established local networks, recognising the importance of having trusted advocates within our communities and the invaluable knowledge they can provide to our services and partners.

A streamlined and effective committee structure

The Kent Council would have statutory committees for non-executive functions. The current County Council has 11 statutory committees. In summary, these are:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Governance and Audit | 7. Scrutiny |
| 2. Pension Fund | 8. Health Overview and Scrutiny (HOSC) |
| 3. Personnel | 9. Selection and Member Services |
| 4. Planning Applications | 10. Electoral and Boundary Review |
| 5. Regulation | 11. Kent Flood Risk and Water Management |
| 6. Standards | |

The Kent Council would also include the addition of a Licensing Committee. Licencing is a significant statutory responsibility of District/Borough Councils.

The Kent Council could also choose to merge some statutory committees' functions. For example, the authority could operate a single Planning and Regulation Committee as some councils already do. However, this would be limited as certain committees (Scrutiny Committee, HOSC, Governance & Audit, Electoral & Boundary Review, Personnel, Selection and Member Services, Pension Fund, or Standards) are not enabled to merge.

The Council may also choose to arrange their committees so they are aligned with Area Assemblies' geographies. For example, area-based Planning Committees.

As well as the obvious and significant overall reduction in committees from moving from 14 councils to one, the Kent Council model offers an opportunity to reduce the number of non-statutory committees, such as the County Council's Cabinet Committees for specific service

areas, that exist under current arrangements. This would help streamline governance and support councillors to focus on critical issues and their role as community champions. A Budget and Performance committee would be retained by the Executive, to ensure capacity for oversight and decision-making on these key issues.

To facilitate the Area Assemblies' role in supporting locality and neighbourhood-based Public Service Reform existing committees such as Health and Wellbeing Board, Kent and Medway NHS Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Police and Crime Panel and Community Safety Partnership could be delegated to Area Assemblies to empower them to work with partners.

How responsibilities for services and functions could be arranged

The table below presents a very high-level, non-exhaustive, indicative split for the services and functions that would sit at a countywide level and those that would be delegated to the Area Assemblies.

Countywide <i>People-based & Strategic services / functions</i>	Area Assemblies <i>Some Place-based services / functions</i>
Corporate services and council strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Strategy (Strategic Statement), Policy Framework and budget • Advocating for Kent • Governance (Democratic services etc.) • Standards; Personnel; Governance & Audit; Pensions • Corporate support services and infrastructure 	Delegated budget/s and strategy development
Revenue and Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax benefit and collection • Housing Benefit administration • Property searches and Land charges • Car parks • Business Rates collection (National non-domestic rate) 	
Strategic planning (Housing / Infrastructure Strategy) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building development (Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)); Local Plan; Local Development Framework (LDF)) • Housing delivery • Minerals • Planning applications • Heritage (Conservation/listed buildings) 	Housing support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing options service (assessing local housing needs, advice and assistance) • Building control

Social Care (Adult's & Children's) and Safeguarding	
Transport strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highways and transport (traffic management) planning and operations Home to school transport and appeals; concessionary travel and public & community transport Cycle routes Road safety Street lighting & furniture 	Highways maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potholes etc.
Economic Development strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth Plan Skills 	Place-based Economic Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local economy support and development Tourism Supported Employment
Education / Children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools including infrastructure and school improvement Early years and childcare SEND strategy and specialist support 	Education / Children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Hubs
Regulatory services & Licensing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trading standards & consumer protection Taxis Alcohol Public entertainment Gambling 	Community services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Museums and Arts/Culture Leisure Markets Libraries and Registration Youth service Village halls / community facilities
Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance of public rights of way Coastal protection and watercourses (drainage) 	Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country parks and countryside management Protecting and enhancing the environment Grounds maintenance (parks and open spaces) Cemeteries and crematoria Street naming
Waste management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste recycling & collection/disposal 	Environmental Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pollution control and air quality Private sector housing standards Food hygiene and health & safety Street-scene (graffiti, litter etc.) Street cleaning and fly-tipping
Public Health strategy (via Director of Public Health)	Public Health delivery
Public protection	Public protection

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency planning and county resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community safety, including Community Wardens
Elections and electoral registration	
Archives	

Councillor numbers and support

Currently in Kent and Medway, there are a total of 658 Councillors covering Kent County Council (81), Medway Unitary Authority (59), and 12 district councils (518). Based on a population of c.1.88 million in Kent and Medway this currently provides one Councillor per 2,851 people. Based on an electorate of c. 1.35 million in Kent and Medway, there is one Councillor per 2,050 electors. For additional context:

- The highest population/electorate per councillor is Kent County Council which has 20,234 people and 14,266 electors per councillor (population 1,639,000, electorate 1,155,544)
- Medway Council has 4,792 people and 3,493 electors per Councillor (population 282,702, electorate 206,075)
- The lowest is in Sevenoaks where there are 2,018 people and 1,505 electors per Councillor
- The average population per Councillor across England is higher than the Kent and Medway average at 3,360.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has advised a minimum of 30 Councillors and a maximum of 100 Councillors for new unitary authorities, and that any exceptions to this need a strong justification.

A workable and representative approach

In determining the most appropriate size for the Kent Council, it has been important to strike the right balance between ensuring effective democratic representation for the people of Kent and Medway, and ensuring that the council has a workable number of councillors to support the efficient discharge of the council's functions.

As the Kent Council will represent a large number of people, our starting point has been to look at current unitary councils with higher ratios of people to councillors. Birmingham Council has the highest, with 11,420 people per councillor. Applying this ratio to the Kent and Medway population, this would mean 165 councillors for the Kent unitary. This is within the same range as the initial number of councillors for the Buckinghamshire unitary when it first formed (147).

However, 165 councillors could fail to strike the right balance of being a workable number for a single council. Taking the mid-point between KCC's current ratio of 20,234 people to per councillor and the Birmingham figure provides a ratio of 15,874. For the Kent and Medway population, this would give 118 councillors.

118 councillors
 15,874 people per councillor (Kent & Medway population of 1,875,893)
 11,430 electors per councillor (Kent & Medway electorate of 1,348,857)

118 councillors is a workable number for a large unitary, similar to the number of councillors in Somerset (110), for example.

From a starting point of 658 councillors currently in Kent and Medway, this is clearly a significant reduction. However, there are a number of reasons why this is a viable, workable number for the Kent Council.

At 11,430 electors per councillor, this is a reduction in the ratio of elector to councillor compared with KCC's current position of 14,266. This reduction will allow capacity for councillors to cover the services and functions provided by a unitary council, which are currently separated between the two-tiers. KCC used to have 99 councillors across Kent and Medway before Medway became a unitary authority in 1998, therefore a precedent has been set for a higher number of councillors in the county area.

It also represents a more realistic and modern view of the way in which people interact with their elected representatives and the communication and technology available that means large councillor to electorate ratios are outdated, unnecessary and inefficient.

Within the rationalised committee structure and streamlined governance processes proposed, 118 councillors is sufficient to ensure that the council's business can be discharged. Each councillor would sit on no more than three to four committees. This would include sitting on the Kent Council, their respective Area Assembly (a councillor will only sit on one Area Assembly) and either one or two other council committees.

The extent of responsibilities and constituency sizes for councillors of the single unitary council would be reflected in a proposed enhanced Basic Member Allowance of £23,000 per annum. This has been provisionally calculated by combining KCC's current allowance with the mean Basic Member Allowance across Kent's District and Borough Councils.

The total cost of basic allowances for all 658 councillors currently in Kent and Medway was £5,176,303 in 2024/25. The proposed Basic Member Allowance for the Kent Council at the enhanced rate of £23,000 would be £2,714,000. This would provide a considerable saving of nearly £2.5 million per year. Calculations are shown in Appendix X.

One of Government's aims of Local Government Reorganisation is to improve outcomes through fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents. The proposed number of councillors for the Kent Council strikes the right balance to deliver this aim. In order to support and empower them in their role, support arrangements have been built in to the Kent Council model.

Supporting and empowering councillors

Councillors in the Kent Council would be empowered and supported to have a meaningful role in the functioning of local government democracy. They will represent their local residents, act as leaders in their communities, and set and oversee policy for the running of

council services. As a streamlined and efficient council, the Kent Unitary would put in place the following arrangements to ensure that councillors can fulfil their role and serve their communities:

An enhanced single contact point for residents – adopting a ‘tell us once’ approach, a mechanism will be created that provides a simple and single route for residents to contact the council when they have a query, complaint or need to access a service – this portal would take full advantage of digital and AI technology and use appropriate channels so that such queries and issues can be processed and directed to the relevant service rather than increasing Member caseloads with what should be straightforward transactions.

Member support unit – this team will apply a triage approach to all enquiries received by councillors to ensure that they are directed to the right service, thereby reducing the time taken to address the matter directly by the service in question and only involving the councillor where this is needed, providing them with manageable caseloads.

An enhanced Community Engagement team – this will provide a bedrock of support for how the council, through its services and councillors, will comprehensively engage Kent and Medway’s residents and their communities, and set out in the Community Engagement section.

Stronger community engagement and empowered communities

LGR presents an opportunity to enhance how local government in Kent and Medway engages with residents by shifting from traditional ‘top-down’ models to more place-based and participatory approaches. However, in order to achieve this, community engagement must become an integral part of the culture for the Kent Council.

The focus though, will be on creating the conditions for meaningful engagement throughout the activity the unitary undertakes, not creating expensive and bureaucratic structures for community engagement. The Kent Council will not create unnecessary forums and layers of governance, but instead use existing forums and governance such as Town and Parish Councils, strengthening their role in community engagement and intelligence gathering and ensuring that strategic and meaningful engagement is embedded as an approach in how the council operates. By adopting this streamlined model, the authority will avoid the cost and complexity of a vast neighbourhood area board structure, which would not be feasible for a large unitary authority, instead delivering targeted engagement while maintaining strong local connections.

Enhancing our community engagement

The Kent Council would introduce a Strategic Engagement Framework setting out clear principles that define how the authority engages with communities and partners. It would provide a consistent set of expectations for residents and stakeholders, whilst also equipping staff with a practical toolkit of engagement methods to support inclusive, effective, and responsive practice.

Community engagement will be a core strategic function embedded in the authority’s decision-making processes. From the earliest stages, the Kent Council will actively involve

the communities it serves, ensuring their voices shape the policies, services, and outcomes that affect their lives

Principles for Community Engagement

The principles presented are illustrative and intended as a starting point for discussion. The final Framework would be developed by the Kent Council collaboratively with residents and partner organisations, ensuring it reflects their shared values and a joint commitment to meaningful engagement.

Co-design and Early Involvement

- Engaging communities from the beginning when shaping the vision, priorities and service models of the new authority
- Using the toolkit of engagement methods, such as citizen's assemblies, formal consultation and Leader's Question Time to ensure diverse voices are heard
- Co-producing proposals with residents and partners so their voices are heard.

Inclusive and Accessible Engagement

- Community engagement must reach all residents of Kent, including those from under-represented and seldom-heard groups
- Staff must consider multiple forms of engagement techniques and channels to ensure all residents are empowered to participate in feedback and service design, considering issues such as digital exclusion or language barriers
- Balancing digital engagement methods with in-person consultation and co-design.

Productive Partnerships

- Collaborate with partners including the Town and Parish Councils and the Voluntary and Community Sector to build on their knowledge and expertise of the local communities
- Develop and build stronger community networks with those organisations to embed collaboration into service design and delivery.

Place-Based Engagement

- Consider the specific needs of the communities and neighbourhoods in the county to ensure that local initiatives are reflective of the communities they will serve
- Engage with residents through the channels they already know and trust, such as town and parish councils, local associations, and partnerships, rather than introducing new, unfamiliar or duplicative structures for communication.

Transparent and Open Communication

- Build strong mechanisms for feedback to demonstrate to partners and residents how their views have helped to shape council decision making
- Communication will be clear and consistent across the authority.

Learning and Development

- Staff will be supported and trained to understand the importance and benefits of engagement and how it can support their work and relationships with residents and partners

- Create a culture within the authority for staff to learn from each other and share insights within the Council and across partners on best practice to ensure continuous and effective engagement
- Provide information to residents on how they can be involved in their local communities and Council decision making.

Town and Parish Councils

Although Parish and Town Councils are independent institutions and not a substitute for meaningful community engagement by local authorities, they remain an integral part of many local communities. The Kent Council would be committed to working in partnership with Parish and Town councils to embed community engagement by building on their local knowledge, networks, and trusted relationships. Recognising the vital role that they play in providing hyper-local insight and community engagement, the Kent Council can build on the existing relationship with Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and increase support to it to support effective Parish and Town Councils. This would also recognise the rurality of Kent and how important local Town and Parish Councils are to reflecting the needs of very diverse communities across a large geography.

Community Governance Reviews (CGR)

Several of Kent's district and borough councils - Ashford, Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling, Thanet, and Tunbridge Wells - are currently conducting Community Governance Reviews and formal consultations in 2025 (partly in preparation for LGR) to determine the potential establishment of new Town or Parish councils, particularly in unparished areas such as Tonbridge, Margate, and Royal Tunbridge Wells.

It should not be assumed that communities will want a Town or Parish council. Canterbury City Council's 2024 review decided against forming a Whitstable Town Council due to lack of public support and concerns about extra costs and governance. Similarly, Medway's 2017-18 review found a Rochester Town Council unviable, as residents felt current community networks were sufficient, and feared increased bureaucracy, duplication, and higher taxes without clear benefits.

In areas of Kent that remain unparished or without town councils following unitarisation and the community governance reviews mentioned above, the Kent Council will work with residents and local community groups to determine how they wish to be represented and how they prefer to engage with public services.

Productive Partnerships

A core principle of the proposed Strategic Engagement Framework would be a pledge from the Kent Council to work in productive partnership.

The Kent Council would work to build meaningful and equal relationships with the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and other key stakeholders. This approach goes beyond tokenistic involvement: partners would be engaged as valued equals, with their expertise, insights, and experience directly shaping decisions and service delivery. The Kent Council would foster open dialogue, shared goals, and mutual accountability to ensure collaboration is genuine, impactful, and rooted in trust.

It is recognised that while the VCSE sector plays an essential role in engaging residents and delivering services, its capacity is often limited, and the sector itself is diverse and sometimes fragmented. Existing forums provide a strategic voice, but it is important to acknowledge and respond to this complexity.

Currently, the VCSE sector must navigate different partnership arrangements across Kent County Council, Medway Council, and the 12 district and borough councils. The creation of a single unitary authority offers a unique opportunity: VCSE organisations will have one strategic partner at the local government level, enabling greater consistency and clarity. The addition of a dedicated Community Engagement Team and a robust, authority-wide Strategic Engagement Framework will also create new opportunities for localised engagement, ensuring that all communities and partners can contribute meaningfully to shaping services and outcomes.

An enhanced Community Engagement Team

This approach would be supported by the creation of an enhanced Community Engagement Team. This is important not just to ensure successful transition to the new structures with minimal disruption to residents, but to pave the way for a sustainable relationship between the unitary and its communities in order to ensure that residents do not feel disenfranchised by the changes to local government in their areas and are empowered to share their voice, influence decisions and help shape the future of their local services.

The new Community Engagement Team would play a pivotal role in helping residents navigate and connect with the emerging Kent Council. This team would serve as a direct and responsive link between communities and the new council, ensuring that local voices are heard, needs are understood, and services are shaped around people.

In addition to leading direct engagement efforts, the team would provide guidance and support to staff across the authority on using the newly developed Community Engagement Toolkit, a flexible resource offering a menu of engagement methods tailored to different audiences and service areas. This would empower services to choose the most effective and proportionate approach to engaging residents, partners, and stakeholders.

It is proposed that the team could consist of 27 Community Navigators and three Community Engagement Managers, aligned with the structure of the three new Area Assemblies, and will be directly accountable to the Kent Council. Their remit would cover the following key areas of focus:

- The community navigators would be embedded into communities so they can solve problems in local areas and help residents and local partners navigate council services and signpost to partners
- They would refer issues and feedback intelligence to services, including linking into the teams that would sit under the Area Assemblies to deliver place-based services
- They would need to reach and engage hard to reach, marginalised or under-represented residents and communities, ensuring that engagement is widespread and effective across the Kent and Medway area

- Through proactive outreach and a trusted local presence, the team would help remove barriers to participation and amplify voices that are often overlooked in traditional consultation and communication models.

Community Engagement Toolkit

By creating a complementary Community Engagement Toolkit, staff will be empowered to translate the high-level principles outlined in the Strategic Engagement Framework into meaningful and practical engagement with partners and residents. The toolkit will provide staff with clear guidance and adaptable community engagement approaches to ensure consistency across the organisation.

Participation levels can vary significantly between areas, leading to unequal influence and more vocal or resourced communities may dominate discussions, marginalising quieter or under-served groups; by utilising a variety of different engagement methods, both online and in-person, the Kent Council will be better placed to engage with a larger and more diverse cohort of Kent residents.

Traditional committee formats may not appeal to younger residents, digitally engaged communities, or those with accessibility needs; the engagement approach should include multiple methods of communication and engagement to avoid excluding voices that prefer alternative engagement methods such as online platforms or pop-up informal events. Some of the proposed community engagement methods are outlined below and provided in more detail in Appendix X. They have been shaped by learning from best practice in other areas of the country.



Digital Engagement – Utilising tools such as social media to share news and communications with Kent residents and organisations.

Public Consultations – Building on current practice used by Kent and Medway Councils, both informal and formal types of consultation should be utilised across a range of digital and non-digital channels.

Accessible Online Committee Meetings – Continuation of current practice, this allows the public to stay informed in Council business and decision making.

Leader's Question Time – Used with positive impact in other local authorities, this method would allow Kent residents to pose questions to the Leader of the Kent Council and have a timely voice on the issues that concern them the most.

Participatory Budgeting - A process where residents help decide how public funds are spent, giving communities a direct voice in local priorities and decision-making.

Citizen Advisory Boards - A collection of individuals selected to be representative of the wider population, meeting for the purpose of open discussion and focussed questioning to make an informed recommendation on a key topic before disbanding.

Community Workshops and Focus Groups – Building on current practice used across Kent and Medway, this method can foster dialogue, gather in-depth insights, and build trust through direct interaction with residents.

Volunteer and Civic Projects – Engage with residents whilst improving local communities together through civic action and volunteering days.

Youth Engagement – Continuation of the youth council model as well as learning from new research and methodologies.

Cultural and Community Events – Engage with residents in informal settings to celebrate shared values whilst having an opportunity to gain important views and insights.

10. Devolution

In submitting our proposal, we acknowledge that our preferred model LGR does not conform to the government's current devolution policy that, to receive devolved powers, a single unitary authority and Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) cannot be established on the same geographical footprint. However, the government has not published a timetable for further rounds of devolution for two-tier areas, which indicates their policy ambitions for the remainder of this Parliament are unclear. In the absence of a clear timeline, and having set out the reasons why it is imperative that a strategic authority is maintained given Kent and Medway's scale, unique challenges and strategic significance, our approach provides a practical way forward.

KCC would welcome the devolution of responsibilities and budgets to an appropriate body in Kent and Medway. Given the context in which we are working, the most appropriate body is the Kent Council that would be created through this LGR proposal. In this model, there would be no need to create a separate MSA, as the Kent Council would provide the strategic capacity necessary for devolution that Government is seeking to embed across the country.

The reality is that Kent and Medway is already operating at the appropriate spatial scale. Our geography, at 1.88 million, is in excess of the 1.5 million set by government for an MSA. We are also a single Functional Economic Area (FEA) with a unique, strategic position between the international gateways to the continent, the wider South East and London.

We already have a successful partnership structure and collaborate with key county-wide partners, including the NHS, Police, and business groups, which fragmenting Kent into multiple unitary authorities would negate.

Kent and Medway has consistently proved we deliver and at scale. There is nothing in the Devolution Framework that could not be delivered by the Kent Council working within the established partnerships in place. The following are examples of responsibilities in the Devolution Framework that are already being delivered in Kent and Medway:

- The Kent and Medway Economic Framework is a Local Growth Plan in all but name
- We are preparing to deliver a Spatial Development Strategy (SDSs)
- The Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce is leading on a Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)
- Kent County Council leads on developing and implementing local transport strategy via the [Local Transport Plan](#)
- Services like the [Kent and Medway Growth Hub](#) and the [Kent and Medway Economic Partnership \(KMEP\)](#) and [Business Advisory Board \(BAB\)](#) provide Business Support.

Kent and Medway has a well-established track record of convening partners across public services, business, and community sectors to create solutions to complex challenges and seize opportunities for the county. Acting as a strategic body - akin to a mayoral authority – and drawing on scale, infrastructure, and well-established relationships across public services, business, and community sectors, Kent and Medway are able to deliver strategic

outcomes for the county and wider region. Whether responding to economic shocks, coordinating complex service delivery, or unlocking investment, we have demonstrated our ability to lead with clarity, build consensus, and drive action.

Case Study: Discovery Park, Sandwich – Convening Power in Action

Kent County Council's convening power was exemplified in its response to Pfizer's 2011 decision to close its European research and development headquarters in Sandwich, which threatened 2,400 jobs and the loss of a nationally significant science and innovation site. Chaired by the Leader of KCC, a dedicated Task Force was swiftly convened, bringing together Government, local authorities, Pfizer, and investors. This collaborative effort led to the purchase of the site by Discovery Park Limited and the launch of the £35 million Expansion East Kent scheme, unlocking investment and job creation across the region. The site has since evolved into a thriving science park, home to over 180 businesses and more than 3500 employees from across the county and beyond, anchoring itself as a vital research and development hub between London and the continent.

KCC's convening role was again critical in 2023 when Pfizer announced its exit from remaining facilities at Discovery Park. A second Task Force, led by KCC, coordinated a rapid response involving central government, local partners and industry stakeholders. This resulted in Asymchem Laboratories acquiring the site and retaining key talent (69 former Pfizer staff, with a further 200 planned), while KCC supported the creation of two pharmaceutical start-ups through the Kent & Medway Business Fund.

This case study illustrates how KCC's strategic leadership and convening power enable it to respond to challenge and unlock new opportunities for Kent—bringing together the right people, at the right time, to secure successful outcomes for the county and beyond.

A priority for the Kent Council would be to seek a bespoke relationship with central Government. Central to this would be the Kent Council being granted a fully Integrated Settlement, along the lines of those currently available to Established Mayoral Combined Authorities.

In return, the Kent Council would work in partnership with Government to accelerate our work with wider partners to design and deliver the crucial Public Service Reform (PSR) ambitions, detailed in the local government White Paper. This would help us address our distinct geographical and socio-economic challenges, mitigate the challenges and maximise the potential our unique area has.

11. Better outcomes for people and place

Public Service Reform

It will not be possible for all future challenges facing local government to be addressed or mitigated as a result of LGR. However, Public Service Reform (PSR) must remain an end goal, to review, reset, and fundamentally change the way in which our services are delivered to residents.

The Kent Council will deliver better services for our people and our places, with the scale and authority to deliver. Through one strategic vision across Kent and Medway, it will have a strong and unified voice to advocate for residents' needs. This will ensure Kent and Medway can continue to build on the strong relationships developed with government but provide the foundations for even greater engagement and influence on the things that matter most to residents. A Kent Council will be able to effectively lobby for the needs of our county with an even greater evidence base through an enhanced, single dataset, ensuring that policy, strategy and services are effective at meeting the real needs of our unique county.

We have assessed the scale of challenge and opportunity presented by LGR to identify those areas where the Kent Council could have the greatest impact. These fall across four main themes:

1. Ensuring the sustainability and responsiveness of our services by shaping and strengthening the markets that our services rely on,
2. Focusing on prevention rather than reactive services to improve outcomes for our residents,
3. Spatial planning and infrastructure delivered at the right scale to ensure communities grow in a sustainable way,
4. Delivering value for money and unlocking greater financial capacity for community based services which improve quality of life.

However, to deliver real PSR, these themes will of course be inter-connected. Essentially, the transformation of services will be centred around improving outcomes for both people and place, with equal importance, leading to the delivery of high quality and sustainable services across a significant public service area and building a better quality of life for Kent and Medway residents.

The key levers to deliver transformation that the Kent Council will utilise include:

1. Service design transformation (co-designing with stakeholders, including service users and frontline staff to understand needs, behaviours and experiences to reimagine and improve how services are designed, from awareness to delivery to feedback).
2. Service delivery transformation (multi-faceted approaches to improve efficiency, accessibility and user satisfaction).
3. Technology and digital transformation (including using new insights from the use of data and AI).
4. Business process transformation (mapping and re-engineering workflows, adopting new digital tools to streamline operations).

Better outcomes for our places

Economic strength and creating a platform for growth

The Kent Council will support the Kent and Medway functional economic area that is already recognised by Government. A Kent Council creates clear strategic oversight and leadership of Kent as a place and to draw investment into the County, providing a strong voice to engage with government and deliver on the Government's ambitions for growth. It will also enable one strategic plan across Kent and Medway, with one voice advocating for the needs of Kent residents and ensuring that we create sustainable communities, with the infrastructure needed to support thriving local areas.

Existing economic strategies such as the [Kent and Medway Economic Framework](#), the Kent and Medway Working Plan and the emerging Local Growth Plan exist at the Kent and Medway level recognising that impactful, strategic economic development work and the local economy, operates at that scale. Strategically important programmes such as the delivery of business support through the Kent and Medway Growth Hub and sector and cluster development activity require a critical mass of businesses to function optimally.

The Kent Council will preserve the long-established, successful partnerships that exist to support investment into the County, for example through the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, the area's Local Growth Board. The Kent and Medway economy is largely SME-based with very few large employers, the scale of one Kent Council strengthens the County's position to attract important investment and to ensure that any growth projects are underpinned by an important strategic understanding of the county's needs, and that one area does not have an unfair advantage.

Kent and Medway's local distinctiveness, creativity and natural environment all contribute to the vibrancy of its visitor economy. Kent and Medway has a large tourism sector, made up of 6,000 businesses, supporting over 70,000 jobs (11% of employment in the county) that generate £4 billion in gross value added. The outstanding coastline, landscapes and internationally significant heritage assets make an important economic contribution, to tourism, leisure and quality of life but are also Kent and Medway's globally recognised 'Garden of England' brand. This brand is also what draws people to live and work in the county, bringing much needed skills, expertise and entrepreneurship into the local economy.

The Kent Council also enables skills to be embedded in wider growth strategies so that housing and infrastructure are underpinned by clear plans to develop the local workforce. Delivering programmes such as Skills Bootcamps and Connect to Work at the whole county level provides opportunity to link the supply side of the labour market with the demand through the county-wide Local Skills Improvement Plan. Services to support skills and employment will continue to be offered at the Kent and Medway level to cater for travel to work patterns across the geography and to ensure that gaps highlighted in the Local Skills Improvement Plan can be filled by a wide pool of candidates from the wider area resulting in enhanced productivity for firms and career opportunities for residents.

The existing Business Advisory Boards will be able to continue to operate at scale to support the skills agenda, whilst the sub regional partnerships that already exist at the area level, East, West and North will be enhanced by the creation of three area assemblies. This will allow for more specialised, localised skills provision such as manufacturing in the North of

the county, to also be considered at the area level to reflect the differing local economies and to create local support for highstreets and small local firms such as retail businesses. Hyper-local tourism offerings can also be promoted at a smaller level for example around a particular town supported by a strong 'destination management' level structure across Kent and Medway which brings together the different specialisms of smaller areas into a coherent, county-wide visitor offer.

The strategic oversight of the Kent Council and the shared intelligence it will hold will greatly benefit the investment opportunities of the County as a whole and the economic health of Kent and Medway as a place.

Strategic planning and infrastructure at the right scale to deliver

The case for strategic planning is well-documented, particularly in grappling with the most significant issues facing the planning system. Whilst partnership arrangements have been in place to support a more coordinated approach and established tools such as the Countywide [Accommodation Strategy](#) (KCC ASC) and the [Kent and Medway Housing Strategy](#), published by the Kent Housing Group have gone some way to alleviate issues presented by the fragmentation of responsibility, in a county that is growing as rapidly as Kent and Medway, a truly integrated approach is needed to meet the significant and complex infrastructure needs of the area

The Kent Council will greatly improve strategic infrastructure planning by providing a single, strategic point of leadership and decision-making, a single and consistent approach with developers and other partners, and a critical mass of capacity and expertise. It will also enable Government to deliver on its housing targets.

The table below shows that in the multi-unitary options, there will be at least one Unitary where the data suggests there will be significant challenges to deliver against housing targets. In contrast a single unitary spreads housing growth out across a larger geographical area and allows for the better delivery of housing targets in a way that is sustainable. It should be noted that neither Option 4d or Option 5a could be modelled because they do not adhere to current district boundaries on which housing targets are set and monitored.

The table shows the percentage of the new annual housing target that has been delivered on average over the last six years and the percentage of the four-year housing target that has been identified for development and has been included in the Housing Information Audit.

Table: Most Challenging Unitary Authority for housing growth delivery in Each Local Government Reorganisation Option

LGR Model	% of New Annual Target Delivered Annually (2017-2023)	% of 4 Year Housing Target Identified in Housing Information Audit
LGR Option 1a	Kent - 62%	Kent - 89%
LGR Option 3a	East Kent - 59%	West Kent - 78%
LGR Option 4b	East Kent- 52%	West Kent - 67%
Kent & Medway	Kent - 62%	Kent - 89%

However, alongside the delivery of housing targets and importantly, the Kent Council will enable the preparation of a single, statutory strategic plan. When done well, housing and the necessary infrastructure it requires shapes how people feel about the place they live and ensures communities can grow in a sustainable way. The Kent Council will establish housing and economic growth requirements in response to local needs and provide choice and opportunity across a far broader geography when determining how those needs are met, taking into account the genuine planning constraints which exist in parts of Kent and Medway. Building on the success of the Kent and Medway Infrastructure Mapping Platform (IMP), the single unitary will have a robust evidence base and platform to build its strategic plan, which will be integrated with the ambitions of our Transport and Growth plans. This platform will enable officers in the Kent Council to identify infrastructure gaps and funding opportunities, whilst enabling early and collaborative discussions on spatial development plans across the geography.

The Kent Council will also enable simplified planning processes - such as Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) by consolidating authority, reducing negotiation complexity, and ensuring transparency and efficiency for developers and communities alike. It also allows for a county-wide infrastructure strategy that equitably distributes developer contributions across both high-growth and underinvested areas.

Furthermore the Kent Council will have a much stronger resource base, able to attract the skills and expertise to deliver high quality housing and infrastructure plans. The alignment of policies, decision making processes and monitoring frameworks will result in a more consistent approach to planning and will make it easier to undertake a greater level of community engagement through Parish and Town Councils, in the planning process. Shared data, information, use of digital technologies and consistent design principles across the new single authority will lead to better delivery of services and associated cost savings. With the full integration of services under one governance structure it will provide optimal authority and oversight to effectively plan and deliver infrastructure that facilitates and supports more innovative service delivery models. For example the co-location of functions such as housing, infrastructure and social care will mean that we can better ensure that people-based services can meet the housing needs of their service users in the future particularly around supported accommodation (of which there is currently a shortage) but also look for opportunities to provide much needed accommodation for children in need and to make better use of Disabled Facilities Grant, all of which will have a transformative impact on people's lives.

The Kent Council will enable a future planning and infrastructure approach that balances strategic oversight with local accountability, but importantly with the resources needed to deliver.

Transforming our delivery: Planning at the right scale to support delivery: integrating spatial and social care accommodation sufficiency planning

Councils with adult social services responsibilities, have a duty to ensure that adults with care and support needs have access to suitable accommodation, and that there is a diverse, sustainable and high-quality range of accommodation care and support options in their

areas. This requires councils to understand the current and future demand and supply for different cohorts of the population.

The Kent Council will bring together statutory duties related to housing, including spatial planning, the production of local plans, development management, strategic housing and land allocation. It will also manage access to social housing (including supported living) through waiting list management and Disabled Facility Grants (DFG) which are used to make home adaptations to support independence.

Moving to the Kent Council will facilitate strategic alignment of related functions, by improving coordination between housing need, land use and availability, infrastructure planning (such as ensuring accommodation is near transport hubs) and people-based service requirements including sufficiency of accommodation provision. The Kent Council will be able to explore housing options across a larger geographical area, ensuring provision is in the right place through intelligent planning. Resident engagement and co-production will be at the centre of this, facilitated through the area assemblies and enhanced community engagement approach, to ensure that all plans are informed by the needs of local communities.

This will lead to better access to housing, in the right place, with the right facilities available, maintaining independence, improving quality of life and reducing pressures on social care and health.

Greater financial capacity for community based services to improve quality of life

It is clear that there will be one off costs from transitioning to a new authority, whatever the model, whilst councils are also starting from a position of fiscal challenge. However, the Kent Council offers the greatest potential to drive efficiency savings by streamlining operations, reducing duplication and optimising resource allocation. Not only will this enhance service delivery, but it will ensure that taxpayer's money is utilised more effectively and can be spent on those community based services which have the greatest impact on residents quality of life.

With the increasing drain of people-based services on local government budgets, less resources are available to invest in universal services such as waste, highways maintenance and leisure or community services, the services that make our places communities. For the majority of residents across Kent and Medway who do not receive social care support, this is felt as an imbalance that contributes to a negative perception of quality of life and value for money from local councils. The Kent Council will bring together those place based services which are currently split across different tiers of government, increasing accountability and freeing up resources to be able to invest in services and spaces that make a difference to peoples lives' whether that is local parks, green spaces, roads, town centres or public rights of way. Through the three Area Assemblies and with a greater focus on community engagement, it will better facilitate services that reflect local nuances and respond to local needs, building communities that people are proud to live in.

The Kent Council will have the flexibility to scale up or devolve down service delivery to remove inefficiencies in systems that were not designed with the resident or business at the centre. For Kent and Medway, a single unitary will also enable the gains from the Fair

Funding review, to increase spend at front line delivery, as intended. Whilst the authority's greater financial resilience will not solve the issues around the financial sustainability of local government, it will create stronger foundations to manage risk.

Transforming our delivery: Public perception of value for money through visible services

LGR presents opportunities to improve delivery of environmental services such as graffiti removal, litter management and street cleaning, and consequently improve public perception of increased value for money for council services.

The Kent Council will consolidate all environmental service responsibility into a single council. It will provide an opportunity to merge disparate service standards and practices across former councils to offer consistent service levels and standardisation of response. Pooling resource (funding, staffing, vehicles, equipment) from 14 separate councils into one large single unitary authority offers opportunity for economies of scale for centralised procurement e.g. for cleaning equipment and vehicles etc. It offers the chance to re-tender or re-negotiate contracts, and to align contracts with a single council strategic vision and performance expectations.

Area assemblies offer the opportunity to inform local service delivery through improved feedback and engagement loops, reflecting community priorities, as well as present a more local targeted approach to campaigns to change poor environmental behaviours. There is also an opportunity to consolidate reporting and data systems to better understand hotspots and trends, enabling targeted interventions, and more effective performance monitoring. For example, the Kent Council can use GIS mapping to identify litter-prone areas and schedule cleaning accordingly. Innovation and technology will be better utilised to improve efficiencies and responsiveness, e.g. using AI to detect graffiti via CCTV. Moving to a single unitary option presents opportunity to further embed good environmental practices into wider council strategy and policy, for example, alignment with prevention and well-being goals.

This means residents will have one point of contact for reporting concerns, reducing confusion and improving satisfaction. The Kent Council will have oversight resulting in more strategic investment in environmental services. Locally, service delivery will be shaped via community engagement and area assemblies to ensure that residents' views are addressed. Improved environmental service delivery will mean cleaner streets and enhance day to day living in the County.

Better outcomes for our people

Sustainable service delivery

Rising demand, funding pressures and unresponsive provider markets are creating unsustainable people-based services. The Kent Council will unlock economies of scale and support more strategic commissioning and enable 'invest to save' initiatives that deliver long-term value. Not only this but it will be coterminous with public sector partners, such as Kent Police, NHS Kent and Medway and will see an increase in partnership working enabling

more integrated and person-centred care, to address the underlying causes which lead to high cost service interventions, supported by community-level work with the Area Assemblies.

A single unitary will provide a simpler point of engagement for partners such as NHS and Police for supporting people who have overlapping needs and create the basis for more joined up planning and integrated pathways. Where currently existing joint service arrangements are in place with partners such as the NHS, a single unitary will not only support the continuation of these e.g. Section 75 arrangements and joint funded care packages but through strengthened partnerships provide more opportunities for integrated working.

The ability to better balance service demand and market capacity across a broader geography will help to equalise demand for adult and children's social care and housing support, reduce disparities in deprivation and age profiles, and optimise the use of care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) placements. This balance will enhance operational resilience and allow for more strategic resource allocation. Balanced demographics will also support long-term sustainability by enabling more predictable commissioning and reducing service pressure.

Given the ongoing pressures on workforce across the social care system, a single unitary will support workforce sustainability and planning and avoid duplication. It will be able to better manage the expected growth in demand for social care services, particularly in areas with higher predicted increases, and allows for both a broader financial base to withstand demand surges, and in terms of managing staffing resource. Scale is vital for specialist services and those that the local authority relies on, specialist providers and their specialist skills to deliver. The Kent Council maintains the coherence to influence the market and ensure that markets are stable and responsive to the populations needs, creating better services for residents. It will have an enhanced power to negotiate to drive up standards and drive down costs, more effectively tackling issues such as provider fee disparity within the market for the benefit of the taxpayer. Enhanced data sharing will also enable greater quality monitoring to ensure that issues such as provider failure are flagged early and are able to be dealt with swiftly to the benefit of those in receipt of services.

A prevention first approach

A crisis focused system and lack of a preventative model of service delivery within social care and health has led to a cycle of escalating issues and increased pressure on people-based services. This has curtailed the ability to strategically plan, invest in prevention, or pursue service integration. The Kent Council offers the opportunity to deliver significant public service reform, to refocus from crisis management toward prevention. By bringing together services such as housing, leisure, education and social care under a single unified structure, it simplifies integration with external partners and creates new opportunities. As a result, it will help to reduce the demand on crisis services, improve outcomes for individuals and families, and reduce the number of 'hand offs' as people get passed around different agencies increasing the risk of people slipping through the net, which often creates delays to support resulting in more costly interventions. For example an individual with housing and debt needs but who also requires mental health and social care support, will access this

support through one organisation without the need to tell a difficult and complex story multiple times, risking delays to their support.

The Kent Council removes a post code lottery of quality and access and instead offers the ability to deliver excellence across Kent and Medway, without differing levels of resource and capability. Importantly it will also maintain the partnerships which effectively deliver statutory services such as safeguarding, creating opportunities for greater collaboration, with an enhanced sharing of data to both deescalate and predict need in the most complex of cases.

The Kent Council will have greater capacity for support functions such as data collection and reporting, analytics, audits, quality assurance and practice development to provide strategic oversight and insight into where to target prevention resource, identify emerging trends and patterns, and forecasting and predicting need. There will be more scope for area-wide data sharing agreements with strategic partners to really understand and inform how to best address needs of residents and before they escalate. All of these functions will help in delivering the right prevention services to the right people in order to drive down longer-term demand into public services.

Transforming our delivery: Public Services Prevention

LGR can facilitate a 'prevention-first' approach for residents by further integrating council functions and by working more closely with key partners.

The Kent Council's enhanced community engagement mechanisms will help facilitate local engagement. A co-production approach to service design and service delivery will be underpinned by hard evidence; the Kent Council would hold all resident data across all council services. This would allow for more comprehensive and efficient information and data sharing within the authority and with partner agencies such as the NHS and Police. AI could be used to analyse the collated data to identify cohorts to further target resources and activities, such as falls prevention in older adults, obesity in primary school children, or youth anti-social behaviour.

For example, strengthened information sharing and coordination across health, social care and housing services could help people in addiction recovery to find appropriate accommodation and reduce their risk of becoming homeless.

This approach would lead to improved health and well-being outcomes, by helping to meet needs early on resulting in reduced escalation. In turn this would reduce demand on statutory functions, create a more sustainable and efficient system and deliver longer term cost avoidance.

Person centred delivery

A single unitary will of course remove duplication in the local government system but a single unitary is not simply about moving the boundaries, it is about designing services that work for the residents of Kent.

The Kent Council will maximise the opportunities for delivering services that are responsive to people's needs, which are intelligently designed and not dictated by structures. Where

local delivery matters to residents and will produce the best outcomes, the council will have the flexibility to join up services locally and take a holistic approach. Whilst the Kent Council will have scale to deliver standardised approaches where appropriate, it will also have the resources to deliver personalised services where they are essential- where individual needs are paramount.

With joined up services, a Kent Council will be able to establish multidisciplinary teams around individuals needs for services such as housing, public health, leisure and social care, which will enable a transformative approach for people with complex needs but also for the wider determinants of health within our county.

It will also enable greater partnership working, utilising the expertise and knowledge of partners who are embedded in, and understand their communities. For example, for key partners such as the Voluntary and Community Sector, a single Kent Council will be much easier to navigate without the arbitrary boundaries of local government, which charities often operate and deliver across. Through the three Area Assemblies and enhanced engagement approach there will be an opportunity for greater co design at the local level with smaller VCS organisations who can provide invaluable insights into service design and delivery, resulting in more responsive services.

The Kent Council will have a simple council structure, making it easier to navigate for our residents, with one website and one central source of information. Likewise, residents would have a single point of contact to their local Member to raise concerns and to suggest improvements to council services (e.g. local Highways improvement projects). In addition, opportunities to create a single case work management system across the new unitary authority, will also make it easier for officers to share information and create more person centric and holistic services.

The future services of the Kent Council will through the dual power of scale and personalised support better meet the individual needs of our people and our places.

12. Implementation planning

The successful delivery of Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway requires a structured, well-managed approach to both transition and transformation. Once the Government confirms the direction for Kent and Medway, implementation will be jointly planned and delivered in collaboration with partner Councils across the county and with MHCLG. This section outlines Kent County Council's proposed high-level plan, based on the preferred single-unitary model. The plan is structured around four key phases, underpinned by a robust programme management framework and a transparent governance structure designed to ensure accountability and clarity throughout the process.

The success of implementation will be the basis upon which public and partner perception of the Kent Council is built, therefore, it is crucial that activity undertaken across all phases supports the delivery of long-term organisational ambitions and ultimately the development of an effective, efficient and sustainable new authority that residents and stakeholders have confidence in.

Implementation guiding principles

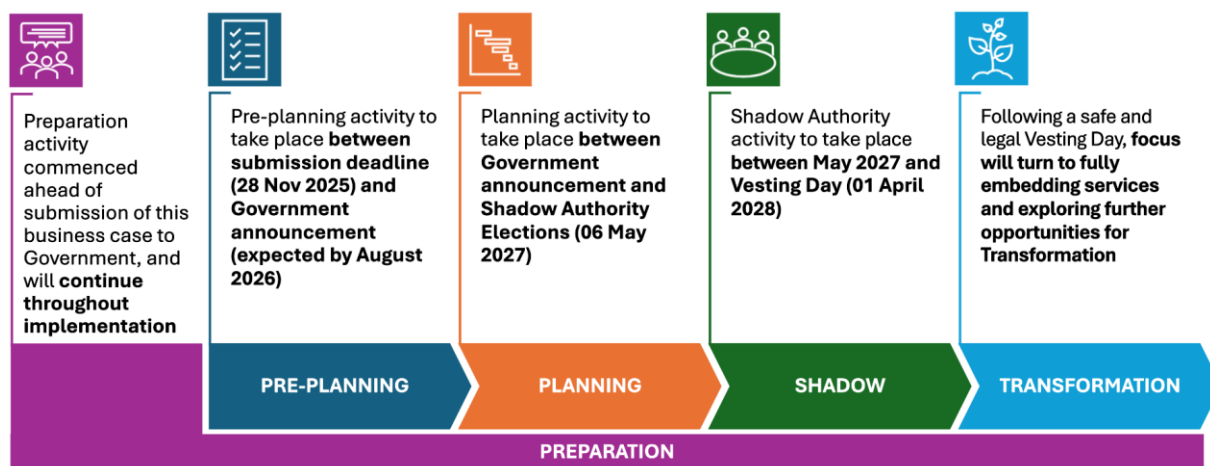
Principles will be developed to underpin our approach to implementing LGR in Kent and Medway. They will act as a framework for decision-making to ensure that transition is delivered consistently in a way that supports our residents, staff and communities.

KCC's proposed principles:

1. **Resident Focussed** - We will continue to put the needs of residents and communities first. Disruption to the delivery of essential services will be minimised and preservation and strengthening of local identity and local voice will be prioritised.
2. **Minimise Risk and Disruption** - KCC would seek to explore the option of continuing authority status to help reduce transitional risk and ensure disruption to our services and residents' lives is minimised.
3. **Resilient workforce** - We will support our staff to deliver high quality services to our residents throughout the process. Careful consideration will be given to succession planning and knowledge transfer to ensure we retain valuable experience and talent in our workforce as we transition to the new authority.
4. **Transparent** - Implementation will be open and transparent, with clear lines of governance, scrutiny, and decision-making in place.
5. **Value for Money** - Resources will be managed carefully, balancing short-term transition costs with long-term financial sustainability and efficiency.
6. **Future-focussed** - The transition will not simply "drag and drop" existing arrangements but will seek to draw on the strengths of predecessor councils and maximise opportunities for transformation, with a focus on efficiency, through innovation and improved ways of working to create a unified, cohesive and resilient organisation.
7. **Partnership and Collaboration** - We are committed to working collaboratively. Strong relationships with partners will be maintained and enhanced to deliver better outcomes together.

8. **Legality and Safety** - All actions and decisions will comply fully with statutory and regulatory requirements, ensuring the legal integrity of the new authority and the continued safety and protection of our residents, staff and communities.
9. **Continuous Improvement** - We will continue to learn from our own experience and the experience of others and use this knowledge to inform transition and ongoing improvement, ensuring the new council is able to adapt and evolve to meet future challenges.

Four Phases of Implementation



Preparation (Before and throughout implementation)

If granted, KCC could act as the 'continuing authority', building on the foundations of the largest existing organisation will minimise transitional activity, time and cost and disruption to residents. KCC will continue to prepare, ensuring where possible systems and services are future proofed and in the best position possible to support efficient transition. Preparation activity will span all implementation phases, as impacted authorities continue to find service efficiencies and protect the financial resilience of the organisations so that the Kent Council is set up to succeed.

Preparation activity may include:

- Undertaking a review of data, systems, subscriptions, contracts, strategies and policies to ensure they are robust and fit for both current and future transitional purposes
- Review of corporate processes to ensure they are flexible to the needs of transition e.g. business planning, performance reporting and internal audit
- HR review, ensuring information is up to date and correct e.g. contracts, job titles and job specifications
- Engaging members, staff, trade unions, partners
- Engaging other local authorities who have been through LGR to understand lessons learned
- Documentation of Risks and Issues linked to LGR Implementation.

Pre-Planning *(Between business case submission and government decision)*

From the point of business case submission, a pre-planning phase will commence. Given the scale and complexity of LGR implementation it is important that time is used effectively while awaiting the announcement of Government's decision for Kent and Medway. The focus of this phase will be planning and building the foundations upon which the Implementation Programme will be delivered, and ensuring authorities' individual and collective readiness for transition.

Pre-Planning activity may include:

- Develop outline of Programme Implementation Plan
- Planning and resourcing of workstreams
- Governance planning and agreement (including mapping and agreement of decision making protocols)
- Setting up programme architecture
- Continuation of work to align and consolidate systems, contracts, assets and change activity
- Ongoing communications and engagement activity
- Ongoing liaison with government.

Planning *(Between government decision and Shadow election)*

Following announcement of Government's decision for Kent and Medway, the Planning phase will commence. This phase will focus on the development of a detailed Transition Implementation Plan and the mobilisation of programme architecture that will support its delivery, including joint-decision making arrangements.

Activity in this phase may include:

- Mapping county and complementary district functions to identify possible efficiencies and opportunities for aggregation
- Development and agreement of a detailed Transition Implementation Plan
- Mobilisation of Implementation Workstreams and development and agreement of workstream action plans
- Continuation of work to align and consolidate systems, contracts, assets and change activity
- Ongoing communications and engagement activity
- Ongoing liaison with government.

Shadow Authority *(Between Shadow Authority election day and Vesting Day)*

Shadow Elections aid a safe and legal transition by ensuring those who will be responsible for governing the new council are accountable for decisions on transition arrangements. Following Shadow Elections (6 May 2027), the focus will be on ensuring the Kent Council is ready to operate safely, legally and effectively on Vesting Day. Crucially in this phase, decisions will be made to ensure operational readiness from day one, which includes but is not limited to decision-making around senior leadership roles, operating models, service and staff transition, buildings, systems and data. Plans will be laid to assist decision-making that is beyond the Shadow authority's jurisdiction and will require enactment after the new unitary authority is fully operational.

Activity in this phase may include:

- Establishment of Shadow Executive arrangements
- Senior staff appointments
- Governance arrangements
- Financial arrangements
- Operating Model
- Budget setting for first year of new authority
- Service and staff transition planning
- Testing and user acceptance activity
- Community engagement governance
- Consolidation and rationalisation activity (assets, data and systems)
- Transformation - invest to save and PSR activity
- Ongoing communications and engagement activity
- Vision, identity and branding activity.

Transformation (*Beyond Vesting Day*)

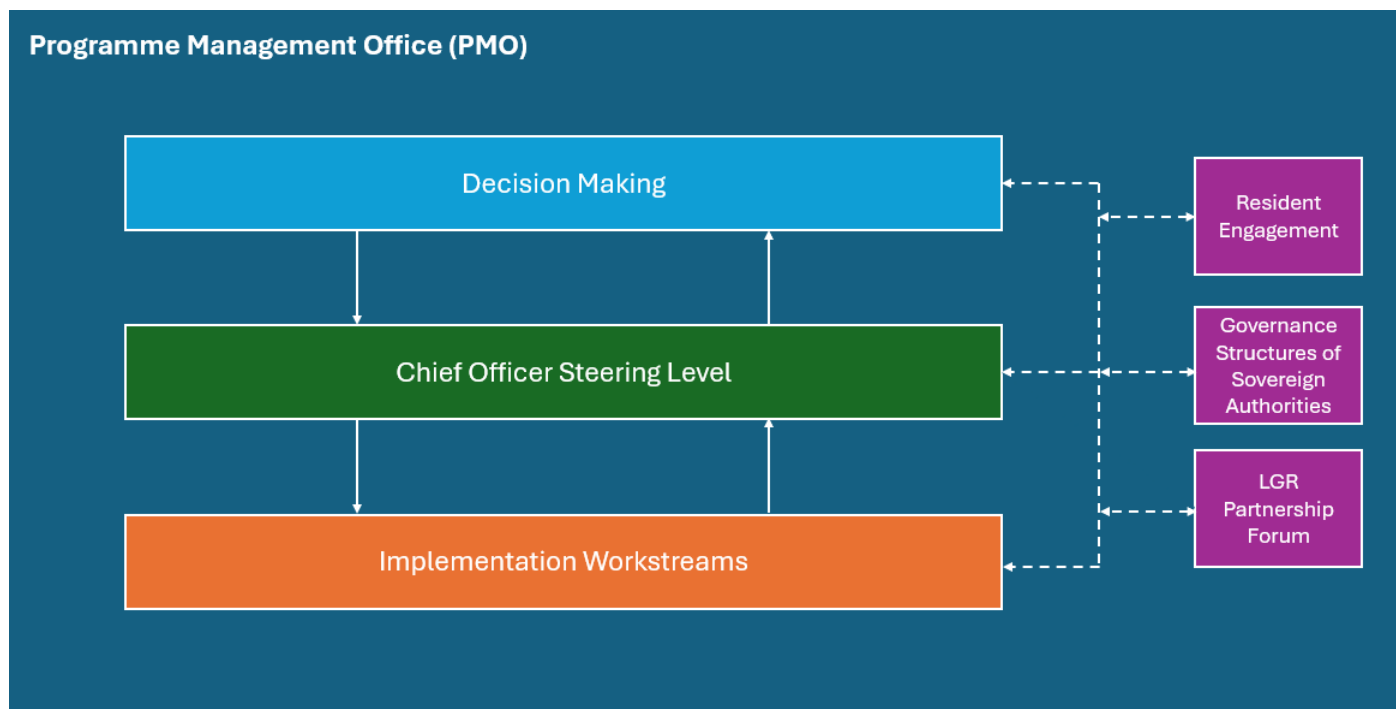
As of Vesting Day (01 April 2028) the priority will continue to be assuring safe, legal and efficient delivery of services. Closure activity will take place in legacy authorities while work to fully integrate services and embed new operating models in the new unitary authority will continue. Opportunities for further transformation and innovation, focussing on efficiency and the delivery of high-quality services, will be pursued which may include the establishment of a transformation programme.

Activity in this phase may include:

- Safe and legal delivery of services
- Setting of corporate priorities and objectives
- Closedown of legacy councils, systems, platforms etc
- Evaluation and feedback activity
- Continued programme and change management capacity
- Continued transformation – including invest to save, PSR
- Workforce training, development and integration activity
- Branding, communication, and resident engagement campaigns.

Programme governance

A proposed structure for implementation governance arrangements is set out below, a final structure will be developed and agreed jointly with partner Councils across Kent and further refined and aligned to meet specifications of the Structural Change Order (SCO) as required.



Programme Management Office (PMO)

This structure will be supported by a Programme Management Office (PMO), led by a Programme Manager. The role of the PMO will include:

- Leading on the design and development of a full Implementation Plan
- Coordinating the delivery of the Implementation Plan and facilitating progress reporting
- Providing support to all levels of the governance structure as required, which may include but is not limited to information sharing, monitoring, facilitation and drafting
- Developing and maintaining key programme documentation e.g. to manage risks, map dependencies and track resources and benefits
- Co-ordinating cross-cutting themes and issues across workstreams, including identification of opportunities for public service reform
- Engaging stakeholders, including other authorities to understand LGR implementation lessons learned.

Decision Making Level

An appropriate joint board will be created as the responsible decision-making vehicle for LGR Implementation for Kent and Medway. Membership of this Board will be established appropriately to meet the requirements necessary to grant decision making powers. Decision-making protocols for implementation will be mapped and agreed during the pre-planning phase of implementation. Sovereign authorities will still need to take key decisions through their own formal governance process, sufficient time and support for which will be built into the programme delivery / implementation plan.

Chief Officer Steering Level

A Chief Officer Steering Group will be created to provide oversight to the activity undertaken by the PMO and Implementation Workstreams, and assurance and advice to the decision-making board. The role of the Steering Group would include:

- Reviewing the implementation programme plan and ensuring it is progressing in regard to the business case approved by MHCLG
- Signing off activity as appropriate (that does not require formal decision)
- Overseeing the delivery of workstream action plans and ensuring collaboration across workstreams is facilitated to address cross-cutting issues as required
- Responding to challenges and issues as they arise.

Implementation Workstream Level

The following workstreams will be established, the membership of which will be made up of representatives from across impacted authorities. Some workstreams may also have representatives from external partners where relevant. A lead will be allocated for each workstream, and they will feed information into and receive feedback from the Officer Steering Group as required. Each workstream will develop and deliver a detailed transition action plan, progress on which will be monitored through the workstream working groups and the LGR Steering Group.

The workstreams will be underpinned by a clear programme management approach, which will drive a consistent focus on timely delivery, risk management, stakeholder engagement and benefit realisation.

- 1. Governance, Democratic Services and Legal**
- 2. Finance**
- 3. Human Resources and Organisational Development**
- 4. Data and IT**
- 5. Assets and Property**
- 6. People Based Services**
- 7. Place Based Services**
- 8. Communications, Community Engagement and Partnerships**

LGR Partnership Forum

The purpose of the forum will be to ensure that there is significant and meaningful co-design and consultation with key stakeholders. Partners will be encouraged to advise on design and implementation of relevant areas of service delivery and assist with the engagement and wider understanding of the new arrangements in the community. Feedback from this group will be reported to all levels of the transition / implementation governance model as required. It is proposed that membership could include representation from (but is not limited to) the following sectors:

- Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC)
- Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Organisations (VCSE)
- Kent Community Foundation
- Kent Police
- NHS Kent and Medway
- Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
- Trade Union representation
- Education representation (including Further and Higher Education).

13. Conclusion

We believe that this business case sets out a strong and compelling argument to Government for a new Kent Council covering Kent and Medway. Whilst many areas may rightly claim their unique qualities and challenges, as we have shown Kent and Medway's unique challenges go beyond this county, impacting the country and therefore Government. Our scale, resources and expertise have kept these challenges largely managed and mitigated within the county and this must not be lost through the unnecessary fragmentation of structures and services.

The Kent Council would have an even greater platform upon which to mitigate risks, overcome future challenges but importantly reform our services so that the residents of Kent and Medway can have the best quality of life possible.

The Kent Council would deliver high quality and sustainable services, with not only the commitment to transform our service delivery but with the financial sustainability, resources and scale to achieve this.

We believe strongly that the Kent Council is the most viable option for Kent and Medway. It would balance financial resilience, service quality and local empowerment to deliver economic prosperity, sustainable growth and excellent public services to our people and communities.

One Kent. One Council. Our Unique County.

14. List of Appendices

The following appendices will be included with the final Strategic Business Case.

Evidence Base:

- KCC financial assessment report
- KCC engagement assessment report
- KCC democracy and local identity assessment report
- KCC transformation assessment report
- KCC devolution policy assessment report
- KCC housing growth analysis report
- KCC Analytics information pack
- Newton report on implications for people-based services
- PwC report on local government reorganisation in Kent
- KPMG financial analysis and methodology

Options Appraisal:

- KCC detailed scoring table
- KCC rationale for scoring
- KCC initial options appraisal of option 1a
- KPMG options appraisal
- KPMG scoring dashboard

Supporting Documents:

- Member Allowance calculations
- Community Engagement Toolkit
- Equality Impact Assessment

This page is intentionally left blank

LGR Resident Survey, Interim Report based off PARTIAL RESULTS

**Results from first 14 days of fieldwork:
Tue 30th Sep to Tue 14th Oct 2025**

Survey closes: Sun 26th Oct 2025

Matt Wagner, Chief Analyst
Anita Winther, Analyst Manager

Executive summary

The Government has asked the councils in Kent to submit proposals to them by 28th November 2025 for 'local government reorganisation' and we want to include the views of residents in this. Therefore Kent County Council is conducting a survey of Kent and Medway residents to gather views on a potential reorganisation of the councils in Kent. This report is based on **partial results**, collected between Tuesday 30th September and Tuesday 14th October 2025. The survey closes on Sunday 26th October 2025, after which a full report of the final results will be produced. The partial results indicate the following key findings:

Opinions on LGR and council size – There are mixed opinions in relation to whether people think that local government in Kent needs major reorganisation or not. Similarly, there is not a clear strong preference for whether people would prefer a smaller, more local council or a larger, potentially more cost efficient council. However, there are differences by age group, with under 35s favouring a larger council, assuming this comes with economies of scale, and those over 56 favouring a smaller council. Those aged 36-55 had balanced preferences.

Furthermore, for those supporting the idea of a major reorganisation, there is a strong preference for 'council services managed by a larger council covering a bigger area, but potentially at a lower cost than a smaller council'. The opposite is true for those who would prefer to retain the existing councils. For those who are unsure about reorganisation, a similar proportion said they would prefer a larger council as a smaller one.

Belonging and connections – The data indicates that the majority of people have a strong sense of belonging at all geographical levels from local village/town up to Kent as a whole. In terms of connections between districts, Option 1a by definition preserves the most inter-district connections, followed by Option 3a and then Option 4b. It is not possible to model this for the two options that include boundary changes.

What residents want – Residents expect a broad range of competing priorities to be delivered, including quality, value-for-money, local representation and resident involvement. This means any future council model must balance these factors, though the preferred balance may vary by service.

Views on cost implications – There is a clear expectation that whatever option is taken forward must result in a system that costs less than continuing with the current one. However, within this context, some would be prepared to pay more council tax if it resulted in decisions being made more locally than in another option. Although a slightly higher proportion would still choose lower council tax over more local decision-making.

Contents

Executive summary.....	2
1 Introduction.....	4
1.1 Local Government Reorganisation in Kent.....	4
1.2 Rationale for conducting the public survey	4
2 Methodology	5
2.1 Survey design and distribution.....	5
2.2 Exclusion criteria.....	6
2.3 Response rates.....	6
2.4 Statistical analysis.....	6
2.5 Analysis of free-text questions	7
3 Survey findings.....	7
3.1 Opinions on LGR and council size.....	7
3.1.1 Is a major reorganisation needed?	7
3.1.2 Opinions on council size.....	8
3.1.3 Reasons for and against major reorganisation	10
3.2 What residents want from LGR	12
3.2.1 What people want from their council	12
3.2.2 Opinions on cost implications	14
3.3 Belonging and connections	15
4 Conclusions	18
5 Appendices.....	19
5.1 Appendix A: Maps of the proposed LGR options	20
5.2 Appendix B: Overview of demographic data.....	23

1 Introduction

1.1 Local Government Reorganisation in Kent

At present, most of Kent operates under what is known as a 'two-tier' council structure. This means that some services are delivered by a district or borough council (e.g. bin collections, housing, planning, leisure centres) and others are provided by Kent County Council (e.g. social care, education services and highways). Council tax currently helps to fund services provided by both the county and district/borough councils, as well as contributing to the police and fire services and parish/town councils (where these exist).

Within Kent, Medway operates differently. Medway council is a 'unitary' authority, meaning they are responsible for delivering **all** local government services within Medway.

The Government intends to simplify this system by creating larger unitary councils that deliver all services in an area, replacing Kent County Council, Medway Council and the twelve district and borough councils. This process is known as Local Government Reorganisation, or LGR.

This would mean council services that are currently managed by district/borough councils being managed across a larger area. It would also mean services that are currently managed by Kent County Council being broken up and managed across smaller areas, unless the Government decides that a single unitary authority covering the whole of Kent should be created.

The Government has asked the councils in Kent to put forward proposals for how many unitary councils there should be and what areas they should cover. These must be submitted by 28th November 2025.

There is not currently agreement among the existing councils in Kent on how many unitary authorities there should be in Kent if LGR was to happen, or what the boundaries of those authorities should be. There are currently five proposals in Kent that are expected to be submitted. Option 1a, Option 3a and Option 4b all adhere to existing district boundaries. Option 4d and Option 5a include boundary changes. The maps showing the configuration of each of these options can be found in the Appendix.

1.2 Rationale for conducting the public survey

The rationale for conducting a survey of residents of Kent and Medway about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is to ensure that the voices and views of those affected by potential changes are heard and included. The survey provides an important opportunity for residents to share their

opinions and priorities regarding the reorganisation of local councils in Kent. Following the submission of the business plans, there will be further opportunities for resident engagement, including through the government's formal public consultation on the LGR options for Kent.

2 Methodology

2.1 Survey design and distribution

The survey was designed to capture a broad range of resident perspectives across Kent and Medway, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. Questions were carefully structured to elicit both quantitative data and qualitative insights, allowing respondents to express their priorities and concerns regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). To facilitate ease of participation, the survey was distributed online using Snap Surveys, a robust and secure digital platform. Snap Surveys enabled the survey to reach a wide audience efficiently, supporting both desktop and mobile users, real-time monitoring of response rates and robust statistical analysis of the results.

The survey is completely confidential. Respondents were not required to give their name so their identity will not be known. Responses are only reported grouped with other participants.

Distribution channels included direct email invitations to residents via Let's Talk Kent, promotion via KCC's website, and social media outreach to maximise awareness and engagement. Printed copies of the survey could be requested for those unable to complete it online.

The survey was shared widely through various channels but was ultimately a self-selecting survey, meaning you are more likely to get responses from people who are particularly interested in the topic. This means respondents may be more informed around the subject of LGR than the average resident, but also that the responses may not fully represent the views of those people who are less interested in how local government is structured.

Due to constraints on time and budget, it was not possible to conduct a gold-standard, fully representative survey of residents, which would have required random sampling and targeted outreach to ensure all population groups were proportionately included. This methodology would have required a third party research organisation with the resources and capacity to carry out this type of research.

2.2 Exclusion criteria

The survey was exclusively for residents of Kent and Medway, meaning people who live outside the area were unable to complete the survey. Businesses and partner organisations were also not able to participate in this survey, however they will have the opportunity to input through other channels.

2.3 Response rates

The partial results for this interim report were run at 5pm on Tuesday 14th October. The number of responses included within the analysis is 1,652.

As of 14th October, there were at least 80 responses from every district, with many getting considerably more. Folkestone & Hythe was the most over-represented district, whereas Medway was the most under-represented. Most other districts were fairly close to their population proportions.

Table 1 – Number of respondents by home district

Home District	# responses	% responses	% Target Pop	Population*
Ashford	147	9%	7%	140,936
Canterbury	167	10%	8%	162,100
Dartford	84	5%	6%	125,011
Dover	98	6%	6%	119,768
Folkestone & Hythe	191	12%	6%	112,411
Gravesham	82	5%	6%	110,671
Maidstone	157	10%	10%	187,767
Medway	90	5%	15%	292,655
Sevenoaks	123	7%	6%	122,748
Swale	140	8%	8%	158,379
Thanet	172	10%	7%	142,691
Tonbridge and Malling	116	7%	7%	136,853
Tunbridge Wells	85	5%	6%	119,694
Grand Total	1,652	100%	100%	1,931,684

* Population source: Office for National Statistics, 2024 mid-year population estimates

2.4 Statistical analysis

Any results commented on in this report have been tested for statistical significance and have been found to be significant, unless otherwise stated.

2.5 Analysis of free-text questions

The survey contained two free-text questions. Due to the limited time available to analyse and report back on the survey results, these free-text responses have been summarised with the help of a large language model (an AI tool). The information remains within KCC's secure infrastructure and is protected by enterprise-grade security and privacy controls. These summaries have been reviewed for accuracy, including through the random sampling of responses to check for consistency.

3 Survey findings

These findings are based on partial results, collected between Tue 30th Sep and Tue 14th Oct 2025. The survey closes on Sun 26th Oct 2025. It is possible that the findings could change materially once all the responses are analysed following the survey closing.

Most groups are reasonably well represented within the survey, however we do have under- or over-representation amongst different age groups. In particular, 16-35s are under-represented and 56+ are over-represented within the respondents. For this reason, we will present the results to some of the key questions broken down for these different age groups, especially where the prevailing opinions vary between the different age groups.

3.1 Opinions on LGR and council size

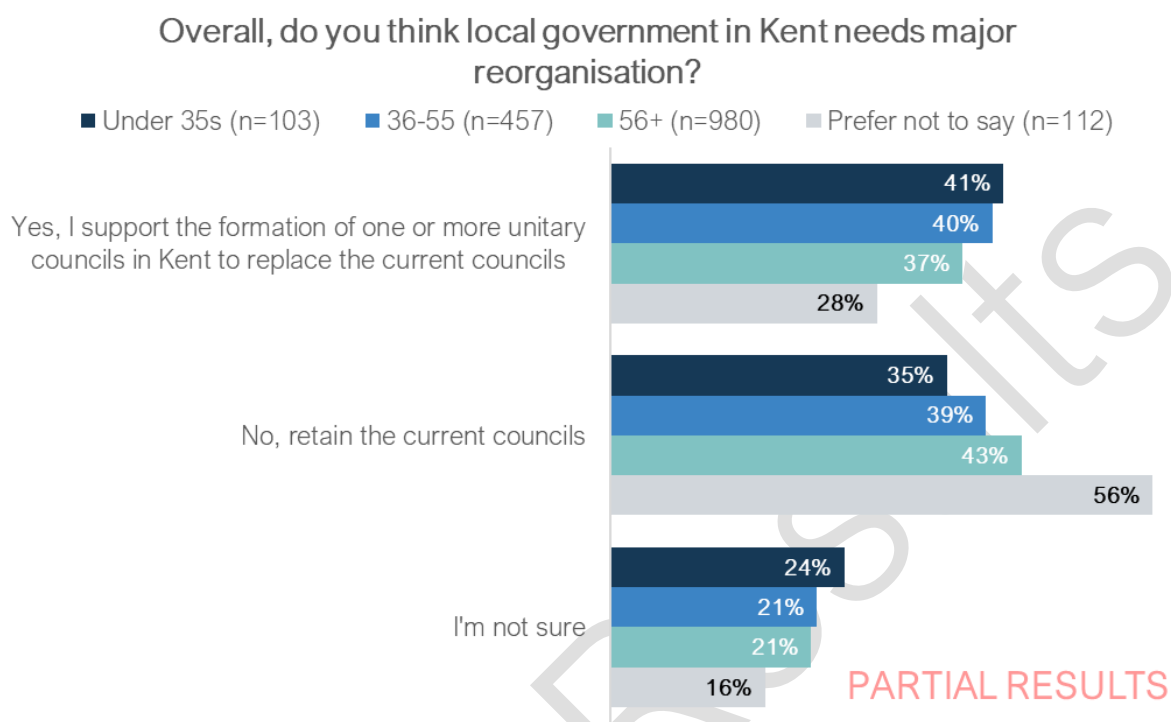
3.1.1 Is a major reorganisation needed?

Respondents to the survey were asked the question 'Overall, do you think local government in Kent needs major reorganisation?', the result of which are shown broken down by age group in Figure 1. Within each of the broad age groups there is split opinion on whether major reorganisation of local government in Kent is a good idea overall, with both the yes and no options receiving support.

Only respondents aged 56 or over and those that chose not to specify their age group had a statistically significant¹ preference – both with a larger proportion favouring retaining the current councils. Under 35s and 36-55s had more respondents who supported the formation of one or more unitary councils, however this preference was not large enough to be statistically significant, particularly due to the smaller sample size in the under 35s group.

¹ Using a two-tailed binomial test.

Figure 1 – Opinions on the need for major reorganisation, by age group

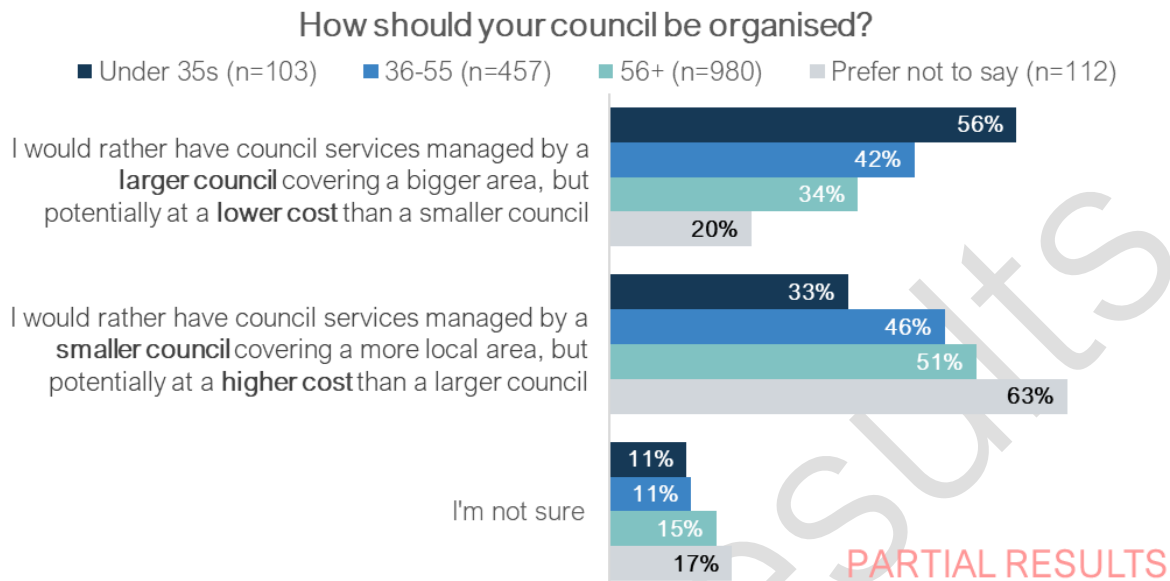


3.1.2 Opinions on council size

In terms of the size of any future councils, there are again mixed opinions. Preferences are different for different age groups, as shown by Figure 2. Under 35s typically favour a larger council that would potentially deliver at a lower cost, whereas those over 56 typically favour a smaller council even if potentially at a higher cost. Those aged 36-55 had balanced preferences (the small difference observed is not statistically significant²).

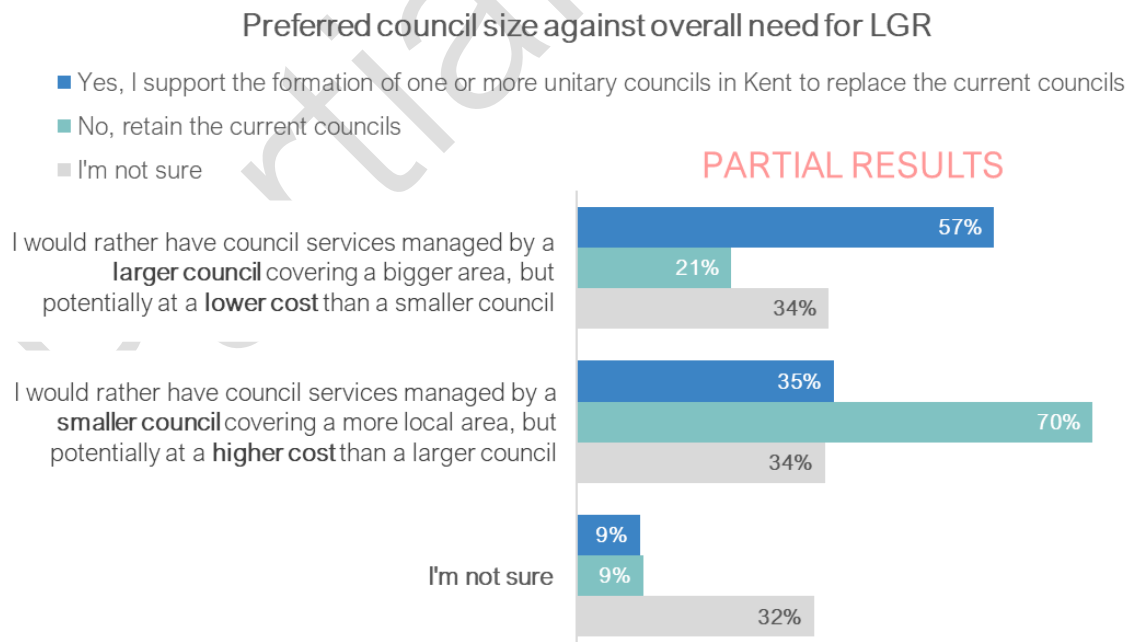
² Using a two-tailed binomial test.

Figure 2 – Opinions on council size, by age group



In Figure 3, respondents' preferences in terms of the size of their council is compared to whether they thought local government in Kent needs major reorganisation.

Figure 3 – Opinions on council size, compared to support for reorganisation



For those who support the idea of a major reorganisation, there is a strong preference for “council services managed by a larger council covering a bigger area, but potentially at a lower cost than a smaller council” (57% preferring larger vs 35% preferring smaller). The opposite is true for people who would prefer to retain the existing councils (21% preferring larger vs 70% preferring smaller). For those who are not sure about whether local government needs major reorganisation, a similar proportion said they would prefer a larger council (34%) as a smaller one (34%).

This may indicate that there is a prevailing sentiment amongst those who favour more localised representation and service management that LGR will result in a worse situation than the current state. Whereas those who favour larger, potentially more cost efficient, services believe LGR could improve local government.

However there is still a sizeable minority who support LGR and would prefer smaller councils even if potentially at a higher cost.

3.1.3 Reasons for and against major reorganisation

After being asked whether they thought local government in Kent needs major reorganisation, respondents were asked to give the reasons for their answer. Looking at the reasons given by those who would **rather retain the current councils**:

These respondents often value local representation, knowledge, and accountability. Many believe the current district/borough councils are best placed to understand and respond to the unique needs of their communities for the services they deliver. There are concerns about losing local identity, community focus, and direct access to councillors, especially outside the larger towns or cities. Respondents highlight Kent’s diversity and argue that “one size fits all” solutions would not work.

Many are sceptical that reorganisation would deliver the promised savings or efficiencies, pointing to the risks of disruption, increased costs, and reduced service quality. There are concerns about the complexity of merging systems, staff, and assets, and about the risk of service deterioration during the transition in particular. Some are concerned about the financial sustainability of unitary authorities due to the disaggregation of county council services, particularly in East Kent, if separated from some of the more affluent West Kent districts.

Many express either satisfaction with the current system or a suspicion of change, saying they see no compelling reason for change or suggesting that the current system, while imperfect, is better than the unknowns of reorganisation.

For those who **supported the formation of one or more unitary councils**:

Supporters of forming one or more unitary councils in Kent believe this change would bring greater efficiency, cost savings, and clearer accountability. They argue that the current two-tier system is confusing, wasteful, and leads to duplicated roles and bureaucracy. Many see unitary councils as a way to streamline services, reduce overheads, and improve integration across services like planning, transport, housing and social care.

Some favour a single authority for the whole of Kent, citing economies of scale, strategic benefits and the capacity to deal with complex challenges. Others argue for three or four unitary councils to reflect the distinct identities and needs of different areas, concerned that too large an authority could be remote and unresponsive.

There is optimism that reorganisation could unlock devolved powers, strengthen Kent's economic position, and allow for more targeted support to disadvantaged areas.

Overall, supporters see reorganisation as a route to a more effective, responsive, and value-for-money local government.

For those who responded **"I'm not sure"**:

Respondents who are unsure about major reorganisation express a strong need for more information, evidence, and clarity before forming an opinion.

They perceive both potential benefits – such as economies of scale and more joined-up services – and drawbacks, including the risk of losing local responsiveness and increased bureaucracy. Many are wary of the costs, disruption, and uncertainty that reorganisation could bring, and want to see robust analysis and practical examples of how changes would work in practice.

Kent's size and diversity are seen as complicating factors, and there is concern that a single approach may not suit all areas. While some value local representation, others are open to change if it can be shown to deliver real improvements for residents.

Some respondents simply do not feel strongly either way, or do not have enough experience or knowledge to form an opinion. They may be satisfied with current arrangements, or feel that changes won't make much difference to them personally.

A comparison across these groups indicates that individuals form opinions based on their assessment of the potential benefits, drawbacks, risks, and opportunities associated with this complex and undefined change, as well as the different importance they assign to each factor. However, many people express that they, quite understandably, do not have all the information and analysis they would need to make a fully-informed judgement. Therefore, understanding what factors people feel are particularly important, as well as any red lines they may have in terms of cost

implications, will support the assessment of what options are most likely to deliver what the residents of Kent and Medway want.

3.2 What residents want from LGR

3.2.1 What people want from their council

When weighing up what they want local government reorganisation to deliver in Kent, respondents said it is **particularly** important to them that their council...

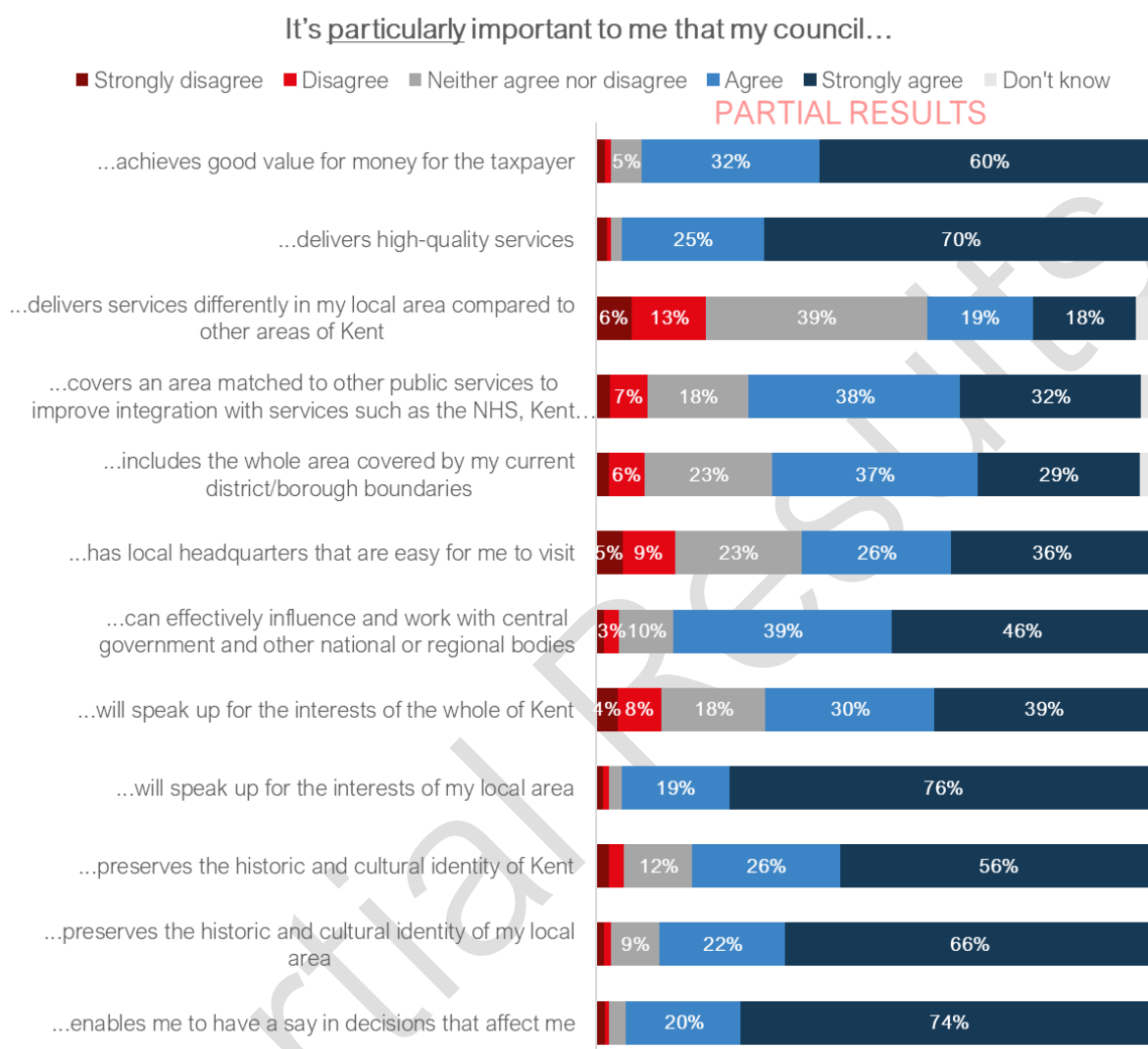
- ...will speak up for the interests of their local area (95% agree / strongly agree)
- ...enables them to have a say in decisions that affect them (94%)
- ...delivers high-quality services (95%)
- ...achieves good value for money for the taxpayer (92%)

Delivering services differently in my local area compared to other areas of Kent was the only statement not to receive a majority support (with 37% agree / strongly agree; 39% neither agree nor disagree; 19% disagree / strongly disagree).

The rest of the options all had a strong majority agreeing, as is shown in Figure 4. In addition to the areas mentioned above, these covered topics such as:

- historic and cultural identity
- working with central government
- covering an area matched to other public services
- their future council including the whole area covered by their current district/borough boundaries
- their local headquarters being easy to visit

Figure 4 – Respondents’ priorities for what they would want LGR to deliver



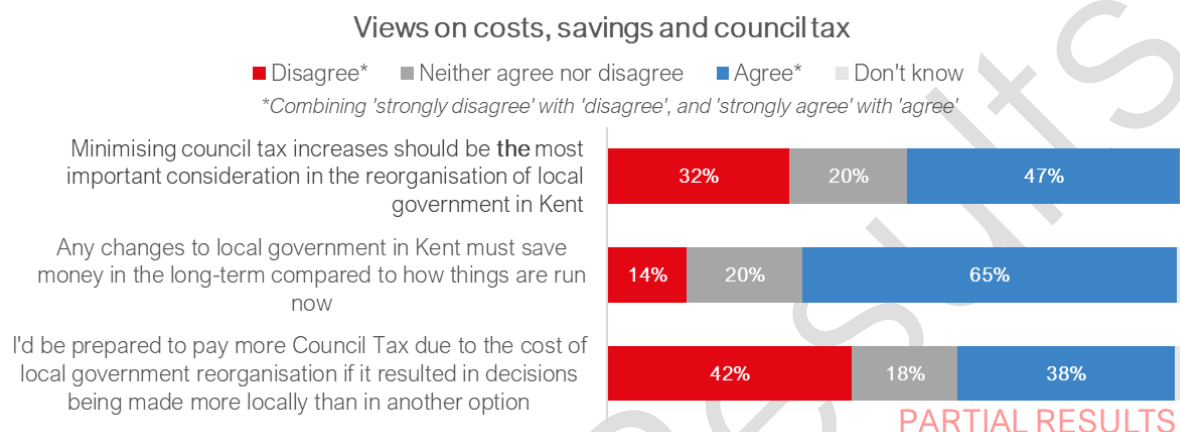
Given the majority of people agreed or strongly agreed with almost all of the elements being particularly important to them, this indicates that most residents expect local government to deliver on a very broad range of outcomes. Priorities were similar across the different age groups, apart from headquarters being easy to visit which was typically more important amongst the older age groups.

The fact that the top four covers such a broad range of priorities which could be in competition with each other (quality, cost, local representation and resident involvement) indicates that any successful future model would need to carefully balance each of these factors. The balance that residents desire may also be different for different council services; however, this survey is not able to provide further insight on this.

3.2.2 Opinions on cost implications

Understanding people's expectations around the cost implications of LGR is also critical in assessing the potential options against what residents want and will accept.

Figure 5 – Respondents' views on costs, savings and council tax



47% of respondents agreed that “minimising council tax increases should be **the** most important consideration” (32% disagreed that it was **the** most important consideration). So clearly, if LGR is to happen, the cost implications are very important to people.

The strongest agreement was with the statement “Any changes to local government in Kent must save money in the long-term compared to how things are run now”, with 65% agreeing and only 14% disagreeing with this. So there is a clear expectation that whatever option is taken forward must result in a system that costs less than continuing with current one.

However, within this context of a significant majority wanting a cheaper system overall, local decision-making is still an important factor to some. 38% would “be prepared to pay more council tax if it resulted in decisions being made more locally than in another option”, although slightly more (42%) said they wouldn't.

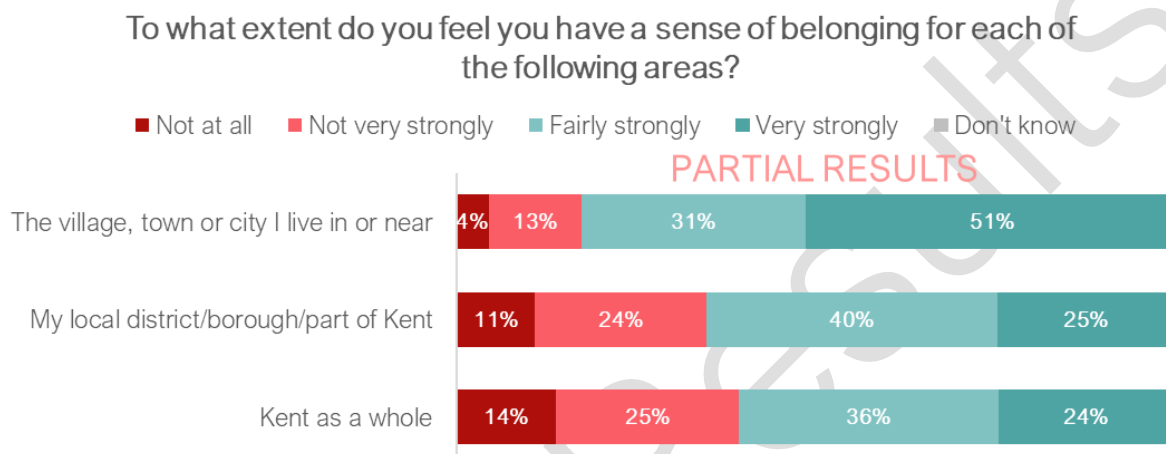
Statistical analysis confirms that the dominant view for each of the three statements is significant³. The prevailing opinion is also consistent for each of the three broad age groups, however the opinions of the younger age groups are slightly more pronounced.

³ Using a two-tailed binomial test.

3.3 Belonging and connections

Respondents were asked about how strong their sense of belonging is to their local area/town, their district/borough and to Kent as a whole.

Figure 6 – Sense of belonging at different geographical levels



Overall, respondents felt the strongest sense of belonging to the village, town or city that they live in or near (82% fairly/very strongly). People felt only a small difference in their sense of belonging to their district/borough (65% fairly/very strongly) compared to Kent as a whole (60%)⁴. The data indicates that the majority of people have a strong sense of belonging at all of these geographical levels.

Respondents were also asked which district they lived in and which other districts they felt most connected to. This is helpful in understanding the extent to which different options conform to the connections that residents feel to other districts. The specific question that was asked was:

Which districts or boroughs in Kent, apart from the one in which you live, do you feel most connected to? This could be due to work, leisure, family or friends. Select as many or as few as you like.

The matrix below shows the proportion of respondents living in each district that said they felt most connected to each of the other districts. They could select more than one other district. Darker green shading indicates a higher proportion from a home district feeling connected to that district.

⁴ Wilcoxon signed-rank test confirmed this difference was statistically significant.

The district groupings for Option 3a are highlighted by the thicker black borders.

Figure 7 – Matrix showing strongest inter-district connections, with Option 3a district groupings overlaid

...feel most connected to...

Option 3a - % of connections for each home district	PARTIAL RESULTS													
	Tonbridge and Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Maidstone	Dartford	Gravesham	Medway	Swale	Ashford	Folkestone & Hythe	Dover	Canterbury	Thanet	None
Tonbridge and Malling		25%	22%	21%	3%	3%	12%	1%	1%	1%	0%	5%	1%	7%
Tunbridge Wells	35%		21%	9%	2%	2%	2%	0%	1%	2%	1%	6%	2%	16%
Sevenoaks	25%	20%		7%	14%	7%	3%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	3%	16%
Maidstone	19%	10%	4%		4%	2%	11%	4%	10%	7%	3%	8%	4%	14%
Dartford	6%	3%	21%	5%		22%	10%	4%	1%	3%	1%	4%	2%	18%
Gravesham	10%	4%	7%	10%	20%		21%	1%	1%	3%	1%	3%	5%	14%
Medway	10%	2%	2%	25%	3%	10%		10%	3%	3%	0%	8%	5%	18%
Swale	2%	0%	2%	13%	3%	2%	15%		7%	5%	4%	27%	9%	12%
Ashford	5%	7%	3%	12%	1%	1%	4%	5%		18%	6%	24%	4%	11%
Folkestone & Hythe	1%	3%	1%	4%	1%	1%	2%	0%	27%		16%	24%	5%	15%
Dover	2%	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%	0%	8%	21%		37%	14%	10%
Canterbury	1%	1%	3%	3%	2%	1%	4%	12%	8%	10%	9%		27%	18%
Thanet	2%	1%	3%	3%	3%	2%	5%	3%	5%	6%	12%	39%		17%

Apart from the single unitary authority option (Option 1a), the groupings of districts in Option 3a (the three unitary authority option) preserves the most inter-district connections (59%). These groupings are the same as the area assembly geographies proposed in the one unitary authority option.

Some of the strongest connections that are missed – focusing on those over 20% – are from Swale to Canterbury (27%), Medway to Maidstone (25%), and Dartford to Sevenoaks (21%).

Figure 8 – Matrix showing strongest inter-district connections, with Option 4b district groupings overlaid

Option 4b

...feel most connected to...

**Option 4b -
% of connections
for each home
district**

PARTIAL RESULTS

Home district

	Tonbridge and Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Sevenoaks	Maidstone	Dartford	Gravesham	Medway	Swale	Ashford	Folkestone & Hythe	Dover	Canterbury	Thanet	None
Tonbridge and Malling		25%	22%	21%	3%	3%	12%	1%	1%	1%	0%	5%	1%	7%
Tunbridge Wells	35%		21%	9%	2%	2%	2%	0%	1%	2%	1%	6%	2%	16%
Sevenoaks	25%	20%		7%	14%	7%	3%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	3%	16%
Maidstone	19%	10%	4%		4%	2%	11%	4%	10%	7%	3%	8%	4%	14%
Dartford	6%	3%	21%	5%		22%	10%	4%	1%	3%	1%	4%	2%	18%
Gravesham	10%	4%	7%	10%	20%		21%	1%	1%	3%	1%	3%	5%	14%
Medway	10%	2%	2%	25%	3%	10%		10%	3%	3%	0%	8%	5%	18%
Swale	2%	0%	2%	13%	3%	2%	15%		7%	5%	4%	27%	9%	12%
Ashford	5%	7%	3%	12%	1%	1%	4%	5%		18%	6%	24%	4%	11%
Folkestone & Hythe	1%	3%	1%	4%	1%	1%	2%	0%	27%		16%	24%	5%	15%
Dover	2%	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%	0%	8%	21%		37%	14%	10%
Canterbury	1%	1%	3%	3%	2%	1%	4%	12%	8%	10%	9%		27%	18%
Thanet	2%	1%	3%	3%	3%	2%	5%	3%	5%	6%	12%	39%		17%

Option 4b preserves 45% of the inter-district connections. Some of the strongest connections that are missed – focusing on those over 20% – are from Swale to Canterbury (27%), Medway to Maidstone (25%), Ashford to Canterbury (24%), Folkestone & Hythe to Canterbury (24%), Dover to Folkestone & Hythe (21%), and Dartford to Sevenoaks (21%).

Options 4d and 5a are not possible to model from the survey results due to the fact that they do not conform to current district boundaries.

4 Conclusions

Opinions on LGR and council size – There are mixed opinions in relation to whether people think that local government in Kent needs major reorganisation or not. Similarly, there is not a clear strong preference for a smaller, more local council or a larger, potentially more cost efficient council. However there are differences by age group, with under 35s favouring a larger council that would potentially deliver at a lower cost, whereas those over 56 typically favour a smaller council even if potentially at a higher cost. Those aged 36-55 had balanced preferences.

Belonging and connections – The data indicates that the majority of people have a strong sense of belonging at all geographical levels within Kent (local village/town/city; district/borough; Kent as a whole). Option 3a preserves 59% of strong inter-district connections that residents feel, whereas Option 4b preserves 45%. By definition, Option 1a preserves 100% of inter-district connections at the unitary level and 59% at the area assembly level. It is not possible to model inter-district connections for Option 4d and Option 5a.

What residents want – What people describe as being **particularly** important for their council to achieve covers a broad range of priorities which could be in competition with each other – quality, value-for-money, local representation and resident involvement all received over 90% agreement. This indicates that any successful future model would need to carefully balance each of these factors. The balance that residents desire may also be different for different council services; however, this survey is not able to provide further insight on this.

Views on cost implications – If LGR is to happen, the cost implications are very important to people. There is a clear expectation that whatever option is taken forward must result in a system that costs less than continuing with the current one. However, within this context of a significant majority wanting a cheaper system overall, some would be prepared to pay more council tax if it resulted in decisions being made more locally than in another option. Although a slightly higher proportion would still choose lower council tax over more local decision-making.

5 Appendices

5.1 Appendix A: Maps of the proposed LGR options

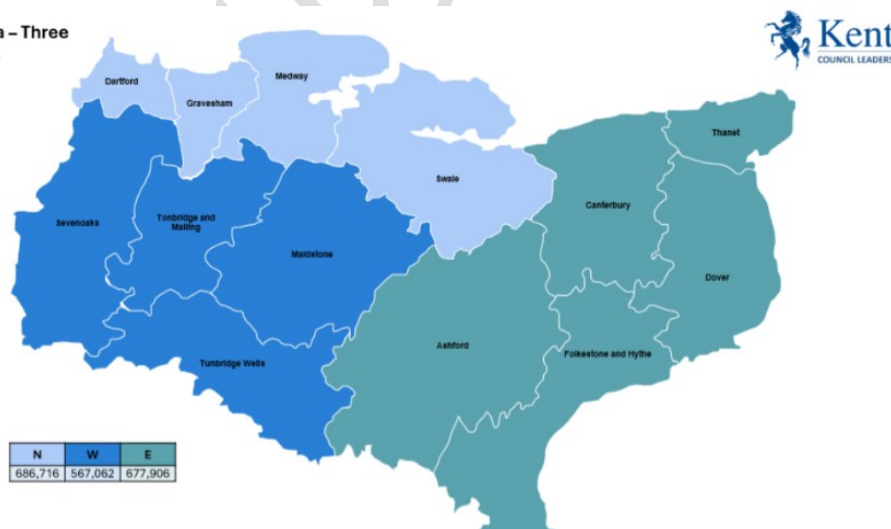
Option 1a – One unitary council, consisting of three area assemblies of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale in the north; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells in the west; and Ashford, Canterbury, Thanet, Dover and Folkestone and Hythe in the east.

**Option 1a –
Single Unitary**

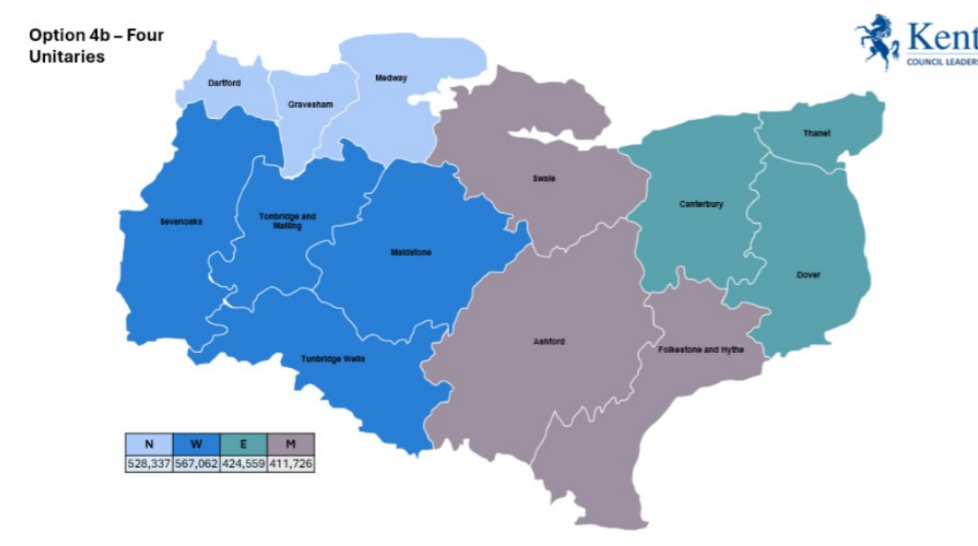


Option 3a – Three unitary councils consisting of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale in the north; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells in the west; and Ashford, Canterbury, Thanet, Dover and Folkestone and Hythe in the east.

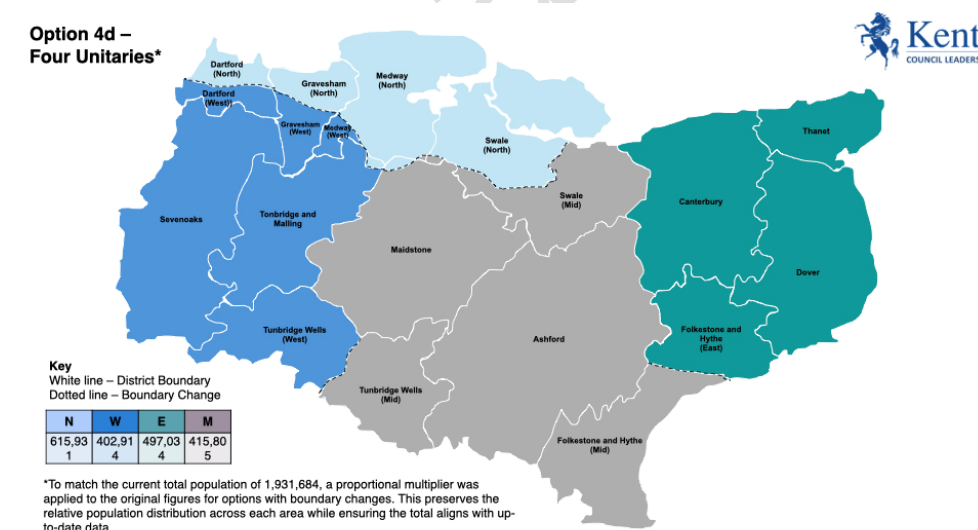
**Option 3a – Three
Unitaries**



Option 4b – Four unitary councils consisting of Dartford, Gravesham and Medway in the north; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells in the west; Swale, Ashford and Folkestone and Hythe in the middle of Kent; and Canterbury, Thanet and Dover in the east.



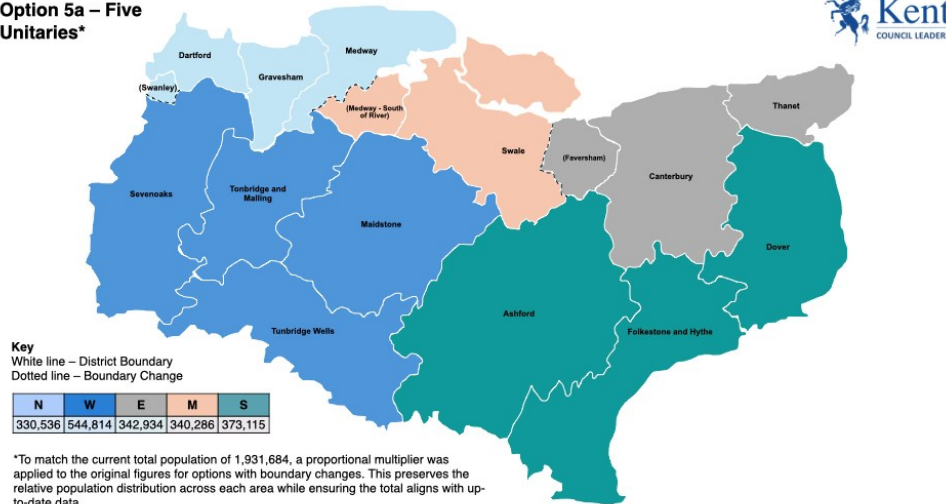
Option 4d – Four unitary councils with boundary changes, consisting of parts of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale in the north; the remaining part of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway, with Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and parts of Tonbridge Wells in the west; Maidstone, Ashford with the remaining parts of Tunbridge Wells, Swale, and part of Folkestone and Hythe; and Canterbury, Thanet, Dover and with the remaining parts of Folkestone and Hythe in the east.



Option 5a – Five unitary councils with boundary changes, consisting of Dartford, Gravesham, parts of Medway west of the River Medway, and Swanley in the north; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling,

Tunbridge Wells, and Maidstone (excluding Swanley) in the west; the remainder of Medway with the western part of Swale (Sittingbourne area) in the middle; the rest of Swale (Faversham area) combined with Canterbury and Thanet; and finally, Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe, and Dover in the east.

Option 5a – Five Unitaries*



5.2 Appendix B: Overview of demographic data

Age group

Which of these age groups applies to you?

Age group	# responses	% responses	% excl. Prefer not to say	% Target Pop	Population*
Under 16	0	0%			375,356
16-25	28	2%	2%	13%	202,699
26-35	75	5%	5%	16%	242,074
36-45	191	12%	12%	17%	259,643
46-55	266	16%	17%	16%	243,279
56-65	430	26%	28%	16%	246,249
65+	550	33%	36%	23%	362,384
I prefer not to say	112	7%			
Grand Total	1,652	100%		N/A	1,931,684

*Population source: Office for National Statistics, 2024 mid-year population estimates

Sex

What is your sex?

Sex	# responses	% responses	% excl. Prefer not to say	% Target Pop	Population
Female	795	48%	53%	51%	991,665
Male	716	43%	47%	49%	940,019
I prefer not to say	141	9%			
Grand Total	1,652	100%		100%	1,931,684

*Population source: Office for National Statistics, 2024 mid-year population estimates

Gender identity different than at birth?

Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?	# responses	% responses	% excl. Prefer not to say
Yes	1,496	91%	99.5%
No	8	0.5%	0.5%
I prefer not to say	148	9%	
Grand Total	1,652	100%	

**Note Census data is not directly comparable*

Disability or health condition

Do you consider yourself to have a disability or health condition that impacts on your normal daily activities?

Disability or health condition	# responses	% responses	% excl. Prefer not to say	% Target Pop	Population
Yes	322	19%	22%	18%	329,995
No	1,165	71%	78%	82%	1,525,847
I prefer not to say	165	10%			
Grand Total	1,652	100%		100%	1,855,842

**Population source: Office for National Statistics, 2021 Census Disability Dataset*

Carer

Do you look after, or give any help or support to anyone because they have a long-term physical or mental health condition or illness, or problem related to old age? Exclude anything you do as part of your paid employment.

Carer	# responses	% responses	% excl. Prefer not to say
Yes	386	23%	26%
No	1,112	67%	74%
I prefer not to say	154	9%	
Grand Total	1,652	100%	

Ethnic group

Which of the following ethnic groups describes the way you think about yourself?

Ethnic group	# responses	% responses	% excl. Prefer not to say	% Target Pop	Population*
White British (English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish)	1,418	86%	95%	82%	1,530,046
Any other White background	46	3%	3%	6%	114,707
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	10	1%	1%	2%	44,625
Asian or Asian British	6	0%	0%	5%	86,424
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	13	1%	1%	3%	56,759
Any other ethnic group	4	0%	0%	1%	23,281
I prefer not to say	155	9%			
Grand Total	1,652	100%		100%	1,855,842

*Population source: Office for National Statistics, 2021 Census Ethnic group Dataset

Council officer or councillor?

Do you work for a council in Kent, or are a councillor?

Council officer or councillor?	# responses	% responses
No	1,301	79%
Yes, I work for a council in Kent	170	10%
Yes, I am a councillor for a local authority	45	3%
I prefer not to say	136	8%
Grand Total	1,652	100%

Further Information

Kent Analytics
Kent County Council
Sessions House
Maidstone
Kent
ME14 1XQ

Email:
kentanalytics@kent.gov.uk

Phone: 03000 41 74 44

Report writers

Matt Wagner, Chief Analyst
Anita Winther, Analyst Manager

EQIA Submission – ID Number

Section A

EQIA Title

KCC Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway

Responsible Officer

Jenny Dixon-Sherreard - CED SPRCA

Approved by (Note: approval of this EqlA must be completed within the EqlA App)

David Whittle - CED SPRCA

Type of Activity

Service Change

No

Service Redesign

No

Project/Programme

No

Commissioning/Procurement

No

Strategy/Policy

No

Details of other Service Activity

Local Government Reorganisation

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate

Strategic and Corporate Services

Responsible Service

SPRCA

Responsible Head of Service

David Whittle - CED SPRCA

Responsible Director

David Whittle - CED SPRCA

Aims and Objectives

Kent County Council (KCC) is responding to the Government's statutory invitation to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which seeks to replace existing local government structures with unitary models. This Equality Impact Assessment (EqlA) has been developed to assess the potential implications of KCC's preferred option of a single unitary authority for Kent and Medway, supported by three Area Assemblies. The model replaces the current two-tier structure with a single-tier authority that incorporates Medway's existing unitary arrangements and extends them across the wider Kent area.

KCC's proposed model aims to support long-term financial sustainability while maintaining strategic coherence and service continuity across Kent and Medway. By establishing a single unitary authority, the model enables Kent to fully realise the benefits of operating at scale, enhancing strategic oversight, and achieving greater financial efficiency through unified service delivery and resource management. Financial modelling indicates that the single unitary model, supported by Area Assemblies is the most financially viable option compared to multi-unitary alternatives which introduce higher costs and longer return periods.

The model is also designed to meet the needs of Kent's diverse communities by supporting accountability, consistent service standards, and more strategic use of resources. It introduces Area Assemblies to

strengthen local engagement and responsiveness, providing a mechanism to shape place-based priorities on services such as libraries, leisure, planning, and highways. This will be further supported by a new Strategic Engagement Framework and Community Engagement Team, including Community Navigators embedded in local areas, to ensure inclusive, accessible, and representative engagement across Kent and Medway.

This reorganisation would offer the strategic coherence needed to manage complex countywide challenges such as high demand in social care, SEND, housing, and public health, while also responding to geographic disparities and infrastructure pressures across East, West, and North Kent. The scale and integration of a single authority would support Kent's ability to respond to national and international pressures, including port disruption and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) responsibilities, and would ensure equitable service delivery across the county.

This Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) supports the LGR process by identifying and addressing the potential impacts of the proposed changes on those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, particularly regarding the potential disruption of bringing together and redesigning services from across the two upper tier authorities of KCC and Medway and the aggregation of services from the District and Borough Councils into the single unitary authority model. It ensures that equality considerations are embedded throughout the development and implementation of the new model, and that the voices of Kent's diverse population are reflected in the decision-making process.

The EqIA will be updated as proposals evolve, evidence is gathered, and engagement continues. Further EqIAs will be undertaken as specific policy proposals, service restructures, or operational changes emerge from the reorganisation process, ensuring that equality considerations are embedded at every stage of implementation.

Section B – Evidence

Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity?

Yes

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

Yes

Is there national evidence/data that you can use?

Yes

Have you consulted with stakeholders?

Yes

Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?

KCC has engaged with a broad range of key stakeholders as part of the development of its LGR proposal. A public survey is taking place, publicised through the 'Let's Talk Kent' platform, and advertised through social media. This will run from 30 September to 26 October 2025. The confidential survey seeks to gather the views of residents on the potential future shape of public services.

In addition to this, KCC has contacted stakeholders including strategic partners, Kent and Medway MPs, and representatives from the voluntary, community, and business sectors across Kent and Medway. The engagement process has also included outreach to public sector partners such as health, police, and education, as well as parish and town councils. Stakeholders were invited to provide their views on the proposed single unitary authority model, including the opportunities and benefits for the county and for their organisations, any concerns about working with a single unitary, and how the Area Assembly model could support operational delivery and local engagement. The consultation process has included written communications and offers of meetings to discuss the proposals in more detail, ensuring that all interested parties have the opportunity to contribute their perspectives and inform the development of the business case.

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?
Yes
Details of Positive Impacts
<p>The proposed LGR model of a single unitary authority for Kent and Medway supported by three Area Assemblies presents several potential positive impacts for individuals and communities with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>By consolidating governance and service delivery into a single authority, the model is expected to improve consistency and equity in how services are planned, commissioned, and delivered across the county. This is particularly relevant for groups who may currently experience variation in access or outcomes due to the fragmented nature of the two-tier system. A unified structure will help reduce postcode lotteries and ensure that residents with protected characteristics receive a more consistent standard of support regardless of where they live.</p> <p>The establishment of Area Assemblies in North, West, and East Kent is designed to preserve local identity and ensure that community voices, including those from underrepresented or marginalised groups are embedded in decision-making and service delivery. This place-based approach will be further supported by a new Strategic Engagement Framework and Community Engagement Team, including Community Navigators embedded in local areas, to ensure inclusive, accessible, and representative engagement. These mechanisms offer opportunities to tailor services to the specific needs of local populations, including areas with higher levels of deprivation, older populations, or greater ethnic diversity.</p> <p>The proposed model also supports improved strategic planning and integration across services such as adult social care, children’s services, housing, and public health - areas that disproportionately affect people with disabilities, older people, and children and young people with SEND. A single authority will be better placed to coordinate responses to complex needs, reduce service gaps, and improve transitions between services, which can be particularly beneficial for disabled people and carers.</p> <p>Furthermore, the financial sustainability of the proposed model creates opportunities for reinvestment into frontline services. This could support the development of more inclusive and accessible services, targeted interventions, and community engagement initiatives that benefit protected groups.</p> <p>Finally, the scale and coherence of a single authority supports Kent’s ability to respond to national and international pressures, such as port disruption and unaccompanied asylum seeking children who may benefit from a more coordinated and well-resourced approach to safeguarding and integration.</p>
Negative impacts and Mitigating Actions

19. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age

Are there negative impacts for age?

Yes

Details of negative impacts for Age

Kent and Medway have a diverse age profile, with notable concentrations of both younger and older residents. In Kent, approximately 22.4% of the population is aged 60 and over, while 23.5% is aged under 20. The largest age cohort is those aged 50–59, accounting for 14.5% of the total population. Kent also has a slightly higher proportion of both 0–14-year-olds and people aged over 50 compared to the national average, with a median age of 42.3 years. There is variation in the age profile across Kent's districts, for example, the average age in Folkestone and Hythe is 45 years, compared to 37.3 years in Dartford. Medway has a younger overall population, with 16.4% aged 60 and over and 24.6% aged under 20. The largest age group in Medway is those aged 50–64, making up 19.2% of the population. The median age in Medway is 38 years, which is younger than both the South East regional average and the national average.

KCC has a significant proportion of staff aged 50 and over, reflecting an ageing workforce trend common in local government. Medway Council reports that 16.3% of its workforce is under 30, with an overall ageing staff profile also noted.

While the implementation of a single unitary model with three assemblies is expected to have minimal potential negative impacts related to age, we acknowledge that certain issues may still arise, which we will actively seek to identify and mitigate.

For older people, particularly those in rural or coastal areas, there is a risk that changes to service structures could disrupt access to adult social care, health services, and community support. These services are often lifelines for older residents, and any transition period or reconfiguration could lead to confusion, delays, or reduced continuity of care.

Similarly, younger people especially those accessing SEND services or transitioning between children's and adult services may be affected by changes in service pathways. The reorganisation could result in temporary disruption or uncertainty around eligibility, referral routes, or support mechanisms if integration is not handled with sufficient clarity and safeguarding.

In a large, countywide authority, there is a risk that local variation in age-related needs may be less visible at the strategic level relating to place-based priorities or services. Without strong local engagement mechanisms, such as the proposed Area Assemblies, there is a possibility that place-based priorities including those related to age may not be fully reflected in service planning and delivery.

Digital transformation and centralisation of services which is often associated with reorganisation may disproportionately affect older residents who are less digitally literate or lack access to online platforms. This could lead to exclusion from information, engagement, or service access unless mitigated through inclusive design and alternative access routes.

Finally, the reorganisation may also have age-related implications for staff. There may be concerns around job security, role changes, or redeployment, which could disproportionately affect older staff who may be less mobile or closer to retirement. Younger staff, particularly those early in their careers, may experience uncertainty around career progression or development opportunities during a period of organisational change. Without clear communication and support, these impacts could affect staff wellbeing, morale, and retention across age groups.

Mitigating Actions for Age

To address the potential negative impacts of the proposed reorganisation on residents of different age groups, a range of mitigating actions would be implemented to ensure that services remain accessible, inclusive, and responsive throughout the transition and beyond.

Importantly, KCC's preferred model of a single unitary authority potentially offers the strongest basis for mitigating risks to age-related service continuity. Unlike multi-unitary options, which would disaggregate key services such as adult social care, SEND, and public health, the single authority model preserves the scale and integration needed to manage complex countywide challenges. This is particularly critical for older residents and children and young people who rely on consistent, joined-up support across service boundaries.

The single unitary model enables strategic oversight and operational consistency across Kent and Medway, including safeguarding boards, which helps reduce the risk of service fragmentation. Continuity plans would be developed to protect adult social care, children's services, and SEND provision during the transition. These plans will focus on maintaining care arrangements, safeguarding referral pathways, and ensuring that transitions between services are clearly communicated and well-managed. In contrast, multi-unitary models could introduce greater complexity and risk, particularly where service boundaries do not align with community needs.

To ensure local priorities are not lost within a larger strategic framework, the model includes three Area Assemblies supported by a new Strategic Engagement Framework and Community Engagement Team. This model would provide the opportunity to engage with older people's forums, youth councils, and voluntary sector organisations to shape service delivery in ways that reflect local demographics. The model would be designed to balance strategic coherence with local responsiveness, which is more difficult to achieve in fragmented multi-unitary arrangements.

In response to the risk of digital exclusion, particularly among older residents, alternative access routes to services and information would be maintained. This includes telephone support, face-to-face provision, and printed materials. Digital transformation initiatives will be designed with accessibility in mind, and digital literacy support will be offered where appropriate. A single authority is better positioned to coordinate inclusive access strategies than multiple smaller unitaries with varying capacities.

Clear and accessible communication will be provided to residents of all ages throughout the reorganisation process. Particular attention would be given to older people and families with children, ensuring they understand any changes to service access, governance, or local representation. Tailored messaging would be delivered through trusted community channels and service providers. A single authority can deliver more coherent messaging than multiple councils operating independently.

The new unitary authority would embed demographic analysis into strategic planning to ensure that services are responsive to the ageing population and the needs of children and young people. This includes forecasting demand and aligning resources. The scale of a single authority enables more effective long-term planning than fragmented models, which may struggle to coordinate responses across the boundaries.

To help mitigate the risk of any negative impact for age on staff, workforce transition plans would aim to be inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of employees across all age groups. Support may include clear communication throughout organisational changes, guidance around redeployment or retirement planning, and opportunities for mentoring, peer support, or career development. The scale and coherence of a single unitary authority offers potential for more consistent workforce planning and support that values experience, promotes inclusion, and enables staff of all ages to navigate change confidently.

Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age

To be determined

20. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Disability

Are there negative impacts for Disability?

Yes

Details of Negative Impacts for Disability

In Kent, approximately 17.9% of the population is classified as disabled under the Equality Act, with a further 10.2% claiming disability-related benefits. The majority of these claimants report physical health conditions, followed by mental health and learning difficulties. The proportion of residents classified as disabled under the Equality Act varies across Kent's districts. Thanet has the highest rate, with 22.9% of its population reporting a disability, followed by Folkestone & Hythe (21.8%), Dover (21.2%), Canterbury (19.6%), and Swale (19.5%). These districts, primarily located in East Kent, all exceed the Kent average of 17.9%. In contrast, Dartford has the lowest proportion at 14.0%. In Medway, approximately 12.1% of the population is classified as disabled under the Equality Act.

While the implementation of a single unitary model with three assemblies is expected to have minimal potential negative impacts related to disability, certain challenges may still arise and steps would be taken to mitigate them.

For people with physical disabilities, changes to service locations or formats could introduce barriers to access, particularly if physical infrastructure or transport links are not adequately considered.

For those with learning disabilities or mental health conditions, transitions in service structures may lead to confusion, anxiety, or disruption in care continuity. Clear communication, safeguarding, and co-designed pathways will be essential to ensure that these groups are not disadvantaged during or after reorganisation.

Digital transformation, while offering efficiencies, may also risk excluding individuals with cognitive impairments or those who rely on assisted technologies. Without inclusive design and alternative access routes, there is a risk of digital exclusion.

In a large, countywide authority, there is a possibility that the specific needs of disabled residents may be less visible at the strategic level. Engagement with disability advocacy groups and community leaders who provide local intelligence and support service navigation may be disrupted, risking reduced visibility of disabled residents' needs and weakening informal referral mechanisms. The proposed Area Assemblies will play a critical role in ensuring that local voices, including those of disabled people and carers, are heard and reflected in service planning and delivery.

As with any organisational change, staff with disabilities may experience specific concerns during the transition, including uncertainty around whether existing reasonable adjustments will be honoured, how inclusive the new structures will be, and anxieties about joining new teams or disclosing personal information. For staff with physical disabilities, changes to office locations or layouts could introduce challenges to access, particularly if physical infrastructure is not adequately considered.

Mitigating actions for Disability

To ensure that disabled residents are not disproportionately affected by the transition to a single unitary model with three assemblies, a range of mitigating actions will be implemented. These actions are designed to uphold accessibility, continuity of care, and inclusive engagement throughout the reorganisation process.

Importantly, KCC's preferred model of a single unitary authority supported by three Area Assemblies offers a strong foundation for mitigating risks to disability-related service continuity. Unlike multi-unitary options, which could fragment key services such as adult social care, SEND, and mental health support, the single authority model maintains the scale and integration needed to address complex and overlapping needs. This is particularly critical for disabled residents who rely on consistent, joined-up services across health, education, housing, and social care. The unified structure also enables more coherent strategic planning and resource allocation, while the Area Assemblies and Community Engagement model provide a mechanism for ensuring that local accessibility and inclusion priorities are embedded in service delivery.

Clear and consistent communication would be prioritised, particularly for individuals with learning disabilities, cognitive impairments, or mental health conditions. Easy-read materials and alternative formats would be made available to help residents understand changes and navigate new service pathways.

To maintain continuity of care, transition planning would be embedded into service redesign, with a focus on safeguarding vulnerable individuals. This includes mapping existing support networks and ensuring that any changes to referral routes or eligibility criteria are clearly communicated and phased in gradually.

The proposed Area Assemblies supported by a new Strategic Engagement Framework and Community Engagement Team would play a key role in ensuring that local disability-related needs are captured and reflected in service planning. Engagement with disabled people, carers, and representative organisations would be built into the governance structure to ensure ongoing feedback and co-production.

Workforce transition planning would consider reasonable adjustments to ensure they are maintained within new structures, alongside clear communication and support for disabled staff navigating organisational change.

Responsible Officer for Disability

To be determined

21. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Sex

Are there negative impacts for Sex

Yes - Add details of the negative impacts and mitigations.

Details of negative impacts for Sex

In Kent and Medway, the population is broadly balanced by sex, with a slight majority of females, particularly in older age groups. Women are more likely to live longer, experience disability in later life, and take on unpaid caring responsibilities. Men, meanwhile, are statistically more likely to experience poorer mental health outcomes and lower engagement with preventative health services. These differences in lived experience and service interaction mean that changes to service structures may have distinct impacts based on sex.

While the implementation of a single unitary model with three Area Assemblies is expected to have minimal potential negative impacts related to sex, certain risks may still arise and will be actively managed.

For women, particularly those accessing adult social care, domestic abuse support, or maternity services, there is a risk that service reconfiguration could disrupt continuity to gender-sensitive provision, particularly during the transitional stage. Women are also more likely to be employed in frontline care roles, meaning workforce changes could disproportionately affect female staff.

For men, there is a risk that changes to public health and mental health services could further reduce engagement, particularly if services are not designed to address known barriers such as stigma or low help-seeking behaviour. Ensuring that services remain inclusive and responsive to male health needs will be critical.

In a large, countywide authority, there is also a risk that sex-specific needs may be less visible at the strategic level. Without strong local engagement mechanisms, such as the proposed Area Assemblies, there is a possibility that gendered patterns of service use and outcomes may not be fully reflected in planning and delivery.

Mitigating actions for Sex

To ensure that changes to service structures do not disproportionately impact individuals based on sex, a range of mitigating actions would be embedded into the design and delivery of the single unitary model. These actions would aim to promote equitable access and ensure that sex-specific needs are recognised

and addressed.

Importantly, KCC's preferred model of a single unitary authority supported by three Area Assemblies offers a coherent framework for managing sex-related service needs. Unlike multi-unitary options, which could fragment services and reduce strategic oversight, the single authority model supports integrated planning and delivery across health, social care, and community services. This is particularly important for maintaining continuity in gender-sensitive provision and ensuring that both women and men can access consistent, joined-up support.

Service redesign would consider gendered service pathways, particularly in areas such as domestic abuse support, maternity care, and mental health provision. This will help ensure that services remain responsive to the distinct needs of women and men, and that any transition does not disrupt access to critical support.

Workforce planning will take into account the gender profile of staff, especially in sectors such as social care and education where women are disproportionately represented and in areas such as waste management, transport, and certain technical services where men may be overrepresented. Measures will be taken to support staff through organisational change.

Responsible Officer for Sex

To be determined

22. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender

Yes - Add details of the negative impacts and mitigations.

Negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender

The move to a single unitary authority may result in some changes to how services are accessed and delivered for all residents, including those who are transgender or gender diverse. There is a possibility that, during the transition, some individuals may experience uncertainty or inconsistency in how their gender identity is recognised in service interactions or administrative processes. This could include occasional issues with the use of correct names or pronouns or concerns about privacy when updating personal information. As with any organisational change, there may also be a period of adjustment for staff and service users as new systems and processes are embedded.

Transgender staff may face heightened concerns during organisational change, including anxieties about disclosing their identity to new colleagues, how their gender will be respected in new systems and teams, and whether existing adjustments or support will be maintained.

Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

The council would ensure that all policies and practices remain compliant with the Equality Act 2010, which provides protection for individuals with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment. Staff would be reminded of their responsibilities to treat all residents with respect and to maintain confidentiality regarding personal information. Where changes to systems or processes are made, care would be taken to minimise disruption and to ensure that individuals are able to update their details as needed. Any concerns raised by service users or staff will be addressed through the appropriate complaints and feedback mechanisms.

The council would ensure that transgender staff are supported throughout the transition, with clear policies on respectful treatment, confidentiality, and continuity of any existing adjustments or support arrangements.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

To be determined

23. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for

Are there negative impacts for Race
Yes - Add details of the negative impacts and mitigations.
Negative impacts for Race
<p>In Kent, 89.1% of residents identified as White in the 2021 Census, with Asian or Asian British residents making up 5.4%, Black or Black British 2.1%, Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups 2.6%, and Other ethnic groups 0.8%. In Medway, the population is slightly more diverse: 84.3% identified as White, 5.9% as Asian or Asian British, and 5.6% as Black, Black British, Caribbean or African. These figures reflect growing ethnic diversity, particularly in urban areas such as Medway, Gravesham, and parts of North Kent.</p> <p>While the implementation of a single unitary model with three assemblies is expected to minimise structural inequalities, we recognise that residents from minority ethnic backgrounds may face disproportionate impacts if services are not designed and delivered inclusively.</p> <p>There is a risk that service reorganisation could disrupt access to culturally appropriate services, particularly in areas such as health, education, housing, and community safety. For example, changes to local engagement structures or staff redeployment could weaken trusted relationships between communities and service providers, especially in areas with established community networks. Language barriers, digital exclusion, and experiences of discrimination may also compound the impact of any disruption.</p> <p>In a large, countywide authority, there is a risk that the specific needs of racially and ethnically diverse communities may be less visible at the strategic level. Existing engagement mechanisms with racially and ethnically diverse communities including trusted relationships with local leaders and organisations may be disrupted, risking the loss of valuable local intelligence and referral routes that support culturally appropriate service access. Without strong local engagement mechanisms, such as the proposed Area Assemblies and Community Engagement Team, there is a possibility that race-related inequalities may not be fully reflected in service planning and delivery.</p> <p>Minority ethnic staff may face particular anxieties during the transition, including concerns about how equality and inclusion will be upheld in new teams, whether cultural awareness will be maintained, and how they will be treated within unfamiliar organisational structures.</p>
Mitigating actions for Race
<p>To ensure fair and consistent service delivery for residents from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, a range of practical mitigating actions would be embedded into the transition to a single unitary model with three Area Assemblies. These actions would be designed to support equal access, uphold community cohesion, and ensure that services are responsive to local needs.</p> <p>Importantly, KCC's preferred model of a single unitary authority supported by three Area Assemblies offers a coherent and efficient framework for managing race-related service needs. Unlike multi-unitary options, which risk fragmenting services and creating inconsistency, the single authority model supports joined-up planning and delivery. This is essential for ensuring that all communities regardless of background receive reliable, high-quality services.</p> <p>Local engagement will be strengthened through the Community Engagement Team, which will provide a direct mechanism for communities to raise concerns and shape services. Engagement structures would consider continuity of relationships with community leaders and organisations representing racially and ethnically diverse groups, preserving local insight and trusted referral mechanisms. This approach would ensure that decisions are made closer to the people they affect and that local priorities including those related to race and ethnicity are properly understood and addressed.</p> <p>Clear communication would be prioritised, including the use of translated materials and community outreach where appropriate, to ensure that all residents can understand and access services. This is</p>

particularly important for those who may face language barriers.

For the workforce, the transition process would include measures to uphold inclusive practices and cultural awareness within new teams, ensuring minority ethnic staff feel respected, supported, and confident in the new working environment.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Race

To be determined

24. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Religion and belief

Are there negative impacts for Religion and belief

Yes - Add details of the negative impacts and mitigations.

Negative impacts for Religion and belief

In Kent, the 2021 Census shows that 50.7% of residents identified as Christian, while 39.1% reported no religion. Other religious groups included Muslim (1.2%), Hindu (0.5%), Sikh (0.2%), and Buddhist (0.3%). In Medway, the religious profile is similar, with 48.3% identifying as Christian, 41.4% reporting no religion, and 6.1% identifying with other faiths, including Muslim (2.2%), Hindu (0.6%), and Sikh (0.3%). These figures reflect a growing diversity in religious affiliation, alongside a significant proportion of residents who do not identify with any religion. Religious affiliation varies notably across Kent's districts. Gravesham has the highest proportion of Sikh residents (8%), while Dartford has the highest proportion of Hindu residents (3.8%) and a relatively high Muslim population (3.5%). In contrast, districts such as Sevenoaks and Swale have higher proportions of residents identifying as Christian (51.8% and 47.2% respectively) and lower representation of minority faiths. The proportion of residents reporting no religion is highest in Swale (45.3%) and Thanet (44.1%), indicating a more secular population in those areas. In Medway, 45.1% of residents identified as Christian, while 43% reported no religion. Other religious groups included Muslim (2.7%), Hindu (1.1%), Sikh (1.6%), Buddhist (0.4%), and Jewish (0.1%).

While the implementation of a single unitary model with three Area Assemblies is expected to minimise structural inequalities, residents of different faiths or beliefs may be disproportionately affected if services are not designed and delivered in a way that respects religious diversity.

There is a risk that service reorganisation could disrupt access to faith-sensitive services, such as culturally appropriate health care, burial services, or community safety initiatives. Changes to local engagement structures or staff redeployment may weaken relationships with faith-based organisations that play a key role in supporting vulnerable residents.

In a large, countywide authority, there is a risk that the specific needs of faith communities may be less visible at the strategic level. There is also a risk that existing engagement structures and trusted relationships with faith-based organisations may be disrupted during the transition, potentially weakening local intelligence and referral pathways that support service accessibility for faith communities. Without strong local engagement mechanisms, such as the proposed Area Assemblies and Community Engagement Team, there is a possibility that religion and belief-related priorities or requirements may not be fully reflected in service planning and delivery.

Mitigating actions for Religion and belief

To ensure that residents of all faiths and beliefs are treated fairly and respectfully during the transition to a single unitary model with three assemblies, a range of practical mitigating actions would be embedded into service design and delivery. These actions aim to uphold freedom of belief, promote community cohesion, and ensure that services are inclusive and responsive to religious diversity.

Importantly, KCC's preferred model of a single unitary authority supported by three Area Assemblies offers a coherent framework for managing religion and belief-related service needs. Unlike multi-unitary options, which could fragment services and reduce strategic oversight, the single authority model supports joined-up planning and delivery. This is essential for ensuring that all residents regardless of faith or belief receive consistent, high-quality services that respect their values and traditions.

Service redesign would include consideration of faith-sensitive needs, particularly in areas such as health care, bereavement services, education, and community safety. This includes ensuring that dietary requirements, religious observances, and cultural practices are respected in service planning and delivery.

Local engagement would be strengthened through the Community Engagement Team which would work to maintain and strengthen relationships with faith-based organisations, ensuring continuity of local intelligence and referral pathways that support inclusive service access. This would help ensure that local religious priorities are reflected in service provision and that trusted relationships with faith communities are maintained.

Communication materials and consultation processes would be designed to be inclusive and accessible. Where appropriate, translated materials and culturally appropriate outreach would be used to support engagement.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Religion and Belief

To be determined

25. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation

Are there negative impacts for Sexual Orientation

Yes - Add details of the negative impacts and mitigations.

Negative impacts for Sexual Orientation

In Kent and Medway, the majority of residents aged 16 and over identified as straight or heterosexual in the 2021 Census. In Medway, 89.7% of respondents identified as straight or heterosexual, while 3% identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or another sexual orientation (LGB+), and 7.3% chose not to answer the question. Across Kent's districts, the proportion of people identifying as straight or heterosexual ranged from approximately 89% to 91%, with between 2.5% and 3.5% identifying as LGB+, and 6% to 8% not responding to the question. These figures are based on data published by the Office for National Statistics at local authority level.

While the move to a single unitary model with three Area Assemblies is expected to minimise structural inequalities, it is important to ensure that all residents regardless of sexual orientation continue to receive fair and inclusive support and recognise that certain sexual orientations may face risks if services are not designed and delivered inclusively.

There is a risk that service reorganisation could disrupt services that LGBTQ+ residents may access, particularly in areas such as mental health, housing, youth support, and community safety. Trusted relationships with specialist providers or community organisations may be weakened if engagement structures are not maintained.

LGBTQ+ staff may experience concerns during the transition about joining new teams, how inclusive the new working environment will be, and whether they will feel safe and supported in disclosing their identity or maintaining existing support arrangements.

Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation

To ensure that residents of all sexual orientations are treated fairly and respectfully during the transition to a single unitary model with three assemblies, a range of mitigating actions would be embedded into service design, engagement, and delivery. These actions aim to uphold equality, promote inclusion, and safeguard against discrimination.

Importantly, KCC's preferred model of a single unitary authority supported by three Area Assemblies offers a coherent and efficient framework for managing service needs related to sexual orientation. Unlike multi-unitary options, which risk fragmenting services and creating inconsistency, the single authority model

supports joined-up planning and delivery. This is essential for ensuring that all residents regardless of sexual orientation receive reliable, high-quality services.

Service redesign would consider services that LGBTQ+ residents access, particularly in areas such as mental health, housing, youth services, and community safety. The aim is to ensure that services remain inclusive and that any changes do not disrupt access to essential support.

Local engagement would be strengthened through the Area Assemblies supported by a new Strategic Engagement Framework and Community Engagement Team, which would provide a direct mechanism for communities to raise concerns and shape services. This approach ensures that decisions are made closer to the people they affect and that local priorities including those related to sexual orientation are properly understood and addressed.

Communication materials and service environments would be reviewed to ensure they are respectful and inclusive, avoiding assumptions about relationships or family structures and reflecting the diversity of Kent and Medway's communities.

Workforce planning would consider the needs of LGBTQ+ staff, including ensuring inclusive team cultures and safeguarding the ability of individuals to disclose their identity safely and confidently within new organisational settings.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation

To be determined

26. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity

Are there negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity

Yes - Add details of the negative impacts and mitigations.

Negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity

In Kent and Medway, maternity and early years services support a significant number of residents each year, with demand influenced by local birth rates and population growth. Pregnant women and new parents often require timely, flexible, and locally accessible support across health, housing, and social care services.

While the implementation of a single unitary model with three Area Assemblies is intended to improve coordination and reduce duplication, there is a risk that service reconfiguration could disrupt continuity of care to maternity-related provision. Service users with this protected characteristic may be disproportionately affected by changes to service structures, particularly where continuity of care or access to maternity and early years support is disrupted. This includes potential risks in areas such as health visiting, perinatal mental health, housing, and social care.

There is also a risk that workforce changes may impact pregnant staff or those either on or returning from maternity leave, especially in frontline health and care roles where women are overrepresented.

Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity

To ensure that changes to service structures do not cause potential negative impacts, a range of mitigating actions will be embedded into the design and delivery of the single unitary model which will aim to preserve continuity of care, protect access to maternity-related services, and ensure that pregnancy and maternity needs are recognised and addressed.

Importantly, KCC's preferred model of a single unitary authority supported by three Area Assemblies provides a coherent framework for managing maternity-related service needs. Unlike multi-unitary options, which may fragment provision and reduce strategic oversight, the single authority model supports integrated planning and delivery across health, early years, and social care services. This is particularly important for maintaining joined-up support during and after pregnancy.

Service redesign would consider maternity and early years pathways, including perinatal mental health, health visiting, and housing support. This would help ensure that services remain responsive to the needs of pregnant individuals and new parents, and that any transition does not disrupt access to essential care.

Workforce planning would take into account the needs of pregnant staff and those either on or returning from maternity leave, particularly in frontline roles where women are overrepresented.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity

To be determined

27. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

No. Note: If Question 27a is "No", Questions 27b,c,d will state "Not Applicable" when submission goes for approval

Negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Not Completed

Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Not Completed

Responsible Officer for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Not Completed

28. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities

Are there negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities

Yes - Add details of the negative impacts and mitigations.

Negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities

In Kent, 135,895 people (9.1% of the population) reported providing unpaid care in the 2021 Census, with 43,166 individuals (31.8%) delivering 50 or more hours of care per week. In Medway, 24,113 people (8.6%) identified as unpaid carers, with 7,582 individuals (31.4%) providing 50 or more hours of care per week.

There is a risk that changes to service structures may disproportionately impact unpaid carers, particularly if access to flexible, localised support is affected. Disruption to services such as respite care, carers' assessments, or crisis support could increase stress and reduce carers' ability to sustain their role.

Carers' needs may also be underrepresented in strategic planning if data on caring responsibilities is not consistently captured or considered. This may particularly affect hidden or informal carers, who often have limited visibility in service design and may face barriers to engagement during periods of organisational change.

Staff with caring responsibilities may face additional pressures during the transition, particularly if changes to roles, teams, or working patterns reduce flexibility or disrupt existing support arrangements. Without careful planning, this could impact their ability to balance work and caring duties effectively.

Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities

To ensure that changes to service structures do not disproportionately impact individuals with caring responsibilities, a range of mitigating actions will be embedded into the design and delivery of the single unitary model. These actions aim to preserve access to carer services, improve visibility of unpaid carers in strategic planning, and support carers through organisational change.

KCC's preferred model of a single unitary authority supported by three Area Assemblies offers a coherent framework for managing carer-related service needs. This structure supports integrated planning and delivery across adult social care, health, and community services, helping to avoid fragmentation that could affect carers' ability to access timely and coordinated support.

Service redesign would consider carer pathways, particularly in areas such as respite care, carers' assessments, and crisis support. This would help ensure that services remain responsive to the needs of unpaid carers and that any transition does not disrupt access to essential support.

Workforce planning would take into account the dual role of staff who also have caring responsibilities, and measures would be taken to support staff through organisational change.

Responsible Officer for Carer's responsibilities
To be determined

By: Joel Cook – Democratic Services Manager

To: County Council – 6 November 2025

Subject: Motions for Time Limited Debate

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

County Council may consider and resolve Motions for Time Limited Debate submitted by Political Groups, in accordance with section 14.32 of the KCC Constitution.

Two Motions for Time Limited Debate are included in the agenda for the 6 November 2025 meeting of the Full Council.

1. In advance of each ordinary meeting of the Full Council, each Political Group may submit one Motion for Time Limited Debate for debate and decision. Motions are placed on the agenda in the order they are received by Democratic Services.
 2. A maximum of 45 minutes will be allowed for each debate. Each Motion must meet the general requirements of Motions as set out in the constitution and the debate is conducted in accordance with normal procedure rules along with any relevant directions given by the Chairman of the Council.
 3. The submitted Motions for Time Limited Debate are appended to this covering report.
-

Recommendation:

The County Council is asked to consider and determine the submitted Motions for Time Limited Debate

Appendices:

- MTLD 1 – Liberal Democrat – NHS and Social Care Crisis
- MTLD 2 – Green – Treasury Management

Report Author:

Joel Cook
Democratic Services Manager
03000 416892
Joel.cook@kent.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

Kent County Council Motion on NHS and Social Care Crisis
Address the Challenge - Advocate for Change

Proposer: Mr Richard Streatfeild, MBE

Seconded: Mr Antony Hook

Background information provided by the Liberal Democrat Group:

This Council recognises the urgent and multifaceted challenges currently facing the NHS and social care system. Across the nation, and particularly in Kent and Medway, residents are experiencing significant difficulties in accessing health and care services. Staff recruitment and retention issues, long waiting times, missed targets, and poor health outcomes have become persistent concerns, requiring immediate and coordinated action.

There is a shared understanding that cross-party collaboration is essential to achieve lasting improvements and effective reform in health and social care. Both The King's Fund and the newly appointed Secretary of State for Health and Social Care have acknowledged the positive vision for social care reform proposed by the Liberal Democrats.¹

This Council's attention is drawn to these current issues in health and social care:

- Access and Waiting Times: In August 2025, 36% or 283,000 GP appointments in Kent occurred more than a week after booking, 23 % over two weeks. This delay highlights critical access issues for patients seeking timely medical support.
- Staffing and Funding: Despite growing demand, primary care providers have not received the necessary funding, as a result of the Carr Hill funding formula, to employ additional GPs, resulting in qualified doctors facing potential unemployment and exacerbating staffing shortages.
- Dentistry Crisis: The NHS is facing a national crisis in dentistry, with increasing numbers of practitioners leaving the service, further limiting access to essential dental care. Only 38% of Kent residents were seen by a dentist last year.
- Budgetary Pressures: The Adult Social Care, Children Care and Education budgets are under considerable strain as they strive to deliver savings during 2025/26, especially as demand for these services continues to rise.
- Pressure on Acute Services: Difficulties in accessing primary and community services increase pressure on acute care, such as within Accident & Emergency departments, and undermines the overall health of the population.

¹The Kings Fund (2024). Available at: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/press-releases/response-lib-dem-pledge-reform-social-care-personal-care>

Alongside the challenges outlined above, the Council recognises the potential impact on KCC Officers in Adult, Social Care and Health due to the recent departure of the Director of Adult Social Care.

This motion affirms the Council's collective commitment and determination, across all political groups, to address the crises facing the NHS and social care system. Through cross-party collaboration, strategic funding, and a commitment to reform, Kent County Council aims to ensure that all residents of Kent have access to high-quality, timely, and equitable health and social care services.

Motion

In light of these ongoing challenges, County Council resolves to:

- Recommend that KCC works with relevant partners to form an independently chaired cross party Health and Social Care Kent improvement board to urgently address issues in the CQC inspection, the budget, and the departure of the DASS.
- Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care should write to the Secretary of State to:
 - Confirm this Council's support of joint working at both local and national levels, including through the KCC Health and Wellbeing Board, to establish a long-term agreement on funding and provision of social care.
 - Call for the establishment of a national cross-party commission dedicated to forging a long-term agreement on a predictable and consistent funding model for free personal care, ensuring sustainability and accessibility for all.
 - Support the introduction of an Emergency Health and Care Budget ahead of the Autumn Statement, prioritising the resolution of the national crisis and placing it at the forefront of the new government's agenda.

Motion for Time Limited Debate – Amendments to Treasury Management

Proposer: Mr Paul Stepto

Seconded: Mr Mark Hood

Background information provided by the Green Group:

Treasury management is the management of Kent County Council's cash flows, borrowing and investments, and the associated risks. The Council has borrowed and invested substantial sums of money and is therefore exposed to financial risks.¹

Implementing changes will allow a greater deal of transparency and scrutiny, where possible, to ensure decisions deliver the best outcomes for all of Kent's residents.

This will allow for a discussion and potential recommendations to be considered before decisions such as paying the £50 million loan from Barclays bank are made.²

Motion:

This Council resolves to

1. Recommend that all future financial transactions/decisions in relation to Treasury Management which are above the value of £2 million are reported to the Governance & Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.
2. Recommend that all Member groups or boards responsible for monitoring and oversight of Treasury Management activity (e.g. the Treasury Management Group) are formalised within KCC governance with a requirement to include representation from all Political Groups.

1. [Appendix 1 - Full year Treasury Management Outturn 2024-25.pdf](#)

2. [A 'brave and significant move' sees £50m wiped off KCC's long-term debt - News & Features - Kent County Council](#)

This page is intentionally left blank