

**DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-
ORGANISATION CABINET COMMITTEE**

Thursday, 14th May, 2026

2.00 pm

Council Chamber





AGENDA

DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION CABINET COMMITTEE

Thursday, 14 May 2026 at 2.00 pm
Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall,
Maidstone.

Ask for: **James Clapson**
Telephone: **03000 417387**

Membership (17)

Reform (10):	Mr M Harrison (Chair), Mrs S Emberson (Vice Chair), Mr M Brown, Mr W Chapman, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr J Eustace, Mrs M Lawes, Mr T Mole, Ms P Williams and 1 Vacancy.
Liberal Democrat (2):	Mr M Ellis and Mr A J Hook
Restore Britain (2):	Mr O Bradshaw and Ms M Fothergill
Conservative (1):	Mr H Rayner
Green (1):	Mr M Hood
Labour (1):	Mr A Brady

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

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

- 1 Apologies and Substitutes
- 2 Declarations of Interest
- 3 Minutes of the meeting held on 23.3.2026 (Pages 1 - 8)
- 4 LGR update (national update including progress in DPP areas) (Pages 9 - 20)
- 5 Update on Service Complexity Assessments (KCC internal preparation for LGR) (Pages 21 - 26)
- 6 26/00028 Procurement of a Strategic Partner for Kent and Medway LGR Programme (Pages 27 - 40)
- 7 Work Programme (Pages 41 - 42)

EXEMPT ITEMS

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

Benjamin Watts
Deputy Chief Executive
03000 416814

Date: 6 May 2026.

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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 23 March 2026.

PRESENT: Mr M Harrison (Chair), Mr A Brady, Mr M Brown, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr M Ellis, Mr J Eustace, Mr J Henderson, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mr M Paul, Mr H Rayner, Mrs P Williams and Mr T L Shonk

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Hespe (Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Local Government Reorganisation).

OFFICERS: Amanda Beer (Chief Executive), Jenny Dixon-Sherreard (Strategy Manger), Dave Shipton (Head of Financial Strategy), Ben Watts (Deputy Chief Executive), David Whittle (Director for Strategy Policy Relationships & Corporate Assurance), Tim Woolmer (Head of Strategic Partnerships), Brendan Arnold (Corporate Director Finance), Mark Scrivener (Head of Risk & Delivery Assurance), Tristan Godfrey (Senior Governance Manager) and James Clapson (Democratic Services Officer).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

20. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Ellis and from Mrs Emberson who was substituted by Mr Shonk.

Mr Hespe was present on behalf of the Leader.

21. Declarations of Interest
(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

22. Minutes of the meeting held on 3.11.2025
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

23. Local Government Re-organisation Update
(Item 4)

1. Mr Hespe, introduced the item that provided an update on national developments relating to local government re organisation (LGR) since the previous meeting of the Committee. The report also set out the current anticipated timetable for the programme and included a number of potential scenarios should the Government amend key milestones.
2. Mr Whittle presented the report and covered the following points:
 - a. Surrey's Structural Change Order had come into force on 10 March 2026. It was the first such order under the current national programme and provided an indication of how the implementation phase of LGR might operate.
 - b. The statutory consultation on the five proposals for Kent and Medway had commenced on 5 February 2026 and was due to close on 26 March 2026. Initial indications suggested that engagement levels had been high when compared with other comparable areas nationally.
 - c. It was expected that the Government would make its ministerial decisions for nonpriority areas before 16 July 2026, as this was the final sitting day of Parliament prior to the summer recess. The Government's decisions relating to priority programme areas had not yet been announced, although ministerial statements indicated that announcements were expected imminently.
 - d. The report included a number of potential scenarios that could arise from changes to the timetable or national LGR programme. These scenarios had been included at the request of Members and supported the wider scenario planning work being undertaken by senior officers across Kent and Medway. The scenarios were theoretical and did not reflect any confirmed changes in Government policy.
3. The following points arose from Members' comments and questions:
 - a. There was concern regarding the negative democratic implications that would be generated if elections were delayed.
 - b. If any of the scenarios became likely, there would be opportunities to make representations to the Government.
 - c. There were risks relating to workforce retention and service continuity during the transition period. This was a recognised issue in LGR programmes nationally and was being actively considered. Most areas were expected to work towards a common vesting date which would provide some mitigation against the loss of staff.
 - d. A Memorandum of Understanding had been agreed between councils to manage the apportionment of costs.
 - e. The timing of the vesting day was a matter for Government however, any strategic response by the Council would be brought before Members for input into the decision making.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted and commented on the update on local government re organisation.

24. Update on Kent and Medway LGR Implementation Preparation
(Item 5)

1. Mr Hespe introduced the item that provided an update on the preparatory work being undertaken collaboratively across all 14 councils in Kent and Medway, in advance of a ministerial decision on LGR. The report focused on the work undertaken since the submission of the Kent and Medway business cases, and on preparation activities requested by the Government.
2. Mr Woolmer, Head of Strategic Partnerships, presented the report during which he covered the following points:
 - a. The Kent and Medway councils had adopted a collaborative approach to the development of the five business cases submitted in November 2025. This joint working had continued through the current “enhanced discovery phase”. This phase focused on preparatory activity and did not pre-empt the ministerial decision.
 - b. The Government had indicated that a ministerial decision was expected by July 2026, with 16 July 2026 being the current planning assumption.
 - c. The estimated total pre vesting day cost across Kent and Medway was approximately £12 million.
 - d. The Government had provided £0.5 million in funding so far, and Kent and Medway were expecting a further allocation of between £4 million and £4.5 million.
 - e. It was anticipated that the costs incurred in 2026/27 would be relatively low and that the majority of the costs would be incurred during the 2027/28 year.
 - f. If additional funding was not forthcoming, councils would need to accommodate their share of the remaining pre vesting day costs in the 2027/28 year. This would probably be managed through reserves, and would ultimately transfer to any successor authority, in line with the principles set out in the business cases.
3. The following points arose from Members’ comments and questions:
 - a. Pre vesting day costs would be reflected within the Medium Term Financial Plan once there was clarity on which option would be progressed.
 - b. Recruitment of a Kent and Medway programme director was underway. A programme management office would also be established that was staffed through a combination of seconded internal staff, new appointments and external support, to support delivery.
 - c. There would be a single, co-ordinated implementation process following the ministerial decision, so services would not be restructured piecemeal in advance of vesting day. The service

design work would take place before the vesting day however; implementation would follow vesting day to ensure legal and operational stability.

- d. Preparatory work was being co-ordinated across all 14 councils to avoid duplication and unnecessary transformation activity ahead of the decision. Detailed service changes would be planned through the formal implementation programme.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the continued collaborative working between all 14 councils in Kent and Medway, and the commitment to continue working closely together in anticipation of a ministerial decision.

25. KCC Service Preparation *(Item 6)*

1. Mr Hespe introduced the item that detailed the Service Complexity Assessment (SCA) process, this was a key element of the Council's preparatory work. The purpose of the assessment was to provide a comprehensive understanding of each service or function, and to assess the potential complexity and risk associated with transitioning services to unitary authorities.
2. Ms Dixon-Sherreard, Strategy Manager, presented the report during which the following points were covered:
 - a. The SCAs would support services in preparing for LGR and would be needed regardless of which model was selected by the Government. It was important for the Council to understand the potential implications for its services at an early stage, given the pace at which implementation discussions would be expected following a ministerial decision.
 - b. The SCA's would gather information across services to provide an evidence base that would inform future discussions on operating models, the aggregation and disaggregation of services, and transition planning.
 - c. Service leaders would be asked to provide factual information and professional judgement based on their operational knowledge. The kind of information collected would include;
 - i. service demand and whether this was geographically concentrated,
 - ii. the current delivery model,
 - iii. the extent to which services relied on countywide or centralised functions,
 - iv. any legislative or statutory requirements,
 - v. workforce considerations, particularly where specialist skills were required.
 - d. The process would be led by the Strategy and Policy team. It would initially focus on assessments for services within the Growth, Environment and Transport directorate, the Adult Social Care

directorate, and the Children's Services directorate. This work was planned for completion by July 2026.

- e. Updates on progress and findings could be brought to future meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the work underway to deliver the Service Complexity Assessments.

26. Local Government Reorganisation: Governance Overview *(Item 7)*

1. Mr Godfrey, Senior Governance Manager, introduced the report that set out the legal and governance framework within which LGR would be required to operate. During the introduction the following points were covered:
 - a. The framework was largely prescribed by legislation, in particular the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which provided the Secretary of State with the necessary powers to implement structural change.
 - b. The primary mechanism for implementing LGR was the Structural Change Order (SCO).
 - c. SCOs set out the detailed arrangements for transition, including governance structures, decision making responsibilities and safeguards to ensure that new authorities were not disadvantaged prior to vesting day.
 - d. The Surrey SCO provided a useful recent example of how these arrangements operated in practice.
 - e. It was likely that shadow authorities would need to be established. Shadow authorities were full legal authorities and operated within the same governance framework as existing councils. This included adopting a constitution, codes of conduct, member allowance schemes and arrangements for audit and best value. However, shadow authorities would not assume responsibility for service delivery until vesting day.
2. The following points arose from Members' comments and questions:
 - a. The present understanding is that existing ward boundaries would be used as the basis for wards in shadow authority elections. A fuller electoral and boundary review would likely take place within the first two terms of the new council.
 - b. Joint Committees were an established governance mechanism that could undertake preparatory decision making in advance of the shadow authorities being established. These committees were generally short-lived and were typically responsible for technical and procedural matters such as, senior officer appointments or the preparation of governance frameworks.
 - c. Political proportionality, voting arrangements and membership of joint committees would need careful consideration and alignment across all affected authorities. Further detail could be brought back to the Committee at a future meeting.
 - d. There was precedent for maintaining a single Lord Lieutenancy covering historic county areas following LGR and ceremonial arrangements could be preserved through appropriate legal mechanisms. Members would receive a report on the implications of LGR on civic and ceremonial functions including the Lord Lieutenant, Cinque Ports and the status of honorary aldermen. A civic functions workstream would be established.

- e. Members sought clarification on the legal position should a local authority disagree with the Government's decision on LGR. Members were advised that a response would need to be considered carefully in light of any statutory obligations and appropriate legal advice would be sought if the circumstance arose.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the governance overview relating to local government re-organisation.

27. KCC Draft Corporate Risk - Local Government Reorganisation
(Item 8)

1. Mr Hespe introduced the item that presented a draft corporate risk relating to LGR which was proposed for inclusion on the Council's Corporate Risk Register. The draft risk was intended to capture the principal strategic risks to the Council arising from the LGR programme and would be reviewed and updated as the programme developed.
2. Mr Scrivener, Head of Risk & Delivery Assurance, presented the report and covered the following points:
 - a. The draft corporate risk set out the national and local context for LGR and identified a number of key risk areas from the Council's perspective.
 - b. The key risks related to;
 - i. financial sustainability,
 - ii. workforce capacity and retention,
 - iii. service continuity,
 - iv. governance and decision making,
 - v. assets and property,
 - vi. delivery of statutory responsibilities during the transition.
 - c. The draft risk was intentionally high level and was not intended to be exhaustive at this stage. When the draft risk was added to the Corporate Risk Register, a dedicated LGR risk register would also be developed to capture more detailed and operational risks. This would be informed by ongoing workstreams, including the Service Complexity Assessment process.
3. The following points arose from Members' comments and questions:
 - a. The financial risks associated with LGR would need to be considered alongside existing corporate financial risks. The interdependencies between risks would be reflected in future reporting.
 - b. There were service continuity risks, including the potential impact of disaggregation of existing countywide services, and the pace at which new authorities would be required to operate following vesting day. The SCA work was intended to help mitigate some of these risks.
 - c. There was concern that decisions taken prior to LGR could disadvantage successor authorities. Careful asset management

during the transition period would be required and this would be reflected in the evolving risk framework.

- d. There were statutory mechanisms in place to address the financial failure of local authorities. The arrangements for the treatment of debt and liabilities would be addressed as part of the implementation process.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the draft corporate risk relating to local government re-organisation, with Members' comments to be reflected in future risk reporting.

28. KCC's Response to the Government LGR Consultation
(Item 9)

1. Mr Hespe introduced the item that set out the Council's proposed response to the Government's statutory consultation on LGR. The consultation covered all five proposals for Kent and Medway, and the response had been prepared to restate the Council's position in light of the previously approved business case.
2. Ms Dixon-Sherreard presented the report and highlighted the following points:
 - a. The consultation response drew directly on the evidence and arguments contained within the Kent and Medway business cases.
 - b. The response supported Option 1A and set out the rationale for that position. It included considerations relating to financial sustainability, service delivery, governance and the management of strategic and statutory risks.
 - c. The response flagged concerns associated with the alternative options; particularly in relation to the potential disaggregation of countywide services, financial resilience of successor authorities, and the concentration of service pressures in parts of the county.
3. Mr Hook, Mr Brady and Mr Hood wished for it to be recorded that they did not endorse the Council's consultation response.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the response to the Government consultation on local government re-organisation to be submitted by Kent County Council.

29. Work Programme
(Item 10)

RESOLVED to note the work programme.

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From: Linden Kemkaran, Leader
Amanda Beer, Chief Executive

To: **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee, 14 May 2026**

Subject: LGR update

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

This paper provides an update on national Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) developments since the previous Cabinet Committee on 23 March 2026. This includes the government's decisions on the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) geographies, progress of the DPP areas, and the key learning for Kent and Medway.

Recommendation:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to:

- (1) **Note** and **comment** on this update
-

1. Introduction

1.1. This paper provides an update on national Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) developments since the previous Cabinet Committee on 23 March 2026. This covers:

- An overview of recent government LGR announcements and activity
- The government's decisions on the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) geographies in full for the first time, and the key learning from these for Kent and Medway.
- Progress of the DPP areas, including:
 - DPP Structural Changes Orders (SCOs)
 - governance arrangements, including progress on Joint Committees and community governance arrangements in both the DPP areas and the LGR 'fast track' area of Surrey.
 - section 24 arrangements

2. Overview of recent Government LGR announcements and activity

2.1 **25 March – DPP unitary council geographies (Tranche 2):** A Parliamentary [Written Ministerial Statement](#) (WMS) made to Parliament outlined the Government's decision to implement the following new unitary council geographies in the following DPP areas:

- *Essex*: 5 unitary councils in Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock
- *Hampshire*: 5 unitary councils in Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton

- *Norfolk*: 3 unitary councils in Norfolk
 - *Suffolk*: 3 unitary councils in Suffolk
 - *East and West Sussex*: The Government decided not to proceed with any of the proposals submitted for East or West Sussex, instead opting to reconsult on a modified option.
- 2.2 The Secretary of State has recently reconfirmed that he is ‘fully committed to delivering reorganisation’, and has said in letters to [East Sussex and Brighton and Hove council](#) and [West Sussex councils](#), that ‘the additional consultation ‘does not affect the intended timetable for new councils, as the timeline will now move to align with the ‘Tranche 3’ areas, where decisions are due to be made in the summer, with new councils still to ‘go live’ in April 2028’.
- 2.3 **25 March – Thurrock Council debt**: Through the [WMS](#) the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) also confirmed it’s ‘commitment to repay in-principle £200m of Thurrock Council’s debt in 2026-27’. Government has said that ‘To prevent failures like those seen in Thurrock and Woking from happening again, [they] will now bring into operation the statutory powers enacted in 2023...which allow direct intervention where authorities take excessive risks in their borrowing and investment practices’.
- 2.4 **25 March – LGR transition funding allocations and local administration**: The [WMS](#) also lays out how the £63 million in transition funding announced in February this year will be allocated. The detail of this is covered in Section 5.
- 2.5 **26 March – DPP LGR ‘implementation letters’**: On 31 March 2026, the MHCLG published a suite of LGR ‘implementation letters’, sent on 26 March, to the Chief Executives of:
- [Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock](#)
 - [Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton](#)
 - [Norfolk](#)
 - [Suffolk](#)
- 2.6 The letters outline the well-rehearsed LGR implementation processes. However, they also provide new information on ‘the decisions Ministers have [already] taken in relation to [the SCO], the additional information [MHCLG] requires from [the councils] before [29th] of May, the processes for administering the allocations of grant funding for the new unitary councils, and the next steps in the process’.
- 3. Government decisions on DPP geographies**
- 3.1 As stated on Section 2, on 25 March the Government [announced](#) which geographies they had settled on for four of the DPP areas (Essex, Hampshire, Norfolk and Suffolk).
- 3.2 For the remaining two areas of East and West Sussex, the Secretary of state for Local Government said that he had ‘not yet made a decision, due to concerns regarding all four of the proposals [he] received’. The Government has proposed ‘an option for potential modification of the proposals for a

further technical consultation' in May/June this year. This appears to be predicated on expanding the Brighton and Hove City Council boundary.

3.3 The table below presents a summary of the DPP decisions. This includes the current whole population of the DPP area, new unitary population sizes, and the main population focus areas of the new unitary areas.

DPP area	No. of new councils	Current population	New council population sizes	Population focus areas
Norfolk	3	940,359	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater Norwich: 278,000 • East Norfolk: 336,000 • West Norfolk: 300,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norwich City Council • King's Lynn • Great Yarmouth
Suffolk	3	786,231	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western: 254,700 • Central & Eastern: 253,416 • Ipswich & Southern: 252,552 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ipswich • Felixstowe • Bury St. Edmunds • Sudbury • Newmarket • Stowmarket • Lowestoft
Essex	5	1,929,610	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West: 325,609 • North East: 510,162 • Mid: 331,757 • South West: 368,745 • South East: 360,317 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chelmsford City Council • Colchester City Council • Basildon & Thurrock • Harlow • Southend-on-Sea
Hampshire	5	1,920,959	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North: 394,648 • Mid: 461,194 • South West: 473,332 • South East: 565,792 • Isle of Wight: 141,660 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portsmouth City Council • Southampton City Council • Winchester • Basingstoke
Sussex (East & West combined)	4 (Proposed by central Government & open to a further technical consultation)	1,759,789 (East Sussex: 844,752 West Sussex: 915,037)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unitary A (Eastbourne, Hastings, Rother, Wealden & parts of Lewes): 537,000 • Unitary B (Arun, Adur & Worthing): 349,000 • Unitary C 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brighton & Hove City Council • Chichester • Lewes • Eastbourne

			(Brighton + Wards & Parishes from Lewes – East Saltdean & Telscombe Cliffs, Peacehaven West, Peacehaven East, Peacehaven North & Falmer Parish: 308,000 • Unitary D (Crawley, Chichester, Horsham & Mid Sussex): 566,000	
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4. Key learning for Kent and Medway from the DPP geographies decisions

- 4.1 The Secretary of State has said that the Government’s decisions on DPP geographies and previously in Surrey, ‘do not set any precedent’ for the other 14 remaining areas going through LGR. Notwithstanding this, there are some key learning points to highlight from the DPP decisions for Kent and Medway.
- 4.2 **None of the proposals being taken forward has been proposed by a County Council.** The conclusion drawn is that this could be the case in the next tranche of remaining 14 areas going through LGR.
- 4.3 **500,000 is a guide, not a threshold.** The government’s original minimum population criteria for new unitary councils was 500,000. However, looking at the DPP decisions, the average size of a new unitary council is 300,000, with the smallest new unitary (‘Ipswich & Southern’) having a population of 252,552. Whilst the largest new unitary (‘North East Essex’) has a population of 510,162. There are disaggregation and financial stability concerns of having unitary councils formed from a low population base.
- 4.4 **Boundary modifications appear to be normal part of the process and there is focus on expanding the boundaries of City Councils.** The government’s original proposal was to use existing District, Borough and City boundaries as the ‘building blocks’ for new unitary council boundaries. However, in Hampshire, Norfolk and Suffolk the geographies being taken forward will necessitate significant boundary changes. The Secretary of State has also suggested modified proposals in East and West Sussex. The conclusion is that a final approved structure need not precisely match any single submission.

- 4.5 **Majority council support appears to matter and collaboration is a requirement.** Each decision letter cites that majority council support has been given to a proposal. While not a formal criterion, it is a powerful reason for collaboration. The Sussex decision was also deferred in part due to insufficient joint working. Proposals developed without genuine cross-authority partnership probably face a higher risk of rejection. In Kent and Medway, no single option commands majority council support. A lack of a majority support for options could be a key structural risk. This is a difference from the DPP areas - where 5/6 or 6/8 councils backed the successful proposals. It is the primary factor that could prompt a Sussex-style deferral for further consultation.
- 4.6 **The criteria to assess proposals appears to have widened.** The original criteria were set out in the MHCLG [invitation letter](#). However, the [WMS](#) implies that the DPP decisions were also assessed using economic growth, housebuilding, and local identity criteria. Unitaries capable of driving housing delivery and urban growth are preferred. Portsmouth, Southampton, Norwich and Brighton all have had boundaries expanded for this reason. Local identity - not population size - was a primary differentiator in every decided area. Every decision letter uses identical language about 'distinct urban, rural and coastal identities'.

5. Progress of the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) areas

- 5.1 LGR transition funding allocations and local administration
- 5.2 The [WMS](#) lays out how the £63 million in transition funding announced in February this year will be allocated. This is fully detailed in Section 5. There will be 'at least' £900,000 for each new unitary council 'to help establish effective services and governance arrangements'. For example, Essex will receive £4.5 million; Hampshire - £3.6 million; Norfolk - £2.7 million; and Suffolk - £2.7m. The Surrey 'fast-track' LGR area will also receive £1.8 million. The Secretary of State has said that the criteria used 'reflects the differing levels of complexity involved across areas and allows for a small central reserve to be used later for targeted support if needed'. Based the options being considered and the government's allocation criteria, Kent and Medway could receive anywhere between £900,000 to £4.5 million in transition funding.
- 5.3 The subsequent 'implementation letters' to Chief Executives of the DPP areas, referred to in section 2.5, detail how the Government would like this funding to be administered locally. The letters describe how, unlike in Surrey, although a Chief Executive of a County Council will be the 'leader' of the Implementation Team for a county area going through LGR, there will also be a 'Deputy Team Leader to be agreed locally from a District/Borough/Unitary in each new unitary area'. DPP councils have expressed a concern about the potential blurred lines of accountability of this arrangement.

- 5.4 Government 'intend to pay' the LGR transition funding 'directly to the councils that are the employers of the Deputy Team Leaders'. Alternatively, if councils can 'inform [MHCLG] that [they] have agreed locally it should be paid to a different council [MHCLG agree they] can do this', subject to 'unanimous agreement of all those councils within the area of the new unitary council'.
- 5.5 In Kent and Medway, the Local Authority Chiefs LGR Programme Board has agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), prepared by Kent Finance Officers (KFOA), including the establishment of a shared 'LGR Implementation Reserve'. Future transition funding will be allocated into this Reserve. The MoU sets out how transition costs will be funded, managed and governed up to vesting day, including cost estimates, the pooling of the anticipated government funding, and oversight arrangements. The MoU also covers funding for the Strategic Business Partner, Project Management Officer (PMO) and Programme Director, supported by mutual letters of comfort between Kent County Council, Medway Council, and the District and Borough Councils.
- 5.6 DPP Structural Changes Orders (SCOs)
- 5.7 To recap, a Structural Change Order (SCO) is essentially the legal mechanism for forming a new unitary council.
- 5.8 The LGR 'implementation letters' confirm the Government is keen to expedite the LGR process and finalise SCOs for DPP areas speedily. However, DPP SCO's will not be finalised until after 29 May - after this May's local elections - due to the Government requiring supplementary information. In addition, for political, but also for practical reasons - many council staff are involved in election preparation - County Councils in DPP areas are largely in a holding position.
- 5.9 The supplementary information that MHCLG requires from DPP areas (Tranche 2) is:
- who should be named as the Returning Officers for the inaugural elections for each new council area.
 - suggested interim warding arrangements for each of the new councils for inclusion in the Order. 'Ideally, the proposed warding would be collectively agreed by the councils in the area of each new council'.
 - the 'current electoral cycles for Parish Councils in the area of each new council and [areas] preferences as to if and how alignment with the new councils' elections should best be achieved'.
- 5.10 Non-DPP areas (Tranche 3) can reasonably expect to be asked for similar information relatively soon after a decision, and this is something which Kent and Medway may wish to factor into their work programme.
- 5.11 Joint Committees
- 5.12 To recap, a Joint Committee is created for each new unitary council to act as an implementation body. They are detailed in the SCO and comprise of

Members from County Councils, District and Borough and City Councils. The Committees are dissolved and replaced by a new, different implementation bodies comprised of elected Members after the inaugural elections to new unitary councils. A Joint Committee is responsible for:

- overseeing development of the Implementation Plan
- preparing draft constitutions and governance frameworks for the new councils
- recommending interim statutory appointments to the shadow authorities

5.13 The DPP implementation letters state that the governance arrangements for Joint Committees that will largely remain the same as for Surrey, in that where a new unitary council comprises a former County and Districts/Boroughs, '50% of the membership are to be councillors representing the County Council and 50% are to be councillors representing Districts/Boroughs collectively'. 'The proceedings and identification of the Chair and Deputy Chair are to be determined by the Joint Committee'.

5.14 However, in those areas with existing unitary councils, there are three significant changes from that used in Surrey.

- Government have said that they 'expect Deputy Leads to have a significant role in supporting their respective Joint Committees'.
- Where a new Unitary Council involves a former unitary council, '50% of the membership are to be councillors representing the existing unitary councils...with the other 50% to be Councillors representing the County, Districts and Boroughs'.
- The Chair is also 'to be a member of the unitary council, with the Deputy Chair determined by the Joint Committee and to not come from the unitary council'.

5.15 DPP areas are not implementing Joint Committee structures until after the local elections. Areas have taken note of the experience of Surrey County Council who have advised that if you create Joint Committees too early there might not be enough activity for elected Members to be involved in. Consequently, the timescales by which DPP areas are setting up their Joint Committees range from June to September. This will allow respective areas to set up their programme and Implementation Teams in advance of Joint Committee creation and activity. This is learning which Kent and Medway may wish to factor in when considering the setting up Joint Committees on a voluntary basis prior to the SCO coming into force.

5.16 Surrey's community governance pilots

5.17 The Government expects new unitary councils to set-up neighbourhood governance structures such as 'Neighbourhood Area Committees' (NACs) to strengthen local community engagement. As the LGR 'fast-track' area, Surrey County Council has been at the forefront of creating NACs. The County Council launched a pilot programme of four NACs in 2025, and an evaluation was undertaken in January this year. The intention is to share the learning from the pilot evaluation with partners across Surrey, including the new Shadow Authorities, once they are established in May 2026.

- 5.18 The pilot NACs were not constituted and had no direct decision-making powers. They operated as advisory bodies, supported by the County Council and partners, acting as focal points for local engagement, insight gathering, and partnership working. Councils and partners were not required to implement any recommendations from the NAC but agreed that identified priorities and actions could be progressed where appropriate.
- 5.19 NAC pilot areas were selected based on the latest Boundary Commission electoral divisions and the average population per area, while accommodating Surrey's urban-rural diversity in order to test the approach across a range of communities. A combination of parished and unparished areas were included. Existing relationships between the involved organisations were also considered due to the fast-paced rollout of the pilots.
- 5.20 Each NAC pilot adopted 12 core principles:
- Community focused
 - Councillors to provide visible leadership while participating as equal partners.
 - Electoral divisions as the building blocks for logical geographies of collaboration
 - Fully inclusive of all partners
 - Enable direct representation from residents
 - Data and evidence informed
 - Draw on insights from a range of creative and inclusive local engagement methods, in person and digital
 - Agree areas of local priority focus within the wider strategic frameworks set by the Unitary Councils
 - Drive action and improvement
 - Connected to local service delivery teams, but not an additional management layer
 - Ensure productive collaboration with Town and Parish Councils and Residents Associations where they operate
 - Operate within a framework of defined parameters for the appropriate range of responsibilities and delegated budgets, to enable the arrangements to have real impact.
- 5.21 All the submitted LGR options in Kent and Medway would require a community governance structure to be incorporated, whichever option the Government decides to proceed with, and we can learn from the Surrey experience, particularly from their evaluation process.
- 5.22 Whist, Surrey County Council has fully involved their Town and Parish Councils in the NACs scheme, they are not supportive of additional Town and Parish Councils being created. The creation and the processes around new Town and Parishes are, like in all English County areas, via a Community Governance Review which is led by the District and Borough Councils. In Surrey, there have recently been several Reviews and from these some new Town or Parish Councils have been supported by the local population and are progressing, but some proposals have not been supported and are not

progressing. In Kent there have been similar Community Governance Reviews which have proposed new Town Councils for urban centres which are currently unparished.

5.23 Section 24 arrangements

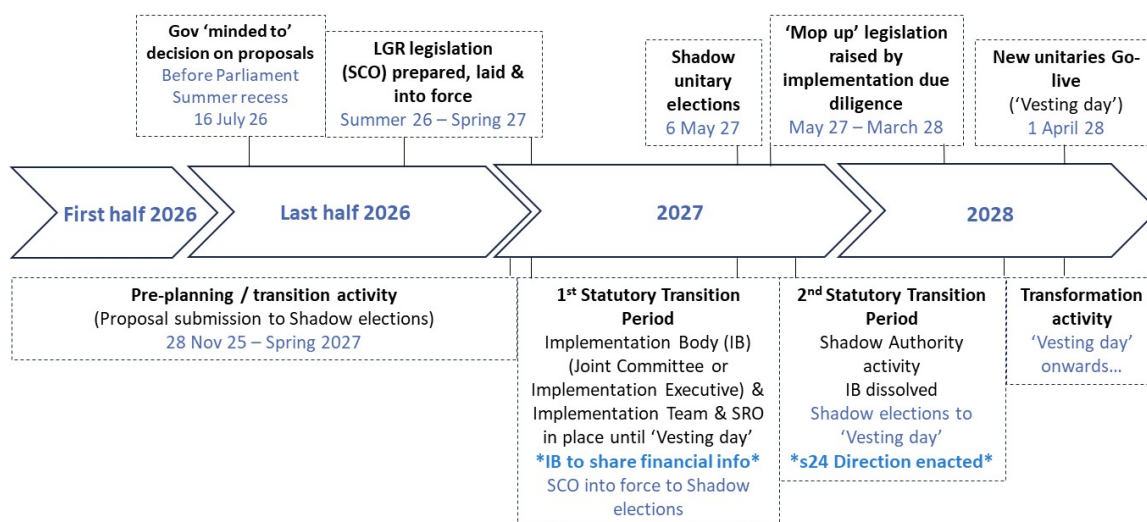
5.24 In previous rounds of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), Government has issued financial directions to councils going through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) under [Section 24 \(s24\) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007](#). This is to ensure that existing (predecessor) councils do not enter into new financial agreements which 'undermine or diminish the benefits or savings anticipated as a result of unitarisation, or which may have an effect on the financial position of the new council/s'. It is anticipated that DPP areas will have sight of a draft of their Section 24 directions in the summer, with them coming into force in the Autumn.

5.25 The process for a Section 24 coming into place is as follows:

<p>After LGR 'minded to' decision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary Joint Committee/s are set-up. • Joint Committees are encouraged to voluntarily share financial decisions as part of their Terms of Reference (ToR) – a s24 direction is only mandatory when a Shadow Council is established. • LGR Implementation programme to establish a 'good governance' principle requiring councils to notify each other and Joint Committee of any actions which would result in changes to the financial position of successor authorities. They would also share information on contracts, sale of assets and capital investments. • Government has said that it expects councils to continue to 'maintain strong accounting and governance disciplines, prepare their accounts on a timely basis, and work closely with their auditors to rebuild assurance where accounts have been disclaimed and to ensure that all assets, liabilities and key risks are correctly identified and reported'. They also 'expect all councils in an area to work together in sharing information and making decisions that are in the best interests of the whole area'. In summary, councils will have to continue to meet their statutory duties until vesting day and this includes adhering to the Best Value Duty, evidencing Value for Money (VfM) and maintaining robust financial governance.
<p>SCO is in place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government has said it intends to issue directions once SCOs have been made, 'to specify a person to give consent for all relevant matters and how that power is to be exercised'. It is anticipated

	that directions will say ‘that written consent from [a] successor council will be required for land disposals worth more than £100,000, entering contracts of more than £1,000,000 for capital and entering contracts of more than £100,000 for non-capital (whole life costs)’.
After first formal meeting of Shadow Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After the first formal meeting of the new Shadow Council/s Executive, the s24 Direction comes into being.
Section 24 enacted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once the s24 direction is enacted, the Shadow Executive is responsible for consent being given to predecessor councils entering into financial transactions listed in the Section 24 Direction.
Vesting Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The s24 direction ends on Vesting Day.

5.26 The diagram below illustrates the s24 direction process within the wider LGR timelines.



Recommendations

The Cabinet Committee is asked to:

- (1) **Note** and **comment** on this update

Relevant Director:

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

Report Authors:

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Edward Thomas, Strategy Manager, Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance – edward.thomas@kent.gov.uk

Background documents:

Previous papers to the Devolution and LGR Cabinet Committee, available at: <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=979&Year=0>

Parliamentary Written Ministerial Statement on LGR and DPP geographies, 25 March 2026, available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2026-03-25/hcws1455>

Government LGR policy and programme updates, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-government-reorganisation-policy-and-programme-updates#policy-documents>

Government summary of the LGR process, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-letter-to-areas-invited-to-submitted-final-proposals/summary-of-the-local-government-reorganisation-process>

Government guidance on LGR implementation, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-implementation-guidance>

Government correspondence on the financial decisions before LGR, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-letter-to-areas-invited-to-submitted-final-proposals/financial-decisions-before-local-government-reorganisation>

Surrey County Council Cabinet agenda item on Neighbourhood Area Committees, 27 January 2026, available at: <https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=9778>

Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) briefing on navigating a section 24 direction, available at: <https://lgiu.org/local-government-reorganisation-explained-navigating-a-section-24/>

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From: Linden Kemkaran, Leader
Amanda Beer, Chief Executive

To: **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee, 14 May 2026**

Subject: **Service Complexity Assessments progress update**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

This paper provides an update on the Service Complexity Assessment process that is being delivered to support Kent County Council's (KCC) internal preparation for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). SCAs will provide KCC with a comprehensive understanding of each service or function and identify likely complexities in transitioning to new unitary council(s). This will support implementation planning and future decision-making. The paper sets out progress so far, some overall findings from early work on SCAs, and next steps.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Committee is asked to:

1) Note and comment on the progress and next steps in delivering the Service Complexity Assessment process.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. A paper to the March meeting of this Committee introduced the Service Complexity Assessment (SCA) process as a first step in supporting KCC's internal preparation for LGR.
- 1.2. The aim of the SCA process is to establish a clear understanding of the issues and risks for each of KCC's services associated with transitioning to unitary council(s) through LGR, particularly if it is necessary for KCC's services to disaggregate into multiple new unitaries. Having this clear understanding will ensure that KCC goes into the implementation phase with an evidence-based position on the issues that need to guide design of new council operating models and service delivery arrangements. It will also support effective planning and prioritisation of the implementation work that needs to happen over the coming years to ensure safe and legal delivery of council services on vesting day for the new unitary/unitaries.
- 1.3. The SCA process is being led by the Strategy & Policy team. It provides a consistent process for collecting and analysing information about services under the following categories:

- service demand across the county and any highly specialised needs being met
 - current delivery model and operational dependencies with other services and partners
 - budget profile
 - staffing numbers, any workforce or skills shortages and specialist roles
 - essential (specific) assets and systems
 - relevant legislative requirements and any upcoming government policy change
 - key risks and opportunities related to LGR identified by the service lead.
- 1.4 The information collated will be used to assess the level of complexity in each category. Assessments will consider, for example, whether there are any significant geographical disparities in demand and spend, whether budgets, contracts and resources can be divided or duplicated and any specific legislative factors that will need to shape the design of future service delivery.
- 1.5 The information collected is not intended to be exhaustive; there will be further requirements for more detailed information about KCC's services across a range of topics to inform the joint LGR implementation programme and later internal preparation. This process aims to collect enough information to start to understand and identify the implications of LGR for each service and issues that will need to be managed.
- 1.6 The SCA process will cover all of KCC's services, with all services in the Adult Social Care & Health (ASCH), Children, Young People & Education (CYPE), and Growth, Environment & Transport (GET) Directorates and a small number of public-facing corporate services being covered in the first phase, which aims to finish in July, ahead of the expected Government decision. The remaining corporate services will be completed between July and September, and will align with work undertaken by the joint Enhanced Discovery Phase being led by Local Authority Chiefs on enabling functions such as finance, workforce etc.
- 1.7 The breadth and depth of the SCA process and the rapid pace at which this work needs to be delivered to inform implementation following a government decision in July means that additional capacity has been required. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has been appointed as an external partner and is working with the Strategy & Policy team to develop and deliver the SCA process. PwC colleagues are supporting other county councils with preparation for LGR so are also able to bring experience and advice to enhance KCC's approach. The value of the contract is £440,000 (exc. VAT) and runs until September. Due to the importance of the disaggregation of countywide services in managing LGR implementation in Kent and Medway, it has been agreed that a proportion of the remaining first tranche of joint LGR funding from MHCLG will be used to support the SCA process.

2. Progress update

2.1 Since the last Committee meeting, the preparation stage of the SCA process has been completed, some pilot assessments have been carried out, and the first phase of the process has been launched.

2.2 Preparation

This stage involved developing the process for collecting information from the services and identifying corporately-held information that could enhance understanding of complexity in areas like assets and contracts – this will be incorporated alongside information collected from the services.

2.3 During the preparation phase, each Directorate Management Team worked with the Strategy & Policy team to agree the list of services / functions in the Directorate and the right level at which the assessments should be conducted. The numbers of assessments taking place in each Directorate are:

ASCH – 49

CYPE – 57

GET – 47

2.4 In addition, 16 services across the Chief Executive's and Deputy Chief Executive's departments have been agreed as in scope of the first phase. This is because they have a close operational alignment with a service in ASCH, CYPE or GET, or because they are public facing. This gives a total of 164 services to be covered in the first phase of the SCA process to July. It is expected that the service lists will shift slightly as the process progresses and more detail on individual service areas is understood.

2.5 A named service lead has been identified for each service, who will work with a named Strategy & Policy officer to provide the information required.

2.6 Communication with staff

Communicating with staff at all levels of the organisation about the SCA process has been a priority. This is the first step in KCC's internal preparation for LGR, and communications messages have aimed to provide information and assurance to staff. Information has been cascaded through management chains and featured in staff newsletters and on KNet. There has been direct communication with named service leads to clarify what they need to do, with endorsement from Directorate Management Teams. The process has been designed to be as streamlined and manageable as possible for service leads to engage with.

2.7 Pilots

In order to test the methodology, a pilot was conducted with one service from each Directorate. These were the Deprivation of Liberties Safeguards service in ASCH, Countywide school admissions in CYPE, and Trading Standards in GET. The full SCA process was followed, including sending out standard communication messages, working with the service to complete the Request for Information form and completing the Scorecard which summarises issues

and provides ratings of complexity for the service across different categories. Learning from the pilots has informed the initial findings in section 3 of this report. The methodology worked successfully in the pilots and a small number of improvements were made to the way information is collected and analysed based on learning and feedback from the pilot services.

2.8 Launch of phase 1

During week commencing 27 April, phase one of the SCA process was launched. Information from all services in scope is being gathered, working with nominated service leads.

3. Initial findings

- 3.1 The SCA process has only recently started, and the following findings are drawn from experience of working with a very small number of services in the pilots and some overall findings from initial conversations with services. Further, more detailed findings will be brought to future meetings of this Committee.
- 3.2 As had been expected, the process has identified complexities across several categories for each service assessed so far and has been helpful in identifying service-specific issues that will need to be addressed during LGR implementation. Examples include management of the Kent Test, the need for sufficient numbers of assessors that are independent of care management to support the Deprivation of Liberties Safeguards process, and management of ongoing legal action in Trading Standards.
- 3.3 Information on the geographical distribution of demand and how this is currently managed by countywide services is important and helps to identify if areas of higher demand are currently being mitigated by working at countywide scale. Data on demand distribution from management information systems is being overlaid with qualitative information from the service lead to gain a full understanding of this.
- 3.4 Early assessments have identified a number of specialist roles that require specific qualifications and / or experience in order for parts of the service to function. This has included Best Interest Assessors to support Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards applications, and specialist Trading Standards inspectors. Information is being collected on any barriers to recruiting or developing existing staff if greater numbers of these specialist roles were required.
- 3.6 While the SCA process will not look in detail at all contracts that KCC holds with providers at this stage, commissioning leads will be asked for initial thoughts on specific contracts or service areas where the transfer of contracts to future unitary/unitaries could be particularly complex. Early issues have included where contracts are over an extended time period, or where re-commissioning will coincide with the expected period of time when new unitary/unitary councils will be starting.

3.7 The process is identifying and mapping interdependencies between KCC services. The way in which one service operates in the future will have an impact on other services in some cases, and this needs to be taken into account in the design of future service delivery arrangements.

4. Next steps

4.1 Information collection will continue with services and corporate support functions during May. Once all relevant information for a service has been collected, Strategy and Policy officers will develop a summary Scorecard for the service. This will provide a comprehensive picture of each service, a judgement on level of complexity in each category and will flag any significant complexities or risks. An initial recommendation on service delivery options for the future will be provided.

4.2 The following table sets out the SCA timeline.

Activity	Date
Development of methodology and pilot SCA process with nominated services	March 2026
Phase 1 - SCA process conducted across ASCH, CYPE, GET and relevant CED/DCED services	April/May 2026
Analysis and synthesis	June 2026
Completion of phase 1 SCAs and initial recommendations	July 2026
Phase 2 - SCA process conducted for corporate support services	July to September 2026

4.3 Updates on progress and key findings will be shared with this Committee at its future meetings.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Committee is asked to:

1) Note and comment on the progress and next steps in delivering the Service Complexity Assessment process.

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

Background documents:

Paper to Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee on 23 March 2026: *KCC Service Preparation*. Available at: [Agenda for Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation Cabinet Committee on Monday, 23rd March, 2026, 2.00 pm](#)

From: Linden Kemkaran, Leader
 Amanda Beer, Chief Executive

To: **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee – 14 May 2026**

Subject: Procurement of a Strategic Partner for Kent and Medway LGR Programme

Key Decision Number: **26/00028**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Report: N/A

Future Pathway of Report: **Leader Decision**

Electoral Division: All

Is the decision eligible for call-in? **Yes**

Summary:

This paper set out the proposal to procure a strategic partner to support the design and implementation plan of Phases 3 and 4 of the collaborative Kent Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme between all 14 Local Authorities in Kent and Medway for LGR. For the Kent LGR Programme, the transition period are Phases:

- Phase 3: Foundational (Decision, July 2026 to Shadow Elections, May 2027)
- Phase 4: Readiness (Shadow Elections, May 2027 to Vesting Day, April 2028)

Subject to appointment, the partner will provide advice, guidance and additional generalist and specialist programme capacity to ensure safe and legal transition of council services to the new Unitary Council(s) is completed by Vesting Day (April 2028).

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to **CONSIDER** and **ENDORSE** or make recommendations to Leader on the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision (PROD) attached at Appendix 1.

1. Background

1.1 In February 2025, the then Minister for Local Government invited Kent and

Medway councils to submit proposals for local government reorganisation, with councils initially providing a joint interim submission in March 2025 and later being required to submit final business cases by 28 November 2025.

- 1.2 All 14 councils across Kent and Medway worked collaboratively throughout the process, sharing a single strategic partner for Phases 1 and 2 to submission, and adopting a unified approach to options appraisal, evidence gathering, financial analysis, communications, and programme governance, in line with Government direction. This collective approach ensured an efficient and coordinated process, culminating in the submission of five final business cases by council Leaders on [28 November 2025](#).
- 1.3 A Ministerial decision is expected by 16 July 2026. The Minister will decide whether to implement any of the submitted proposals, and with or without modification, based on the criteria, consultation responses, and other relevant information, with final agreement made collectively across Government. Until then, councils will continue preparatory work as tasked by MHCLG.

2. Procurement of Strategic Partner

- 2.1 As set out at the previous session of this committee, Kent and Medway councils are continuing to work collaboratively within an agreed governance and programme framework to prepare for implementation, completing MHCLG-required preparatory activities that are decision-agnostic and will enable efficient mobilisation following Ministerial decision. Any option approved would represent one of the largest and most complex local government reorganisation process in England, involving 14 councils serving 1.9 million residents.
- 2.2 Once the Ministerial decision is announced, councils will need to move immediately into a time-critical implementation planning and mobilisation phase through to Vesting Day in April 2028. This will require the building of significant programme capacity to manage transition across workstreams, including programme management, finance, workforce, systems, and governance.
- 2.3 The strategic partner therefore will support the programme team to establish and operate framework management arrangements, and work with all 14 councils to coordinate delivery across agreed workstreams alongside councils' staff and existing teams. The strategic partner will also help draw on emerging and national best practice related to LGR, and will provide independent assurance to strengthen governance, effective risk management and overall delivery confidence. There will be a requirement for learning and knowledge transfer, to ensure skills and expertise are transferred to council staff to support new councils design and transformation work.
- 2.4 It is important to note that the strategic partner will not hold, exercise or assume any decision-making authority. In particular, the strategic partner will have no role in relation to statutory functions, formal governance decisions, employment decisions or financial approvals, nor will it be responsible for implementing service changes arising from this work; responsibility for implementation will remain a matter for the relevant authority.

- 2.5 Consistent with Phases 1 and 2¹ and previous Committee reports, all 14 councils have determined that a strategic partner is required to support Phases 3 and 4, from Ministerial decision to Vesting Day April 2028. They have asked Kent County Council to once again act as lead commissioning authority to procure the partner on behalf of all 14 councils. This approach provides a flexible and scalable means of securing specialist expertise and additional capacity aligned to the agreed programme structure.
- 2.6 A robust procurement exercise has been designed by the KCC Procurement Team building on learning from Phases 1 and 2, to ensure that whilst there is urgency in appointing a partner by Ministerial decision, rigorous process is followed with sufficient time for moderation, evaluation and decision, overseen by a panel made up of Chief Executives and senior Directors from across Kent and Medway.

3. Options Considered and Dismissed and Associated Risks

- 3.1 Reliance on internal capacity alone was considered but ultimately discounted, as councils do not have sufficient specialist expertise or capacity to undertake implementation planning, mobilisation and preparatory work at the required scale and pace without unacceptable risk to core service delivery. The strategic partner will therefore provide necessary generalist and specialist capacity to underpin the programme management office to successfully manage the complexity of transition and readiness activity whilst ensuring the councils can also maintain business-as-usual services.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The total value of the Strategic Partner contract is not yet confirmed. While consultancy and strategic partner services have been procured previously, the scale and volume of work required for a reorganisation of this size, diversity and complexity has not been delivered for a council arrangement of this kind. It is anticipated that the total cost will exceed £1 million and therefore will meet the Key Decision criterion.
- 4.2 As set out at the previous session of this [Committee](#), Chief Executives have agreed to an apportionment methodology and an implementation reserve designed by Kent Finance Officers Group for these costs. A Memorandum of Understanding and letters of comfort have been signed by all councils to ensure that pre-implementation costs are managed consistently across all 14 councils with an equitable distribution between them.
- 4.3 The methodology apportions pre implementation costs up to vesting day and averages cost shares using population and taxbase, as set out below:
- Between Unitary and Two-Tier area 50% by 2024-25 Taxbase and 50% Population Estimate
 - In the two-tier area between County and Districts by 80%:20%
 - Between Districts and Boroughs 50% by 2024-25 Taxbase and 50% by Population Estimate

¹ **Phase 1:** Options Appraisal for Shortlisting Geographies (August 2025 – September 2025).

Phase 2: Strategic Business Case(s) Development (September 2025 – November 2025)

- 4.4 On 16 February 2026, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced an additional £63 million nationally to support the next phase of reorganisation. On 25 March 2026, as part of decisions in Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) areas, MHCLG confirmed that this funding would be allocated to areas on a basis of £900,000 per new unitary authority. Depending on the number of new unitaries the Minister establishes in the summer, Kent and Medway are therefore expected to receive between £900,000 and £4.5 million
- 4.5 It is therefore not anticipated that additional resource will be required from Kent and Medway Council budgets for financial year 2026/27. However, if no further funding from Government is forthcoming in the interim, remaining pre-vesting day costs will need to be built into council budgets for 2027/28, in line with the agreed apportionment set out in the Memorandum of Understanding.

5. How the Proposed Decision Supports the Council's Strategic Statement

- 5.1 This decision directly aligns with Reforming Kent objective 4 priorities and commitments:
- 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.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The proposed decision is only related to procurement, therefore there are no legal implications. Relevant and the required legal advice will be sought as part of the procurement governance process, including of key documents, specification, evaluation criteria and the contract.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken for this decision (Appendix 2). It is anticipated that the procurement of a strategic partner to support LGR will not result in any negative impact on people with protected characteristics.
- 7.2 As the proposed decision relates solely to the commissioning of specialist support and does not directly change policies or service delivery arrangements. Equality considerations will continue to be embedded throughout LGR as the programme progresses.

8. Data Protection Implications

8.1 There are no data protection implications for Kent County Council or other local authorities in Kent and Medway associated with the procurement of strategic partner for LGR. Any DPIAs will be developed to support the implementation of LGR if required at any point during the programme.

9. Other Corporate Implications

9.1 There are no corporate implications.

10. Governance

10.1 This key decision seeks to authorise the procurement of a strategic partner to provide specialist external support for the LGR programme across Kent and Medway. It confirms Kent County Council as the lead commissioning authority, responsible for running the procurement and managing the contract on behalf of all 14 councils.

10.2 The decision also establishes governance arrangements for the receipt and management of Government LGR funding, allowing Kent County Council to administer funding on behalf of the 14 councils for LGR purposes only. It proposes authority is delegated to the Chief Executive to progress and conclude the procurement and oversee the use of funding in line with agreed controls, with appropriate Member oversight retained if costs change.

10.3 The key decision does not determine the outcome of the government's decision on LGR, nor does it approve or commit to specific implementation proposals such as service changes, staffing structures, budgets, asset transfers or organisational design. All transition and implementation decisions will be subject to further reports and future Member decisions, and the decision does not commit spending from the council's 2026/27 budget.

11. Conclusion

11.1 The decision to procure a strategic partner represents a proportionate and timely response to the scale and complexity of LGR across Kent and Medway. It will provide essential additional capacity, specialist expertise and independent assurance to support safe and legal and well-governed transition to new Unitary Council(s), while ensuring councils can maintain business-as-usual services.

11.2 The proposal builds on established collaborative arrangement and maximises the effective use of available government funding, putting Kent and Medway in the strongest possible position to deliver successful transition following the Ministerial decision in July 2026.

12. Recommendations

12.1 Cabinet Committee is asked to **CONSIDER and ENDORSE** or make recommendations to Leader on the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision (PROD) attached at Appendix 1.

13. Relevant Director:

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14. Report Authors:

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15. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Proposed Record of Decision Strategic Partner for LGR

Appendix 2 – EQIA Strategic Partner for LGR

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council

DECISION NUMBER:

26/00028

Executive Decision – Key**26/00028 – Procurement of a Strategic Partner for Local Government
Reorganisation in Kent and Medway****Decision:**

As Leader of the Council, I agree to:

Approve the procurement of a Strategic Partner, with Kent County Council acting as the lead commissioning authority on behalf of the Kent and Medway councils, for securing of relevant specialist advice and resource to facilitate and assist with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) activity.

Approve that Kent County Council will hold any MHCLG Local Government Reorganisation funding received on behalf of Kent councils, to be used solely for LGR transition and implementation planning activity.

Delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Local Government Reorganisation, and the Section 151 Officer to accept and deploy relevant MHCLG funding intended to support all Councils in Kent and Medway to prepare for and implement Local Government Reorganisation.

Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to, negotiating, finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision.

Reasons for decision:

To support councils in Kent and Medway transition to new Unitary Council(s), following the Ministerial decision July 2026, Kent and Medway councils have requested that Kent County Council act as lead procurement authority for securing a strategic partner to support implementation from the Ministerial decision to vesting day April 2028. For the Kent LGR Programme, the transition period are Phases:

- Phase 3: Foundational (Decision, July 2026 to Shadow Elections, May 2027)

- Phase 4: Readiness (Shadow Elections, May 2027 to Vesting Day, April 2028)

This decision is required now to ensure that appropriate support is in place as soon as the government decision is made, enabling councils to progress implementation at pace and in a coordinated way.

Financial implications:

The total value of the Strategic Partner contract is not yet confirmed. While consultancy and strategic partner services have been procured previously, the scale and volume of work required for a reorganisation of this size, diversity and complexity has not been delivered for a council arrangement of this kind. It is anticipated that the total cost will exceed £1 million and therefore will meet the Key Decision criterion.

To support transition to new Unitary Council(s), Kent and Medway councils are procuring a Strategic Partner to provide implementation support from the Government’s decision (expected July 2026) through to vesting day for the new Unitary Council(s) (April 2028).

Kent and Medway Chief Executives have agreed an apportionment methodology, designed by the Kent Finance Officers Group, for sharing the costs of transition to establish new councils. This has been formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by all 14 councils, supported by letters of assurance and comfort from all Chief Executives.

The methodology apportions pre implementation costs up to vesting day and averages cost shares using population and taxbase, as set out below:

- Between Unitary and Two-Tier area 50% by 2024-25 Taxbase and 50% Population Estimate
- In the two-tier area between County and Districts by 80%:20%
- Between Districts and Boroughs 50% by 2024-25 Taxbase and 50% by Population Estimate

On 16 February 2026, MHCLG announced an additional £63 million nationally to support the next phase of reorganisation. On 25 March 2026, as part of decisions in DPP areas, MHCLG confirmed that this funding would be allocated to areas on a basis of £900,000 per new unitary authority. Depending on the number of new unitaries the Minister establishes in the summer, Kent and Medway are therefore expected to receive between £900,000 and £4.5 million.

MHCLG advised that this funding would be paid to the council whose Chief Executive is designated as the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the relevant new unitary footprint. However, MHCLG has indicated that this arrangement is negotiable, and Kent and Medway councils have made clear their preference for the funding to be received jointly into a shared programme funding pot hosted by KCC.

If the MHCLG funding is still paid directly to individual councils, the Memorandum of Understanding agreed by all Kent and Medway authorities still requires that such

funding is transferred to KCC, which will continue to hold and manage the funding on behalf of the 14 Councils.

It is therefore proposed that MHCLG funding allocated to Kent and Medway will be used to meet the costs associated with procuring and engaging the Strategic Partner and will require no spend from the Councils budgets for 2026-27. This is further supported by paying the Strategic Partner in instalments during the length of the contract, subject to the Strategic Partner achieving agreed contractual milestones and Key Performance Indicators.

Legal implications:

The proposed decision is only related to procurement, therefore there are no legal implications.

Relevant and the required legal advice will be sought as part of the procurement governance process, including of key documents, specification, evaluation criteria and the contract.

Equalities implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken for this decision. It is anticipated that the procurement of a Strategic Partner to support LGR will not result in any negative impact on people with protected characteristics. As the proposed decision relates solely to the commissioning of specialist support and does not directly change policies or service delivery arrangements. Equality considerations will continue to be embedded throughout LGR as the programme progresses.

Data Protection implications:

There are no data protection implications for Kent County Council or other local authorities in Kent and Medway associated with the procurement of strategic partner for LGR. Any DPIAs will be developed to support the implementation of LGR if required at any point during the programme.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The proposed decision will be considered at the Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation Cabinet Committee on 14th May 2026.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Deliver implementation using internal council capacity only. This option was discounted as councils do not have sufficient capacity or specialist expertise available to deliver LGR implementation at the required pace and scale without creating unacceptable risk to core service delivery. The complexity of reorganisation in Kent and Medway, including its size and the number of councils involved, exceeds what could reasonably be managed through existing resources alone.

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

.....

Signed

.....

Date

EQIA Submission – ID Number

Section A

EQIA Title

Procurement of a Strategic Partner for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway

Responsible Officer

Matthew Mottram - CED SPRCA

Approved by (Note: approval of this EqIA must be completed within the EqIA App)

Tim Woolmer - CED SPRCA

Type of Activity

Service Change

No

Service Redesign

No

Project/Programme

No

Commissioning/Procurement

Commissioning/Procurement

Strategy/Policy

No

Details of other Service Activity

No

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate

Strategic and Corporate Services

Responsible Service

Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance

Responsible Head of Service

Tim Woolmer - CED SPRCA

Responsible Director

David Whittle - CED SPRCA

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the procurement of a Strategic Partner is to provide a collective programme, assurance and specialist support to the 14 councils in Kent and Medway to ensure that new Unitary Council(s) are established lawfully, safely and on time, are financially sustainable and operationally ready, and are positioned to deliver improved and more efficient public services.

There is no potential for discrimination arising from the procurement of the Strategic Partner. Equality impacts will continue to be monitored and reviewed as the programme progresses and as more detailed service, workforce and transformation proposals are developed.

Section B – Evidence

Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity?

No

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

No

Is there national evidence/data that you can use?

No

Have you consulted with stakeholders?

Yes

Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?
Chief Executives, senior officers, and programme leads contributing through established LGR governance arrangements, including the Kent LGR Programme Board.
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?
Incomplete, supporting evidence is required.
Section C – Impact
Who may be impacted by the activity?
Service Users/clients
No
Staff
No
Residents/Communities/Citizens
No
Are there any positive impacts for all or any of the protected groups as a result of the activity that you are doing?
No.
Details of Positive Impacts
None Identified.
Negative impacts and Mitigating Actions
19. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age
Are there negative impacts for age?
No.
Details of negative impacts for Age
Not Applicable
Mitigating Actions for Age
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age
Not Applicable
20. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Disability
Are there negative impacts for Disability?
No.
Details of Negative Impacts for Disability
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Disability
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Disability
Not Applicable
21. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Sex
Are there negative impacts for Sex
No.
Details of negative impacts for Sex
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Sex
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Sex
Not Applicable
22. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender

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

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

Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation Cabinet Committee 2025/26 Work Programme

15 JULY 2026	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">LGR update (national update including any information known on a government decision for Kent and Medway)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Update on Service Complexity Assessments (KCC internal preparation for LGR)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Work Programme	Standing Item

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