

Democracy and Local Identity assessment

1) Summary of findings within the agreed areas of focus

The Democracy and Local Identity (DLI) workstream considered the challenges and opportunities of the different proposed models of LGR in Kent and Medway through the themes listed below in order to address the following problem statement:

People are disconnected from council decision-making and place-shaping – how can we enhance this (and not make it worse) through LGR?

- **Identity** – local identities, culture and heritage that need to be considered for LGR
- **How people live their lives** – the way people live and travel in the county area
- **Democracy and representation** – implication of councillor/member numbers, and achieving effective representation
- **Governance and engagement** – implications and opportunities regarding community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment arrangements through LGR and future relationships with VCSE, Parishes and other community partners that comprise civil society.

Our report explores individual categories within these themes and provides a summary of our evidence and conclusions that explains the extent to which each option meets the LGR criteria. Further information about our evidence can be found in the appendices, which are provided in a separate document.

Identity

Summary - For Identity, the workstream has considered the socio-economic factors of deprivation and diversity, and how areas identify as places: the cultural, heritage or geographic factors that give them a local identity. Based on the information gathered for this section it was felt that Option 1 – 3UA would be most reflective of and could potentially boost local identity in the different areas. There were two main factors behind this: firstly, it produces lower levels of deprivation in individual authorities compared to other options; and secondly, because it produces district groupings that felt like a good 'fit' and that align with how other organisations and partnerships organise themselves.

Indicator	Best fit to Government criteria	Explanation
Socio-economic and demographic factors		
Deprivation	Option 1 – 3UA	<p>The 3UA model has a lower disparity between the West and the rest of Kent than the 4UA models and it produces the lowest peak IMD and lowest proportion of most deprived LSOAs in East. Importantly, it separates Swale and Thanet meaning that high deprivation is not concentrated in a single authority.</p> <p>Option 2 – 4UA groups Swale and Thanet in a small unitary authority which creates the highest levels of deprivation.</p> <p>The 2UA model has a lower disparity between the unitary authorities but this is because West becomes relatively more deprived, while East remains just as deprived as in other models.</p>

Ethnicity	No optimal option	No conclusions as to the strength of the options, only that a North unitary in any option (or West in Option 5) would be more ethnically diverse than other parts of the county.
Religion	No optimal option	No conclusions as to the strength of the options, only the conclusion that a North unitary in any option (or West in Option 5) would have more religious diversity than other parts of the county.
Place and identity		
Place	Option 1 – 3UA	<p>In the 3UA model the areas are smaller and therefore closer to residents than in the 2UA model, but are large enough to encompass broader and complementary identities, particularly in grouping coastal communities together and districts spanning the Thames Estuary, which it was felt the 4UA models were unable to do.</p> <p>The 3UA model is more equal in terms of deprivation. Areas of high deprivation, such as is the case with Option 2 – 4UA will likely have significant spending pressures meaning they may have to prioritise resources on statutory services rather than place-making.</p> <p>There is a risk that an overall Kent identity could be undermined in a 2UA model due to a West vs East dynamic.</p>

Socio-economic and demographic factors

Deprivation

The findings in this section are based on an analysis of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) scores for each of the 13 area in Kent and Medway (more detail can be found in Appendix A). The analysis considered two measures of deprivation:

- Average IMD scores - for whole district areas and combinations of districts within proposed unitary authorities. This provided a measure of deprivation **(the higher the score, the higher the level of deprivation)** for whole unitary authority areas which allowed comparisons of different options.
- LSOAs (Lower Super Output Areas i.e. neighbourhoods) in the top 10% most deprived areas in England – this provided information about where the most deprived individual neighbourhoods in Kent are located. These are the neighbourhoods where demand for council services will likely be highest.

Proposed UA	Option 1 – 3UA	Option 2 – 4UA	Option 3 – 4UA	Option 4 – 4UA	Option 5 – 2UA	Option 6 – 1UA
Average IMD						
North	22.8	21.6	21.4	21.4	-	19.8
East	22.6	25.1	23.4	23.4	23.3	
West	13.4	13.4	13.4	12.3	16.8	
Mid	-	-	23.2	20.7	-	
South	-	21.6	-	-	-	
Range (most - least deprived)	9.4	11.7	10.1	11.1	6.5	-

Proposed UA	Number of LSOAs in 10% most deprived in England	Total number of LSOAs	% of LSOAs which are 'most deprived'	% of Kent and Medway's 'most deprived' LSOAs (i.e. /65)
Option 1 – 3UA				
North	33	370	9%	51%
East	30	386	8%	46%
West	2	309	1%	3%
Option 2 – 4UA				
North	17	285	6%	26%
East	36	259	14%	55%
South	10	212	5%	15%
West	2	309	1%	3%
Option 3 – 4 UA				
North	17	285	6%	26%
East	25	241	10%	38%
Mid	21	230	9%	32%
West	2	309	1%	3%
Option 4 – 4UA				
North	17	285	6%	26%
East	29	308	9%	45%
Mid	19	258	7%	29%
West	0	214	0%	0%
Option 5 – 2UA				
East	46	471	10%	71%
West	19	594	3%	29%
Option 6 – 1UA (benchmark)				
Kent & Medway	65	1065	6%	100%

Findings:

- More than half (53%) of Kent and Medway's LSOAs categorised as 'most deprived' are within two districts – Thanet (28%) and Swale (25%). Thanet and Swale are also the most deprived areas by average IMD at 31.3 and 27.1 respectively.
- All of the 4UA models have higher 'peak' IMDs and greater ranges, compared to the 2UA and 3UA models. This means that these options produce unitary authorities which are **more deprived overall** as well as creating wider disparities between unitary authorities.
- In all of the options, there is a disparity between West which has low levels of deprivation on average and very few of the most deprived LSOAs and the other areas.
- The 3UA model produces the least deprived version of an East UA with an average IMD of 22.6 and 8% of LSOAs categorised as most deprived. This is the only option in which East is not the most deprived unitary authority, with North scoring slightly higher. This is because Swale and Thanet are in different unitary authorities.
 - It is the option with the lowest peak IMD score (22.8 in North UA)
 - It is the option with the equal lowest peak percentage of LSOAs categorised as most deprived (9% in North UA)
- Option 2 – 4UA creates an East unitary authority which has an average IMD of 25.1 and where 14% of LSOAs are categorised as most deprived. **This would be the most deprived unitary authority across all of the options.**

- This unitary authority would be made up of Thanet and Swale –the two most deprived districts in the whole Kent and Medway – and Canterbury.
- The 2UA model produces **the lowest disparity between unitary authorities**. However this is because West has a higher IMD than in other options at 16.8, rather than the East unitary authority having a lower IMD which remains at a similarly high score of 23.3. Meaning that with this option, on average, the **West would become more deprived, but the East would not become less deprived**.

Conclusions:

One, two, three or four unitary authorities?

- A 4UA model would produce unitary authorities that were more deprived (than 2UA or a 3UA model) on average, with higher concentrations of acute deprivation and greater disparities between the West and the rest of Kent.
- **Reducing disparity does not necessarily mean reducing deprivation** in the most deprived unitary authority. A 2UA model has the lowest disparity between the West and the East unitary authorities – but this is because West becomes more deprived. Deprivation levels in East remain as high as in other models.
- The 3UA model produces the lowest peak IMD and the lowest peak proportion of most deprived LSOAs (i.e. the most deprived unitary authority is not as deprived as in other models).

District makeup of the unitary authorities

- Grouping Swale and Thanet together would produce a unitary authority with a very high average IMD score and containing more than half of Kent and Medway’s most deprived LSOAs. By doing so, the most significant deprivation would be concentrated alongside potentially high demand upon services and financial pressure within a single unitary authority.

On the basis of the points above, Option 1 – 3UA would be optimal. The disparity between the West and the rest of Kent is slightly lower than for the four unitary models and it produces the lowest peak IMD and proportion of most deprived LSOAs. Importantly, it separates Swale and Thanet meaning that high deprivation is not concentrated in a single authority.

Diversity

The findings in this section are based on the 2021 Census. Data tables are included in Appendix A.

- In 10 of the districts, 82% or more are White British and 89% or more are ethnically White. These figures are higher than the national average.
- In contrast, Dartford and Gravesham have a far more diverse population with approximately a quarter part of a minority ethnic group which is above the national average.
- Within Dartford and Gravesham there are specific communities which are prevalent:
 - In Dartford 9.9% of the population are Asian – with 4.4% of the population Indian
 - In Dartford 10.5% of the population are Black – with 8.4% of the population African
 - In Gravesham 11.2% of the population are Asian – with 7.6% of the population Indian
 - In Gravesham 6.5% of the population are Black – with 4.9% African

- Medway is also more ethnically diverse than other parts of Kent, with 15.7% part of a minority ethnic group. Ashford, Canterbury and Maidstone are also relatively diverse with more than 10% of the population in those districts part of a minority ethnic group.
- Similarly, Dartford and Gravesham are the most diverse districts in Kent for religion, with 10.1% and 13.5% identifying with a minority religion and the lowest proportions saying that they have 'no religion'. This includes:
 - In Dartford, 3.8% of the population are Hindu and 3.5% are Muslim
 - In Gravesham, 8.0% of the population are Sikh – the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara is the largest Gurdwara in Europe

Conclusions:

Dartford, Gravesham and Medway are grouped together in all of the different options. This means that there will always be one unitary authority which has a relatively higher level of diversity and the other unitary authorities will have a higher proportion of White British and lower levels of religious diversity.

There will be an authority – North – which is more diverse than the other authorities in Kent. The new authorities, particularly a North unitary authority, will need to consider how to engage with all residents and reflect their diversity. The unitary authorities should aim to be reflective of the diversity of their populations in the recruitment of staff and to encourage residents, voters and prospective candidates from all communities to participate in council business.

Any engagement model which is developed should aim to be inclusive of the diversity in Kent.

Place

The workstream considered a range of identifying features for 'place' including heritage, culture, economy, nature and landscapes.

Based on the information gathered for this section, we felt it should be possible to establish 'identities' around recognisable and distinctive features for the proposed unitary authorities. There are many commonalities across Kent and within proposed unitary authority boundaries to build upon existing identities; and for those identities to feel meaningful (or in the very least to not feel alienating). The workstream considered the 3UA model best meets the government's criteria due to the scale and the particular combination of districts within the unitary authorities.

Findings and conclusions

The workstream felt that there was a case for changing existing district boundaries so that Swanley (Sevenoaks) was aligned with Dartford in a North UA, and for Swale to be split so that Sittingbourne and Sheppey align with Medway in a North UA and for Faversham to align with Canterbury in an East UA. This was based on economic, geographic and travel factors, as well as our own knowledge of the respective areas.

4UA model

- Intuitively, a 4UA model, in which the proposed unitary authorities cover smaller areas and populations, would be 'more local', and should therefore be more reflective of local identities and more conducive to place making and identity building.
- However, the specific combination of districts could limit or even hinder the ability to reflect and build local identity. For example:
 - It could be argued that Swale would fit more naturally in a North unitary authority alongside Medway, rather than in an East or Mid unitary authority – this is based on how people in

Swale live their lives, that most of the population and geographic area are within the Thames Estuary and North Kent Marshes, and that parts of Swale have been included in the Thames Gateway regeneration project.

- While they are not direct neighbours, there is a strong case to be made for Thanet and Folkestone & Hythe to be included within the same East unitary authority, not only due to their shared coastal identities, but also to build upon the growth of their creative industries – centred around the Turner Gallery and redevelopment of the Old Town in Margate, and the Creative Quarter in Folkestone.
- Another factor to consider is whether the new unitary authorities will have the resources to be able to reflect and build local identity, particularly in areas of high deprivation such as with Option 2 – 4UA which groups Swale and Thanet together.
- The poly-centric nature of Kent and Medway means that employment and economic drivers are spread across different parts of the county. Having a higher number of unitary authorities could mean that individual areas become over-dependent on fewer economic drivers, for example if a South Kent UA became over-dependent on the Port of Dover.
- Further to the above, the creation of more boundaries could hinder access to economic and regeneration opportunities. For example, if Swale was not part of the North UA it would be separated from other areas in Kent that are part of the Thames Gateway regeneration programme, which could make partnership working more difficult.

3UA model

- A 3UA model creates larger unitary authorities than a 4UA model but one benefit of this is that it does not split districts/areas which would potentially ‘fit’ well together, but which are not direct neighbours or could be placed in different areas in a 4UA model. As covered above, Swale and Medway could be considered a good alignment, as could Thanet and Folkestone. In the 3UA model, these districts are included within the same proposed unitary authorities.
- Another benefit is that the impact of deprivation is lessened as the ‘peak IMD’ is lower. This means that the proposed unitary authorities should have more capacity for discretionary spending (albeit probably only marginal).
- There are also well-established geographic areas and groupings which are roughly coterminous with the 3UA model, for example, Kent Police, Health & Care Partnerships (HCPs) and economic partnerships. There are many examples of other organisations and partnerships organising around these broad areas:
 - Thames Estuary and proximity to London in the North
 - Coastal and rural areas in the East and South
 - Affluent commuter towns and rural areas in the West

2UA model

- The scale of the unitary authorities in a 2UA model would limit how reflective of local identity they could be. The proposed West Kent unitary authority would have a population of more than 1 million people and would encompass districts which have fairly tenuous links. The three Northern districts which are urban areas and located on the Thames Estuary, would be grouped with Tunbridge Wells with which they do not share a boundary and is far more rural.
- Their scale would require significant focus in order to successfully promote and build upon the local identities within their areas. The East unitary authority in this model has a high average IMD and the grouping of Swale and Thanet means there is a high concentration of most deprived

LSOAs. This may define how their local identities are perceived (internally and/or externally) and subsequently invested in.

- There is a risk that a 2UA model could undermine an overall Kent identity by creating an East vs West dynamic. The dividing lines in such a dynamic could be defined by their socio-economic profiles, and by their locations and settlement types – the East would have relatively high levels of deprivation and would coalesce around coastal communities and the border; in other words they may feel that they are ‘left behind’. Meanwhile, the West would be defined by its relative affluence, its commuter towns and by its proximity to London.
- In an even system with only two ‘participating’ authorities, in particular where there are differing motivations and drivers, partnership working could become difficult as negotiations could end in deadlock.
 - In a 3UA or 4UA model, this dynamic would likely be lessened. The additional ‘participants’ would reduce the scope for binary thinking and direct competition, and the socio-economic differences would be more even. Also, any deadlock in partnership working becomes less likely.

1UA model (benchmark)

- A likely criticism of a single unitary authority covering the whole county area and representing close to 2 million residents would be that it lacked credibility for representing ‘local identity’ because it would be too remote.
- There may be opportunities with scale to boost specific local areas, but the basis upon which an area is selected could be contentious, or, if multiple campaigns were running concurrently the impacts could be diluted.
- One advantage to having a single UA could be the ability to market or lobby for the whole county as a destination for tourism and investment, and maintain Kent-wide vehicles such as Visit Kent, Produced in Kent and Locate in Kent.

The conclusion of the workstream was that the 3UA model would be most reflective of local identity. The 3UA model creates authorities which are smaller geographically and by population than a two unitary model, but which are large enough to encompass identities and economic opportunities which span districts/areas – for example, in the three unitary model the coastal communities in Folkestone & Hythe, Dover, Thanet and Canterbury are grouped together in East; and the entire Thames Estuary area spanning Gravesham, Dartford, Medway and Swale are grouped together in North.

An important next step with LGR considerations would be to engage with residents on how they perceive their local identities and what the defining features of a proposed unitary authority area could be.

Possible features of local identity and place

The diagram overleaf is purely for illustrative purposes. It was developed collaboratively by the workstream based on desk research of the distinctive features of different parts of Kent and their own knowledge of the county, categorised by ‘Place’, ‘Economy and development’, and ‘Culture, heritage and identity’. Using the 3UA model, it shows the types of features that could contribute to a sense of local identity within the proposed unitary authorities, and which they could promote as part of place-making and identity building initiatives. The features suggested overleaf are therefore not intended to be exhaustive.

NORTH

Place

Thames Estuary and North Kent Marshes
Proximity to London
Urban

Economy and development

Proximity to London and London City Airport
University cluster in Chatham
Ebbsfleet Garden City
Thames Gateway redevelopment
Bluewater shopping centre

Culture, heritage and identity

Religious and ethnic diversity - Gurdwara in Gravesend
Sweeps Festival
Rochester Cathedral
Charles Dickens
Maritime history: Historic Dockyard Chatham



WEST

Place

Proximity to London and Gatwick
Affluent commuter towns
Maidstone County Town
Kent Downs and High Weald
Royal Tunbridge Wells - Spa Town

Economy and development

Entrepreneurial, service-based economy
High productivity
Kings Hill Business Park
Food sciences and agricultural training

Culture, heritage and identity

Oast houses
Castles: Leeds, Hever, Scotney, & more
Spa Valley Railway



EAST

Place

Coastal towns and villages
White Cliffs of Dover and coastline
Kent Downs and High Weald; rural areas
Canterbury city
UK Border - Gateway to Europe - Port of Dover,
EuroTunnel

Economy and development

Creativity and regeneration in Margate and Folkestone
Otterpool Park Garden Town development
University cluster in Canterbury
Life sciences - Discovery Park, Sandwich
Logistics and border facilities
Food and drink; viticulture e.g. Chapel Down Wine
Retail hubs: Ashford Outlet Centre, Westwood Cross

Culture, heritage and identity

Canterbury Cathedral
Dover Castle
Battle of Britain
Dreamland
Turner Contemporary
Animal conservancy: Howlett's, Port Lympne, Wildwood



How people live their lives

Summary - Based on analysis of the data used to indicate how people live their lives (travel to work, education, and healthcare), the workstream consider the 3UA model as being most closely reflective of the geographical range and travel patterns of people living within those areas. In coming to this conclusion, particular consideration was given to the relationships between Swale and Medway and between Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Thanet. The 3UA model maintains these groupings within the proposed boundaries, while most of the other options create divisions between these districts/areas which would produce unitary authority areas which were less reflective of how people live their lives.

The data that the analysis for this section was based is included in Appendix C.

Indicator	Best fit to Government criteria	Explanation
Travel to work	Option 1 – 3UA	The differences based on the number of unitary authorities would be marginal. Option 1 groups Swale with Medway in North, and groups five Eastern districts which have close travel links.
Travel to education	Option 1 – 3UA	The differences based on the number of unitary authorities would be marginal. Option 1 groups Maidstone with Tonbridge & Malling in West and groups Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Thanet in East.
Emergency hospital admissions	Option 1 – 3UA	The 3UA model most closely aligns with current HCP areas. Option 1 groups Maidstone with Tonbridge & Malling West and groups Swale with Medway in North.

Travel to work

Overall findings:

- Most travel to work is within district boundaries and within proposed unitary boundaries. There are relatively few journeys to work outside of home districts or beyond proposed unitary boundaries.
- In seven of the 13 districts, the second most common travel to work destination is ‘outside Kent & Medway’ (presumably to London in most cases). The exceptions were Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe (which would all be part of the East or South proposed unitary authorities), and Maidstone and Swale
- Only 12% of workers in Kent and Medway travel more than 20km to work. 71% either work mainly from home (30%) or travel fewer than 20km to work (41%). The remaining 17% of workers were categorised as ‘Other’ which could include offshore, abroad or no fixed location.

There are some specific travel to work journeys between districts which are prevalent and warrant highlighting as they could influence where the boundaries of the unitary authorities are set:

- Travel to work is most localised within the Eastern districts - Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, and Folkestone & Hythe. People travel between these districts, but of these Canterbury is the most sizeable destination for work. Ashford, to a lesser extent, is also a major destination for work from these districts.

- In comparison, travel *between* North and West proposed boundaries, and travel *from* North and West to ‘outside of Kent & Medway’ (and vice versa), is more common.
- In Swale, the most common travel to work journey (beyond Swale) is to Medway.
- From Sevenoaks, the most common travel to work journey is to ‘outside K&M’ followed by Dartford. This is reflective of the large commuter population in Sevenoaks but is also likely explained by the position of Swanley within the M25 and its proximity to Dartford and to London.
- Maidstone is a travel to work journey from different parts of the county, including from Ashford and Medway. But the highest rate of travel is *between* Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling.

Conclusions:

One, two, three or four unitary authorities?

On the basis that most journeys to work are within current district boundaries, and that the second most common destination is ‘outside of Kent & Medway’ (particularly in the North and West of Kent) there is no compelling case about whether a two, three, or four unitary model would be optimal. Fewer unitary authorities would mean fewer travel to work journeys outside of proposed unitary boundaries, but the difference would be marginal. Most journeys would be within the proposed boundaries regardless of their size and makeup, and those which are beyond current district boundaries are more likely to leave Kent & Medway altogether.

District makeup of the unitary authorities

- There could be a case to split Swale so that Sittingbourne and Sheppey would be aligned with Medway and so Faversham would be aligned with Canterbury. However, as a whole district Swale is more closely aligned with Medway due to the overall higher prevalence of travel to work journeys between the two areas.
- There could also be a case to split Sevenoaks district, so that the portion within the M25 including Swanley aligns with Dartford in a North unitary authority.
- There are travel to work links between the districts of Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe and Thanet suggesting that these five districts should be within the same East unitary authority.
- A case could be made for Maidstone to be placed in multiple different groupings. But the most important relationship for Maidstone in respect to travel to work journeys is with Tonbridge & Malling in a West unitary authority.

On the basis of the points above – the three unitary model, option 1, would be optimal. This places Swale in North Kent alongside Medway, groups the five Eastern districts together in East Kent, and places Maidstone alongside Tonbridge & Malling in West Kent.

Travel to education (KCC only)

Overall findings:

- Nearly all primary school pupils attend school within their home district (92-99%).
- While a slightly lower proportion than for primary school pupils, the vast majority of secondary school pupils attend school within their home district – with c.90% in most districts.
- The exceptions to this are in West Kent, most notably Sevenoaks where only 35% of secondary school pupils attend school within the district. Tunbridge Wells at 78% and Tonbridge & Malling at

65% also have a relatively lower proportion of secondary school pupils attending school within their home districts.

There are some notable journeys between districts for secondary school pupils which could influence the boundaries of the unitary authorities:

- Canterbury is a significant destination for education, with relatively high numbers of pupils from Dover, Swale and Folkestone & Hythe travelling there.
- Dover is also a significant destination for education, with relatively high numbers of pupils from Thanet and from Folkestone & Hythe travelling there.
- Pupils in Sevenoaks are almost as likely to travel to Tonbridge & Malling (28.4%) as they are to stay within their home district (35.1%). Also very notable is that 17.1% of pupils in Sevenoaks travel to Dartford and 13.2% travel to Tunbridge Wells. This is likely because of the proximity and because there are grammar schools within these districts, and Sevenoaks is the only district in Kent without any grammar schools, only hosting an annex to the Weald of Kent Grammar School in Tunbridge.

Conclusions:

One, two, three or four unitary authorities?

The vast majority of pupils' journeys to education are within their home district meaning that the differences between a 1, 2, 3 or 4UA model would be marginal regarding the number of pupils travelling outside of their home area to go to school.

District makeup of the unitary authorities

- The fluidity of travel for secondary pupils between Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling mean that these districts would make sense as a grouping.
- There are also a high proportion of secondary pupils from Tonbridge & Malling travelling to school in Maidstone which provides a case for Maidstone to be included within the West UA.
- A high proportion of pupils in Sevenoaks travel to Dartford, which may be partially explained by the proximity of Swanley to Dartford and because there is a grammar school in Dartford. This may provide a case to split the northern part of Sevenoaks so that it aligns with Dartford in the North.
- There are education links between Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Thanet.

On the basis of the points above – the three unitary model, option 1, would be optimal. This places Maidstone in the West and groups Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Thanet together in East Kent.

Emergency hospital admissions

Findings:

- Most emergency admissions are within proposed unitary authority areas.
- The majority (61.3%) of emergency admissions from Swale are to Medway
- Emergency admissions from Sevenoaks are split between North and West areas – 32.2% of emergency admissions are to Dartford and 51.2% are to Tunbridge Wells
- There are close links between Tonbridge & Malling and Maidstone – 39.8% of emergency admissions from Tonbridge & Malling go to Maidstone and 26.6% vice versa.

- The current HCP map most closely aligns with the 3UA model with DGS and Medway & Swale HCPs covering the area of a North unitary authority - albeit with Faversham split from the rest of Swale, and Swanley and North Sevenoaks paired with Dartford and Gravesham.

Conclusions:

One, two, three or four unitary authorities?

- While there are four HCP areas, their boundaries most closely align with the 3UA model.
- Most emergency admissions are within proposed unitary boundaries. Differences between a 1, 2, 3 or 4UA model would be marginal.

District makeup of the unitary authorities

- Swale and Medway are closely linked in terms of emergency admissions. However, Swale is split in the HCP map, with Faversham grouped with East Kent. This may provide a case to split Swale, but if this were not an option, it would make sense to group the whole of Swale district with Medway in a North Kent Unitary as there is a greater overall link between these areas.
- Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling are linked and therefore grouping them would be beneficial.
- Sevenoaks and Dartford are linked, and Sevenoaks is split in the HCP map, with Swanley part the DGS HCP in North Kent. This may provide a case to split Sevenoaks, but if this is not an option, it would make sense to group the whole of Sevenoaks in a West Kent unitary authority.

On the basis of the points above – the three unitary model, option 1, would be optimal. This places Maidstone in the West alongside Tonbridge & Malling, and places Swale in the North alongside Medway.

Democracy and representation

Summary - For democracy and representation, the workstream considered the impact of different models for councillor numbers for each option, and the current and potential landscape of parish and town councils as the next tier of local democracy in a unitary scenario. It was felt that either a 4UA or 3UA model would be the options that best reflect the government's criteria. Of the 4UA models, option 4 would be the most optimal. These models allow for a good balance between having a workable number of Councillors and having strong democratic representation, based on having a lower population per Councillor ratio.

Indicator	Best fit to Government criteria	Explanation
Councillor numbers		
Number of councillors per UA	Option 4 – 4UA Or - Option 1 – 3UA is also a good option	<p>Currently there are 658 Councillors covering the Kent and Medway area. Replicating this number of Councillors across the new unitary authorities would be unworkable – regardless of whether it was a 1, 2, 3 or 4 UA model. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) recommends between 30-99 Councillors per new unitary authority.</p> <p>Within a 4UA model there is the opportunity to meet LGBCE's recommendation and to have smaller electorate per councillor than in other options. For this reason, a 4UA model could be perceived as more democratically representative. Of the 4UA models, Option 4 was the most even. Based on replicating the average electorate in Cornwall following a 2018 review, this option would produce unitary authorities with between 53 and 71 Councillors.</p> <p>The 3UA model would also produce a workable number of Councillors, as if replicating Cornwall, it would produce unitary authorities with between 79-92 Councillors.</p> <p>In a 1UA or 2UA model, there would need to be a trade-off between having a workable number of Councillors and the size of electorate per Councillor. The choice would be either to have a large electorate per Councillor or to exceed LGBCE's recommended number of Councillors.</p>
Parish and town councils		
Parished and unparished areas	No optimal option	<p>It is worth noting that in a North unitary in any option, the majority of the population would not be represented by this tier of council. This is predominantly an urban area and is more diverse. Any engagement or devolution model developed by a new North unitary authority would need to consider the implications of this.</p>

Number of Councillors

Background information:

- 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 there is one Councillor per 2,851 people. And based on an electorate of c. 1.35 million in Kent and Medway, there is one Councillor per 2,050 electors.

- The highest population/electorate per councillor is in Medway where there are 4,792 people and 3,493 electors per Councillor
- 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 99 Councillors for new unitary authorities, and that exceptions to this need a strong justification.
- In 2018 the LGBCE conducted a review of Cornwall Council's electoral arrangements and [recommended that they reduce the number of Councillors from 123 to 87](#). This worked out at a projected 5,163 electors per Councillor by 2023 (significantly higher than Kent's current average). When carrying out the review they had three main considerations:
 - Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
 - Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity.
 - Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

The table below is based on electorate figures. A table with population figures is included in Appendix D:

Proposed unitary authority	Total electorate	Electorate per councillor – 99 Councillors (LGBCE's advised maximum)	Number of councillors to meet Kent average of 2,050 electorate per Councillor	Number of Councillors to meet Cornwall's average of 5,163 electorate per Councillor
Option 1- 3UA				
North	477,222	4,823	233	92
East	464,222	4,689	226	90
West	407,167	4,133	199	79
Option 2 – 4UA				
North	367,424	3,711	179	71
East	321,747	3,250	157	62
South	252,519	2,551	123	49
West	407,167	4,133	199	79
Option 3 – 4 UA				
North	367,424	3,711	179	71
East	298,941	3,020	146	58
Mid	275,325	2,781	134	53
West	407,167	4,133	199	79
Option 4 – 4UA				
North	367,424	3,711	179	71
East	369,135	3,729	180	71
Mid	336,801	3,402	164	65
West	275,497	3,711	134	53
Option 5 – 2UA				
East	574,266	5,801	280	111
West	774,591	7,824	378	150
Option 6 – 1UA (benchmark)				
Kent & Medway	1,348,857	13,625	658	261

Findings and conclusions:

- If the number of Councillors replicated current Kent averages, every option would produce an unworkable number of Councillors per unitary authority:
 - 2UA model would produce between 280-378 Councillors per unitary authority
 - 3UA model would produce between 193-233 Councillors per unitary authority
 - 4UA models would produce between 130-199 Councillors per unitary authority
- On the premise that a smaller population and electorate per Councillor is more democratically representative, a 4UA model would provide an optimal configuration. If setting the number of Councillors per unitary at 99 (as per the upper limit recommended by LGBCE), the 4UA options would produce unitary authorities with between 3,670 and 5,568 people per Councillor; this is comparable to the current Medway Unitary Authority figure.
 - Of the four unitary models, option 4 is the most even between the proposed unitary authorities.
 - Option 2 produces the widest difference in population per councillor with West having close to 2,000 more people per Councillor than South.
- If the new unitary authorities were to follow LGBCE's approach to setting division boundaries and were to settle at a similar ratio to Cornwall, the 3UA and 4UA models would produce unitary authorities that met LGBCE's recommendation for Councillor numbers, whereas the 2UA would exceed this. The 4UA models would be most flexible as they could feasibly increase the number of Councillors while remaining within LGBCE's recommendation.
 - 2UA model would produce between 111-150 Councillors per unitary authority
 - 3UA model would produce between 79 - 92 Councillors per unitary authority
 - 4UA models would produce between 49 -79 Councillors per unitary authority
- Presuming the divisions in the new unitary authorities do not exactly match the existing district boundaries, there will need to be a process to set new boundaries around larger average electorates. It is unlikely that LGBCE will be able to review the boundaries prior to the inception of the new councils meaning that the boundaries will need to be drawn up initially through the LGR process. Then in the future, there would need to be a boundary review.
- An argument for having fewer Councillors and for having fewer authorities (as would be the case with any of the proposed models) is that it would save money due to fewer Councillor allowances to fund, fewer elections to run, and less resource needed to support Councillors. But some of these savings may be offset by the provision of alternative local representation and engagement (i.e. the cost of setting up Town Councils or other mechanisms such as Neighbourhood Area Committees, which are being promoted by Government as a key vehicle for community engagement).
- In the current two-tier system in Kent 'twin-hatting' is common: an individual is simultaneously a member of a District Council and the County Council. This can potentially lead to conflicts of interest. For example, if a Councillor were to abstain from a vote due to a conflict of interest, as a result of twin hatting, this creates an absence of representation. A single tier of local government would greatly reduce this possibility (it could still theoretically occur if a Councillor is also an MP or Parish Councillor).

On the basis of the points above, option 4 would be optimal. A four unitary model would be most democratically representative as there is the potential to have a lower electorate per Councillor, and this option is most even across proposed unitary authorities.

There is a strong case for the new unitary authorities to prioritise the practicalities of governance and scrutiny above replicating the current number of Councillors across the County – as was the case in Cornwall Council. This would result in a lower number of Councillors but would be much more workable and the role of individual Councillors would be more defined and impactful.

Taking this into account, the 3UA model under the Cornwall ratio would also support the criteria, producing between 79 and 92 Councillors per unitary authority which is more manageable.

Parish and Town Councils, and unparished areas

Findings:

- There are over 300 parish and town councils in the Kent and Medway area. Overall, 56% of the population in Kent and Medway live in parished areas and 44% live in unparished areas. The areas which are covered by this level of representation tend to be rural and those which are not covered tend to be urban. More than 70% of the population [live in urban areas](#).
- Most of the large towns do not have a Town Council or any other type of council at that level, these include (ordered by population size):
 - Maidstone (Maidstone)
 - Gillingham (Medway)
 - Dartford (Dartford)
 - Chatham (Medway)
 - Ashford (Ashford)
 - Rochester (Medway)
 - Margate (Thanet)
 - Royal Tunbridge Wells (Tunbridge Wells)
 - Gravesend (Gravesham)
 - Canterbury (Canterbury)
 - Sittingbourne (Swale)
 - Tonbridge (Tonbridge & Malling)
 - Herne Bay (Canterbury)
 - Whitstable (Canterbury)
- Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Sevenoaks districts are all fully parished, including the following Town Councils (ordered by population size). It is notable that the largest town council is in Folkestone which has a population of c.50k. All of the towns larger than this do not have town councils.
 - Folkestone
 - Dover
 - Deal
 - Sevenoaks
 - Swanley
- The districts/areas with the highest proportion of the population living in unparished areas are: Medway (86%), Gravesham (84%), Canterbury (72%), and Dartford (56%). With the exception of Canterbury, these districts/areas are all in the North of the county, are heavily urbanised, and are more diverse than the rest of Kent.

Conclusions

- The areas without town and parish councils are concentrated in the urban areas which would make up a North unitary authority – Medway, Gravesham and Dartford. This means that if a North unitary authority is established, this tier of representation would largely be missing. Most of the rest of Kent is covered by this tier of representation, aside from the towns listed above.
- This could be perceived as a democratic deficit in these areas. To redress this, town councils could be established (and/or the role of existing parish and town councils could be bolstered) with some service delivery and asset responsibilities.
- However, there could be difficulties with the set-up, management, cost, and engagement with these new councils – particularly in the largest urban areas where scale and local representation would be a more pressing issue, and in the North where the model is not common and where there are not as many nearby exemplars.
 - In such instances other community engagement models could be considered (as covered in the next section).
 - As set up and running costs are likely to be a barrier to the establishment of new councils, the ability to precept will be key to their viability.

The principal conclusion is that there will be an authority in any option configuration in which a higher proportion of the population is not covered by a town or parish level council. Steps should be taken to address this across the county and to build an engagement model that means people feel that their local area is sufficiently represented under the new unitary authorities, particularly focusing on towns and where the population has expressed a desire for this tier of engagement/representation.

Governance and engagement

Summary - This section takes into account the current local decision-making and engagement arrangements across Kent, and potential implications for the different options. While this assessment has stated that a 4UA model would be optimal in terms of community engagement mainly due to the smaller scale of the new unitary authorities, the purpose of this section is not to come to firm conclusions - rather, its main purpose is to set out various different options and considerations for enhancing community engagement that could be scaled up or down across different sized unitaries.

Further information relevant to this section can be found in Appendix E.

Indicator	Best fit to Government criteria	Explanation
Governance		
Upper and lower tier councils	No optimal option	<p>On the basis that fewer authorities would mean more straightforward governance routes for partnership working, a 1UA or 2UA model could be considered optimal. However, in comparison to the current situation in which there are 14 councils covering the area, any of the models would be a significant improvement in this regard.</p> <p>There is also an argument that more participants – such as in a 3UA or 4UA model - would bring greater diversity and be more democratically representative.</p>
Parish and town councils	No optimal option	<p>The establishment of new town councils should not automatically be seen as the best vehicle for local representation or enhancing community engagement – each area should decide for themselves whether to establish town councils or not.</p> <p>It is vital for the viability of any new town or parish council that they can precept.</p>
Engagement		
Models of community engagement	<p>A 4UA model (but not option 2)</p> <p>Or -</p> <p>Option 1 – 3UA is also a good option</p>	<p>Each unitary authority should develop its own model depending on what works well for their communities.</p> <p>A 4UA model's smaller scale would most greatly support community engagement. However, option 2 would potentially have high levels of deprivation in its East UA, but might have less resource to undertake localised engagement effectively.</p> <p>The 3UA model would also be of a suitable scale and has the added benefit of being coterminous with strategic partners which should aid continuity of relationships.</p>

Upper and lower tier councils

Background information

- Currently there are 14 separate councils covering the Kent and Medway area – Kent County Council (upper tier), 12 district and borough councils within the KCC footprint (lower tier), and Medway Unitary Authority (upper tier).
- Each of these councils has a broadly similar formal decision-making process in that they each operate a leader and cabinet system. They also operate a number of statutory and non-statutory committees to make decisions on policy and budgetary matters. Further information can be found in Appendix E.
- The formal engagement mechanism for the leaders of the 14 councils to convene are the two partnership groups: Kent Leaders and Joint Kent Chiefs.

Conclusions

- Pan-Kent partnership working can be challenging, due to the number of stakeholders who need to be involved and trying to come to an agreement with 14 separate councils. It can also prove difficult due to the necessity for decisions to pass through 14 different governance processes, for example, for pan-Kent & Medway partnership strategies.
- Therefore, with any of the LGR models, whether it be a 1UA model or a 4UA model, the governance process will be greatly streamlined and it should be easier to reach consensus with fewer participants.
- An argument could be made that more participating authorities would bring greater democratic representation and therefore legitimacy to pan-Kent partnerships. The case could also be made that more participants would bring greater nuance and different perspectives which would enhance the development of strategy and partnerships.

Compared to the current situation, with 14 separate councils, it is highly likely that all of the models would significantly streamline governance processes and make partnership working across Kent more straightforward.

But there is also an argument for more unitary authorities bringing greater diversity and democratic legitimacy to pan-Kent strategies and partnerships.

Town and Parish Councils

- As covered previously, there are over 300 Town and Parish Councils in Kent and Medway, with 56% of the population covered by this tier of council. Most of the large towns, particularly in the urban areas of North Kent, do not have town councils.
- Currently they have fairly limited decision-making powers primarily covering allotments, village greens, burial grounds and crematoriums, car parks and community centres/village halls and some street lighting.
- They are the most local form of government and can provide a local voice for the community responding to consultations and raising concerns with the relevant organisations as well as acting as consultee on planning applications¹.

¹ [Maidstone Borough Council Community Governance Review Terms of Reference 2022/23](#)

- Town and parish councils can also act as a local convenor, enhance civic engagement, and be a vehicle to express local pride. When developing engagement models, new unitary authorities may want to utilise town and parish councils as ‘anchor institutions’ through which they can engage with communities.
- They can raise funds to meet the costs of administration and provision of services through setting a precept which forms part of council tax bills levied on council tax payers within the parish.
 - The Government is reportedly due to publish a ‘Communities White Paper’, and its position on whether new Town and Parish Councils will have the ability to levy a precept is as yet unknown; this will potentially have a significant impact on the capabilities and viability of any new bodies.
- Discussions have been ongoing with the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) to explore ways in which greater powers, funding and responsibilities could be devolved to Parish and Town Councils².
- In preparation for Local Government reorganisation (LGR) several District Councils’ Democratic Services teams are undertaking preparatory work which could see these areas have a Town Council. This would enable some continuity of current civic functions, for example the process of mayor-making. These include:
 - Ashford – conducting a review of parished and unparished areas
 - Maidstone – conducting a review of parished and unparished areas
 - Tonbridge & Malling – in June 2025 launched a formal consultation on the creation of a town council for Tonbridge
 - Tunbridge Wells – in June 2025 launched a formal consultation on the creation of town and parish councils in unparished areas (including Royal Tunbridge Wells).
- It should not be assumed that communities will actually want to have a town or parish council. Canterbury undertook the Whitstable community governance review which concluded in October 2024 with a decision to not go ahead with the adoption of a town council for Whitstable because the majority of respondents were not in favour. Concerns were raised about the additional costs associated with a town council precept and lack of support for an additional layer of governance³.

Most of the large towns in Kent do not have a town council, particularly in Dartford, Gravesham and Medway; and overall, 44% of the population in Kent and Medway are not covered by this tier of council. In these areas, town and parish councils would not act as ‘anchor institutions’ for community engagement and alternative models should be considered.

Several districts are conducting (or have already concluded) reviews as to whether to establish town councils in response to LGR. The result of the Canterbury review shows that the establishment of town councils should not automatically be seen as the best vehicle for local representation or enhancing community engagement – each area should decide for themselves whether to establish town councils or not.

It is vital for the viability of any new town or parish council that they can precept.

² [Kent Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation](#)

³ [Agenda for Council on Thursday, 24th October, 2024, 7.00 pm | Canterbury City Council](#)

Building on the relationship with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector

As of 2022/23, there were 2951 registered charities in Kent with 431 of those active across both Kent and Medway; the majority of active organisations are micro and small (with income less than £100,000), although the highest proportion of income comes from larger organisations. The majority of charities in Kent provide services, with the most common beneficiaries being the general public, followed by children and young people. Charities are unevenly distributed across the county with concentration in major urban areas, within individual districts⁴.

Smaller organisations often have a very specific area of expertise, and limited capacity which can significantly impact their ability to engage with large organisations such as Local Authorities (LAs) or other public sector bodies. Working in partnership acknowledges that the capacity of the majority of the sector is limited. While forums exist which support the strategic voice of the sector, the complex diversity and fragmentation within the sector is important to recognise.

Due to the current democratic geography of Kent, the VCSE sector must work in partnership in different ways across the county, across KCC, Medway Council and the twelve district/borough councils. It has an essential role in engaging with residents and providing services on behalf of local government and other strategic partners such as Kent Police and NHS Kent and Medway. Below are the main partnership arrangements across the county area:

VCSE Strategic Partnership Board - KCC currently engages with the VCSE at a strategic level through its management of and participation in the VCSE Strategic Partnership Board which has oversight of the 2021 [Civil Society Strategy \(CSS\)](#) detailing how KCC will support the social sector through its funding and partnership arrangements.

K&M VCSE Steering Group - this provides a vehicle for the VCSE to be heard in strategic conversations and allows for greater sharing of information and opportunities for collaboration and co-design. KCC funds the steering group to support this engagement, however the group remains fully independent and responsible for their own activity. ([VCSE Kent & Medway](#)).

CYPE Steering Group - this was created in 2018 to represent the issues of VCSE organisations working with children and families in Kent. It provides a space for collaboration and discussion as well as lobbying with key stakeholders such as LAs and other statutory services. The group shares a Chair with the VCSE Steering Group.

Health partnerships - the VCSE is a key partner in the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System and has representatives on the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and at each of the HCPs. **VCSE Health Alliances** are established in each of the four HCPs and provide a forum for networking and collaboration within the sector and with representation from key partners such as LAs and NHS organisations. Above this, the **VCSE Health Alliance Group** includes all the VCSE ICS appointed leads and the leads for the four HCPs in Kent and Medway. The Chair of the group is a standing member on the VCSE Steering Group, providing regular updates at meetings.

Medway Better Together Consortium - Medway Council work closely with Medway Voluntary Action and support the sector through the [Medway Better Together Consortium](#), to provide guidance, advice and support to Medway residents and VCSE organisations. The group meets quarterly and consists of five key VCSE stakeholders to represent the wider sector.

⁴ [Kent Analytics VCS Report - January 2025](#)

In 2022, the [Medway and Swale Voluntary and Community Sector Strategic Framework](#) was developed by the Medway & Swale HCP, of which Medway Council, KCC and Swale Borough Council are key signatories. The framework aims to support effective working relationships between the statutory and public sectors and the VCSE and a variety of working groups were established to create action plans to facilitate the delivery of the framework.

It is noted that VCSE engagement with District Councils is less understood and there are different approaches and varying levels of support, with some holding funding forums and events for the sector, others providing funding to their local volunteer centres.

Some form of VCSE partnership board would be beneficial in continuing in any unitary configuration – it may make more sense for a pan-Kent partnership group with UAs and VCSE as members, rather than each UA having its own group.

The VCSE would most likely appreciate the opportunity that LGR could provide if it offered greater consistency; however, particularly for the smaller and micro organisations, they will most likely want to engage on a localised level also through the creation of community boards or similar.

Models to enhance community engagement

Regardless of the number of unitary authorities chosen for Kent and Medway, it will be imperative to design meaningful models of community and local place engagement. This should include representation from town and parish councils, civil society and the general public. When considering the diversity of Kent – including differences in urban, rural and coastal areas, socio-economic factors and identity (as covered previously) – it is unlikely that a blanket approach to community engagement across Kent and Medway will be effective.

New unitary authorities will need to develop their own models of engagement which are suitable for their relative scale, and which work at the community level. They should aim for equal levels of engagement and participation from all of their communities will also have to consider continuity of pre-existing partnership arrangements.

Examples of different community engagement models

- **Local Boards** ([Kent County Council, 2006-13](#))
From 2006 to 2013, 12 Local boards operated in Kent, each one covering a District council area and with County councillors for these areas as members of the Local Board. The role of the boards was to effectively act as a community group, holding regular public meetings and providing an opportunity for the public to raise issues that affected their communities as well as allocating funding to local projects. They met four times a year.
- **Community Boards** ([Surrey County Council](#))
In their recently published plan for local government reorganisation Surrey County Council plan to “build stronger and simpler arrangements for local community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment”. To achieve this, they are developing a community engagement approach using towns and villages as the focal point of their approach and considering the role of Town and Parish councils. They are testing the creation of Community Boards which would include representatives from organisations and groups: Councillors, residents, businesses, housing associations, VCSE, health, education, and emergency services.

- **Local Community Networks (Somerset Council)**
Somerset Council created 18 “Local Community Networks” to encourage community engagement, partnership working and to provide a connection with local government. Membership would be determined locally but would include broadly the same representation as the Community Boards in Surrey.
- **Leader’s Question Time (Medway UA, Mayor of London, Greater Manchester CA)**
Since 2017, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has hosted quarterly ‘Question Time’ events, aiming to highlight and answer questions on local issues posted by members of the public. The Mayor of London holds ‘Mayor Question Time’ events ten times a year in which residents of London can submit questions online. And Medway UA are currently trialling questions to Cabinet Members at Cabinet Meetings as an addition to those at Full Council meetings.
- **Participatory budgeting (Tower Hamlets, Glasgow City Council)**
Participatory budgeting is a funding model in which residents are involved in the process of deciding how public money is spent. In the UK, this is most often seen in the form of small-scale community grant allocations, whereby residents will be invited to vote on their preferred proposals within a set budget. Kent County Council have utilised a similar model through the Crowdfund Kent programme.

Funding Considerations

The financial capacity of new unitaries to invest in robust community engagement will be critical in devising effective and sustainable models. Any kind of localised engagement model, particularly community boards or networks will require resource to run them effectively and would be enhanced by defined sources of funding to facilitate decision-making and empowerment at a local level. For example:

- **Staffing:** KCC’s former ‘local board’ model employed Community Liaison Managers to work with each of the county’s 12 Boards.
- **Council funding:** in addition to administration costs, KCC’s local board model saw £10,000 allocated to each county councillor per annum to use for local projects, and the boards could consider bids for larger local projects (up to £20,000) from a separate county-wide fund of £500,000.
- **Town/Parish Council funding:** town and parish councils could potentially act as ‘anchor organisations’ for a community board structure, by using funds raised through their precept to support the board’s work. However, parish councillors are unpaid volunteers which will have capacity implications, and further work would be needed to engage the Kent Association for Local Councils (KALC) in the model, as well as consideration for those areas without town or parish councils.
- **Partner funding:** There may also be options for funding from strategic partners if their organisations are embedded into the community board model and helps meet their own organisational objectives. For example, the Office for the Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC) provides considerable funding to the VCSE to support victim-based services.
- **Participatory budgeting:** as mentioned above, this could be utilised by community boards to both secure funding and involve the local communities in where it should be spent (e.g. Crowdfund Kent).

More details about funding considerations and examples for different engagement models are included in Appendix E.

The workstream considered opportunities and challenges for local engagement to exist on a spectrum, within which the financial capacity of the new unitaries to invest in robust community engagement will be critical for effective and sustainable models:

- Authorities that cover larger geographic areas, and larger and more diverse populations would likely face greater challenges in engaging with residents and communities at the local level. There would need to be significant resource in place to manage relationships, and it would probably be challenging for a large authority to develop and maintain models which were flexible and suitable for all areas.
- Whereas, an authority covering a smaller area and population would be closer to the residents and communities and would have fewer relationships to manage. In this context (capacity and resource permitting) it is likely that they would be more capable of developing locally suitable models of engagement. Smaller VCSE organisations will want to engage on a very localised level.

For this reason, a 4UA model would be optimal in terms of community engagement. However, the capacity to actually deliver these engagement models will be impacted by the relative spending pressures of the individual authorities, meaning that option 2, in which East has high levels of deprivation, might face specific challenges.

A 3UA model should still be of a scale for effective community engagement and a specific benefit of the 3UA model is that it is roughly coterminous with how strategic partners organise themselves, including the Police, HCPs and VCSE Health Alliances, meaning that there would be continuity in relationships.

A 2UA or 1UA would likely face significant challenges in terms of community engagement, although larger and infrastructure VCSE organisations would be more comfortable engaging with larger, fewer UAs. However, the need to implement additional structures to achieve meaningful local engagement might negate the perceived benefits of LGR.

Regardless of unitary size, but perhaps particularly pertinent for the 1UA and 2UA options given their larger sizes, it will be important that robust formal and informal local engagement models are established. This could mitigate the removal of the district layer of community engagement, while providing a streamlined, coherent approach that can reduce duplication or dilution that can be experienced in the current two tier system.

2) Specific considerations for 2 unitary option

Overall, the 2UA option is fairly similar to the 1UA option in that the large scale of the unitary authorities presents the same risks and opportunities. Differences to the 1UA option are a matter of degree rather than fundamental. One area that could be considered specific to the 2UA option is the risk of creating an East ('left behind') vs West (affluent) dynamic which may not be conducive to partnership working and may undermine an overall Kent identity.

Identity and deprivation

- The size of the two unitary authorities would limit how reflective of local identity they could be. For example, the proposed West UA would have a population of more than 1 million people and would encompass districts that have fairly tenuous links.
- There may be opportunities with scale, as a large unitary authority could take a broader view and direct resources where they are most needed. However, creating larger unitary authorities would not completely negate the challenges posed by deprivation – compared to other options the disparity would be reduced but the overall levels of deprivation remain and are mostly concentrated in the East. The East UA remains similarly deprived as in other options – Swale and Thanet are grouped together – and the West becomes more deprived than in other options.
- A 2UA option risks undermining an overall Kent identity by creating a potentially adversarial East vs West dynamic. The East would have relatively high levels of deprivation and would coalesce around coastal communities and the border (i.e. 'left behind'); and the West would be defined by its relative affluence, its commuter towns and by its proximity to London.
- If this dynamic were to develop, partnership working could become difficult, particularly as there would only be two participating authorities meaning that negotiations could end in deadlock.

How people live their lives

- Considerations on 'how people live their lives' were based upon travel patterns to work and education, and on hospital admissions. Fewer unitary authorities, such as with the 2UA model, would mean fewer cross boundary journeys and the creation of geographic areas which encompass people's daily lives.
- However, most people live in the same districts, or travel a short distance, to where they work, learn or go to hospital meaning that the differences between a 2, 3 or 4UA model would be marginal.
- Despite the large geographical areas covered by the authorities, one drawback is that Swale and Medway are separated. Swale and Medway share close links, for example, Swale's most common travel to work destination (beyond Swale) is Medway, and the majority of emergency hospital admissions from Swale are also to Medway.
- Further to the above, the 2UA model is not coterminous with the HCP map in which Sittingbourne and Sheppey are within the Medway and Swale HCP. The HCP map is much closer to the 3UA model.
- In terms of facilitating how people travel in their areas, management of Highways would be split across the two areas, and management of the Strategic Road Network's M2/A2 and M20/A20 by Highways England would require interacting with two unitaries – this could become more complex for managing schemes such as Operation Brock.

Democratic representation

- Similar to the 1UA model, but to a lesser degree, there would need to be a trade-off between having a workable number of Councillors – the LGBCE recommend 30-99 per authority – and having an electorate per councillor ratio that felt representative.
 - To replicate the current number of Councillors in Kent and Medway, the West UA would have 372 Councillors, and the East UA would have 286 Councillors. This would be unworkable.
 - If the single authority had a similar size of electorate per councillor to Cornwall, then the West would have 150 Councillors, and the East would have 111 Councillors. These are higher than the LGBCE recommendation, but much lower than the 1UA option.
 - To meet the maximum recommended 99 Councillors, in the West there would be 7,824 electors and 10,704 population per Councillor, and in the East there would be 5,801 electors and 8,244 population per Councillor. This is still much higher than the current Kent ratio and higher than other options.

Engagement

- The workstream considered opportunities and challenges for local engagement to exist on a spectrum. Authorities which cover larger geographic areas, and larger and more diverse populations would likely face greater challenges in engaging with residents and communities at the local level. There would need to be significant resource in place to manage relationships, and it would probably be more challenging for a large authority to develop and maintain models which were flexible and suitable for all areas.
 - It is likely that authorities in a 2UA model would face challenges in developing locally flexible and suitable engagement models.
 - However, robust formal and informal engagement mechanisms could mitigate the removal of the district layer of community engagement while providing a streamlined approach that could reduce duplication and dilution that can be experienced in the current two tier system.
 - VCSE organisations will engage with their respective LA for funding/commissioning - larger and infrastructure organisations will be more comfortable engaging with fewer UAs, while small and micro VCSE will also want to engage at a much more local level, and will need to be factored into any local community board arrangements.
- In the 2UA model Dartford, Gravesham and Medway are included in the West UA (in all other options they are part of North). These areas are more ethnically and religiously diverse than other parts of Kent. Another feature is that apart from one town council in Dartford, there are no other town councils within these areas and most of the population live in urban unparished areas. This makes these areas quite distinctive from other parts of the West UA. Any engagement model would need to be sensitive to these differences, meaning that a blanket approach would probably not work.

3) Specific considerations for 3 unitary option

In respect to democratic representation and engagement, the 3UA model could be considered a middle ground between a less representative and more distant 2UA model and a more representative and 'closer' 4UA model. However, in respect to reflecting local identity and reflecting how people live their lives, the picture is more nuanced. This is due to a combination of scale and the specific combination of districts within the 3UA model, compared to the other options.

Identity and deprivation

- The 3UA model represents a middle ground between the 1UA, 2UA and 4UA models in terms of population size and how 'local' the new authorities would be.
- However, analysis shows that the larger scale, in comparison to the 4UA models, would provide benefits in terms of reflecting and boosting local identity. This is because they are large enough to encompass districts/areas which fit well together, but which are separated under the 4UA options. Specifically, the East UA groups together the coastal areas of Folkestone & Hythe, Dover, Thanet and Canterbury, as well as Ashford, which aligns well based on various factors; and the North UA groups together Swale and Medway which have close links.
- The 3UA model creates the least deprived (based on overall average) version of an East UA. This may mean that there is greater capacity for identity building initiatives.
 - Importantly, Swale and Thanet are separated in the 3UA model; this avoids concentrating the high levels of deprivation in these areas within one unitary.
- The 3UA model is roughly coterminous with how many other organisations and partnerships organise themselves, including Kent Police, HCPs and economic partnerships. It also feels relatively intuitive based on geographic features:
 - Thames Estuary, urban areas and proximity to London in the North
 - Coastal and rural areas in the East
 - Affluent commuter towns and rural areas in the West

How people live their lives

- Considerations on 'how people live their lives' was based upon travel patterns to work and education, and on emergency hospital admissions. Fewer unitary authorities would mean fewer cross boundary journeys and the creation of geographic areas which encompass people's daily lives, meaning that a 3UA model would represent a middle ground between a 2UA or 4UA model.
- However, most people live in the same districts, or travel a short distance to where they work, learn or go to hospital meaning that the differences between a 2, 3 or 4UA model would be marginal.
- In regard to reflecting people's lives there are some specific journeys between districts/areas which are prevalent and would remain within the boundaries of the 3UA model when compared to the 4UA options and to the 2UA model (though to a lesser degree).
 - Swale and Medway are grouped together in the North UA which is important in regard to journeys for work and particularly for healthcare.
 - There are travel to work and travel to education links between Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Thanet - these five districts are grouped together within the East UA.
 - Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling are grouped together in the West UA. There is a high prevalence of travel between these districts for work.

- The 3UA model is roughly coterminous with the HCP map – with the exceptions of North Sevenoaks being part of the Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley (DGS) HCP and Faversham (Swale) being part of the East Kent HCP.
- In terms of facilitating how people travel in their areas, management of Highways would be split across the three areas. Management of the Strategic Road Network in Kent by Highways England, particularly the M2/A2 and M20/A20 would require interacting with three unitaries – this could become more complex for managing schemes such as Operation Brock.

Democratic representation

- In a 3UA model it would be possible to strike a balance between having a workable number of Councillors – between 30-99 as recommended by LGBCE – and having a Councillor per elector ratio that felt representative and was comparable to other areas (i.e. Cornwall)
 - If replicating the elector per Councillor ratio in Cornwall the North UA would 92 Councillors, East UA would have 90 and West UA would have 79.
 - Based on these figures there would be some flexibility to create divisions with fewer electors per Councillor and still be within the maximum recommended figure of 99 Councillors per unitary authority.

Engagement

- The workstream considered opportunities and challenges for local engagement to exist on a spectrum. Authorities which cover larger geographic areas, and larger and more diverse populations would likely face greater challenges in engaging with residents and communities at the local level. There would need to be significant resource in place to manage relationships, and it would probably be more challenging for a large authority to develop and maintain models which were flexible and suitable for all areas. Whereas, an authority representing a smaller area and population would be closer to the residents and communities and would have fewer relationships to manage. In this context (capacity and resource permitting) it is likely that they would be more capable of developing flexible and locally suitable models of engagement.
 - The three UA model represents a middle ground between the 1UA, 2UA and the 4UA models.

4) Specific considerations for 4 unitary option

Due to the smaller population sizes, and therefore the ability to have smaller population/electorate per Councillor ratios, the 4UA options are considered the most democratically representative and most able to engage with residents and communities. It would seem intuitive that smaller unitary authorities would feel more local and reflective of people's lives, however, analysis indicates that their smaller scale may actually limit how reflective they can be and could have the effect of artificially separating districts which might otherwise sit well together.

Identity and deprivation

- Intuitively, a 4UA model, in which the proposed unitary authorities cover smaller areas and populations, would be 'more local', and should therefore be more reflective of local identities and more conducive to place making and identity building.
- However, the specific combination of districts/areas could limit or even hinder the ability to reflect and build local identity. As covered under the consideration for a 3UA model, in regard to identity, it would make sense to group together the coastal areas and to group Swale and Medway. This is not the case in any of the 4UA models.
- There is also the potential impact of deprivation upon a new unitary authority's capacity to deliver identity building initiatives, as areas of high deprivation may require those authorities to prioritise significant resource pressures.

Option 2 – this option groups Swale and Thanet together in East which creates the most deprived unitary authority of all of the options. It also separates Thanet from Folkestone & Hythe and Dover.

Option 3 – this option separates Folkestone & Hythe from Dover and Thanet, and the combination of Swale and Folkestone & Hythe in Mid was not considered a logical fit compared to other configurations.

Option 4 – this option creates the most affluent version of West because it does not include Maidstone. This could be politically contentious and might entrench socio-economic divisions. It would also create a unitary with the highest concentration of protected land – this could make place-shaping harder in this area. However, the Mid Kent UA could create a hub for rural Kent in terms of identity and engagement.

How people live their lives

- Considerations on 'how people live their lives' was based upon travel patterns to work and education, and on emergency hospital admissions. Fewer unitary authorities would mean fewer cross boundary journeys and the creation of geographic areas which encompass people's daily lives, meaning that a 4UA model would be the least representative of how people live their lives.
- However, most people live in the same districts, or travel a short distance, to where they work, learn or go to hospital meaning that the differences between a 2, 3 or 4UA model would be marginal.
- In regard to reflecting people's lives, it was felt that the combinations of districts within the 3UA model would better meet the government criteria than any of the 4UA options (as covered above).
- In terms of facilitating how people travel in their areas, management of Highways would be split across the four areas. Management of the Strategic Road Network in Kent by Highways England, particularly the M2/A2 and M20/A20 would require interacting with four unitaries – this could become more complex for managing schemes such as Operation Brock.

Option 2 – this separates Swale and Medway which is an important journey for healthcare and work. It also separates Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Thanet which have close links.

Option 3 – as above, this separates Swale and Medway as well as splitting the five Eastern districts.

Option 4 – this groups Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Thanet together which would have benefits in terms of their links but separates them from Ashford; it also separates Swale and Medway; as well as separating Maidstone from Tonbridge & Malling which have close travel to work links.

Democratic representation

- A 4UA model would best meet the criteria in regard to democratic representation and would produce unitary authorities that had a workable number of Councillors. There would also be the most flexibility to create divisions with smaller electorates.
 - If replicating the elector per Councillor ratio in Cornwall, a 4UA model would produce between 49 to 79 Councillors per unitary authority.
 - Based on producing authorities with the maximum recommendation of 99 Councillors, there would be between 2,551 to 4,133 electors per Councillors. This is similar to the current Medway figure of 3,493 electors.

Option 4 – this option creates the most even spread of Councillors with 53 in West, 65 in Mid and 71 in both North and East.

Engagement

- The workstream considered opportunities and challenges for local engagement to exist on a spectrum. An authority representing a smaller area and population, would be closer to the residents and communities and would have fewer relationships to manage and could more successfully engage locally operating smaller VCSE organisations. In this context (capacity and resource permitting) it is likely that they would be more capable of developing flexible and locally suitable models of engagement.
 - The 4UA model options would therefore be most able to develop and maintain engagement models that are flexible and suitable for local residents, communities and the VCSE.
 - All 4UA options create a North UA which will have the most diverse UA in the county, and will need to tailor engagement accordingly to effectively reach their communities.

Option 2 – this groups Swale and Thanet which are the most deprived districts in Kent. This might create significant resource pressures meaning that capacity for effective engagement could be limited.

5) Specific considerations for single (1) unitary option (benchmark)

Within a 1UA model some of the issues which arise from differences between areas or by separating areas would not arise, or would be less apparent. For example, there would be no socio-economic disparities between authorities, and critical Highways services would remain within the single authority. However, a 1UA model would likely be viewed as not democratically representative due to low Councillor numbers (or conversely there would be unpractically high number Councillors), and would be the least reflective of local identities.

Identity and deprivation

- A likely criticism of a single unitary authority covering the whole county area and representing close to 2 million residents would be that it lacked credibility for representing 'local identity' because it would be too remote. The 'Garden of England' would not be enough to counter this.
- In a single unitary authority, the issue of creating socio-economic disparities between different UA areas would not exist and it should be much more straightforward to redistribute funding and resource to where it is most needed.
- There may be opportunities with scale to boost specific local areas, but the basis upon which an area is selected could be contentious, or, if multiple campaigns were running concurrently the impacts could be diluted.

How people live their lives

- Considerations on 'how people live their lives' was based upon travel patterns to work and education, and on emergency hospital admissions. Within a 1UA model all of these journeys (aside from those that left Kent and Medway altogether) would be within a single unitary authority area.
- Management of Highways would be by a single authority, and there would be a single conversation with Highways England regarding Kent's Strategic Road Network.

Democratic representation

- With a 1UA model there would need to be a trade-off between having a workable number of Councillors – the LGBCE recommend 30-99 per authority – and having an electorate per councillor ratio that felt representative.
 - To replicate the current number of Councillors in Kent and Medway, a single unitary authority covering the entire area would have 658 Councillors. This would obviously be unworkable.
 - If the single authority had a similar size of electorate per councillor to Cornwall, then there would be 261 Councillors. This is much lower but would still be unworkable.
 - To meet the maximum recommended 99 Councillors there would be 13,625 electors per Councillor. By population this would be 18,948 per Councillor. This is 6.6x the current ratio and much higher than other options.

Engagement

The workstream considered opportunities and challenges for local engagement to exist on a spectrum. Authorities that cover larger geographic areas and larger and more diverse populations would likely face greater challenges in engaging with residents and communities at the local level. There would need to be significant resource in place to manage relationships, and it would probably

be more challenging for a large authority to develop and maintain models which were flexible and suitable for all areas.

- A single unitary would cover the whole county area – encompassing urban, rural and coastal areas, areas of deprivation and affluence, and differences in diversity. A blanket approach to engagement would be unlikely to be effective and it would be very challenging for such an authority to develop and maintain flexible and suitable engagement models for all areas.
- However, robust formal and informal engagement mechanisms could mitigate the removal of the district layer of community engagement, while providing a streamlined approach that could reduce duplication and dilution that can be experienced in the current two tier system.
- This model might require consideration of new or enhanced mechanisms to facilitate more localised democracy and decision-making to prevent the Unitary from being too remote – this would require significant resource.
- VCSE organisations will engage with their respective LA for funding/commissioning – larger and infrastructure organisations will be more comfortable engaging with fewer UAs, while small and micro VCSE will also want to engage at a much more local level, and will need to be factored into any local community board arrangements.

6) Conclusion

In considering all the above information, analysis indicates that the **three unitary option** provides the most scope for successful Local Government Reorganisation into a unitary system, for the following reasons:

- It provides the most evenly balanced configuration of **deprivation** factors across the three unitaries, and avoids creating imbalances between unitaries with a high concentration of deprivation and those with very low levels. It also creates the least deprived version of an East Kent UA.
- In terms of **place and identity**, this option best reflects the existing local identities within East, West and North in the most logical way; one that communities could identify with, grouping together districts that are deemed to fit well together, rather than separating them.
- This option best reflects **how people live their lives** through travel to work, education and healthcare, with most local travel patterns being preserved within UA boundaries.
- Despite four unitaries being optimal for **representation**, the 3UA option would still strike a good balance between having a workable number of councillors per UA and having a councillor per elector ratio that felt representative.
- It most **closely aligns with the configurations of strategic partners**, as it is roughly coterminous with the delivery models of bodies such as Kent Police and the Health & Care Partnerships.
- Regarding **community engagement**, this option provides a middle ground in terms of size and the level of resource and capacity needed to establish, manage and sustain formal and informal local engagement structures.

It is worth noting that in viewing the three unitary option the most optimal regarding democracy and local identity, in terms of most of the factors considered, this option would be optimised by splitting parts of Sevenoaks and Swale so that Swanley sits with North Kent and Faversham/East Swale sits with East Kent, as these respective areas align more closely. The workstream acknowledges the challenges of resulting boundary change proposals, the limitations of LGBCE to address this during the initial stages of Kent and Medway's LGR process, and MHCLG's preference to maintain existing district boundaries.

Democracy and Local Identity - Appendices

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Appendix A – Identity: deprivation and diversity

Deprivation - Average IMD

The analysis below is based on the average Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) scores for each district, set out in the table below. This quantifies relative levels of deprivation over whole district geographies.

District	IMD average score
Thanet	31.3
Swale	27.1
Folkestone and Hythe	24.1
Medway	23.9
Dover	22.2
Gravesham	21.4
Dartford	18.8
Ashford	18.5
Canterbury	16.8
Maidstone	16.5
Tonbridge and Malling	13.3
Sevenoaks	12.4
Tunbridge Wells	11.3

The scores below are averages of the district averages within the proposed unitary authority. For example, in Option 1 the North Unitary Authority is made up of Dartford - 18.8, Gravesham - 21.4, Medway - 23.9, and Swale - 27.1, which produces an average of 22.8.

Proposed unitary	Option 1 – 3UA	Option 2 – 4UA	Option 3 – 4UA	Option 4 – 4UA	Option 5 – 2UA	Option 6 – 1UA
North	22.8	21.6	21.4	21.4	-	19.8
East	22.6	25.1	23.4	23.4	23.3	
West	13.4	13.4	13.4	12.3	16.8	
Mid	-	-	23.2	20.7	-	
South	-	21.6	-	-	-	
Ratio (most : least deprived)	1.7	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.4	-
Range (most - least deprived)	9.4	11.7	10.1	11.1	6.5	-

Deprivation - Top 10% most deprived LSOAs in England

The analysis below is based on the number of 'Lower Super Output Areas' (LSOAs) which are in the top 10% most deprived in England (labelled as 'most deprived'), set out in the table below. This gives an indication as to where the most acute deprivation is located.

District	Number of LSOAs in 10% most deprived in England	Number of LSOAs in district	% of LSOAs in district which are 'most deprived'	% of Kent and Medway's 'most deprived' LSOAs (i.e. /65)
Thanet	18	84	21%	28%
Swale	16	85	19%	25%
Medway	14	163	9%	22%
Dover	5	67	7%	8%
Folkestone and Hythe	4	67	6%	6%
Gravesham	2	64	3%	3%
Dartford	1	58	2%	2%
Canterbury	2	90	2%	3%
Maidstone	2	95	2%	3%
Ashford	1	78	1%	2%
Tonbridge and Malling	0	72	0%	0%
Sevenoaks	0	74	0%	0%
Tunbridge Wells	0	68	0%	0%
Total for Kent and Medway	65	1065	6%	100%

Proposed unitary authority	Number of LSOAs in 10% most deprived in England	Total number of LSOAs	% of LSOAs which are 'most deprived'	% of Kent and Medway's 'most deprived' LSOAs (i.e. /65)
Option 1 – 3UA				
North	33	370	9%	51%
East	30	386	8%	46%
West	2	309	1%	3%
Option 2 – 4UA				
North	17	285	6%	26%
East	36	259	14%	55%
South	10	212	5%	15%
West	2	309	1%	3%
Option 3 – 4 UA				
North	17	285	6%	26%
East	25	241	10%	38%
Mid	21	230	9%	32%
West	2	309	1%	3%
Option 4 – 4UA				
North	17	285	6%	26%
East	29	308	9%	45%
Mid	19	258	7%	29%
West	0	214	0%	0%
Option 5 – 2UA				
East	46	471	10%	71%
West	19	594	3%	29%
Option 6 – 1UA (benchmark)				
Kent & Medway	65	1065	6%	100%

Findings:

- More than half (55%) of Kent and Medway's LSOAs categorised as 'most deprived' (top 10% nationally) are within two districts – Thanet and Swale
- All of the 4UA models have a greater range in average IMDs and greater ratios, compared to the 2UA and 3UA models. This means that these options produce unitary authorities which are more deprived overall as well as creating wider disparities between unitary authorities.
- In all of the options, there is a disparity between West which has low levels of deprivation on average and very few of the most deprived LSOAs.
- Option 1 – 3UA creates the least deprived version of an East unitary authority with an average IMD of 22.6 and 8% of LSOAs categorised as most deprived. This is the only option in which East is not the most deprived unitary authority, with North scoring slightly higher.
 - This creates two unitary authorities which are close to parity in terms of deprivation.
 - It is the option with the lowest 'peak' IMD score
 - It is the option with the equal lowest 'peak' LSOAs categorised as most deprived
 - In this option, Swale and Thanet are in separate unitary authorities.
- Option 2 – 4UA creates an East unitary authority which has an average IMD of 25.1 and where 14% of LSOAs are categorised as most deprived. This would be the most deprived unitary authority across all of the options.
 - This unitary authority is made up of Thanet and Swale –the two most deprived districts in the whole Kent and Medway – and Canterbury.

- Option 5 – 2UA has the lowest disparity and ratio between unitary authorities. However, this is because West has a higher IMD than in other options at 16.8, rather than the East unitary authority having a lower IMD which remains at a similarly high score of 23.3. Meaning that with this option, on average, the West would become more deprived, but the East would not become less deprived.

Diversity

The data below is based on the 2021 Census.

Ethnicity

District	White British	All white ethnicities	All minority ethnic groups
Ashford	82.6%	88.1%	11.9%
Canterbury	82.5%	89.2%	10.8%
Dartford	67.3%	74.5%	25.5%
Dover	90.3%	94.9%	5.1%
Folkestone & Hythe	88.0%	92.6%	7.4%
Gravesham	68.3%	76.6%	23.4%
Maidstone	82.0%	89.8%	10.2%
Medway	78.3%	84.3%	15.7%
Sevenoaks	85.6%	92.1%	7.9%
Swale	88.6%	93.8%	6.2%
Thanet	87.3%	93.0%	7.0%
Tonbridge & Malling	88.3%	93.3%	6.7%
Tunbridge Wells	84.2%	91.5%	8.5%
Kent and Medway	82.4%	88.6%	11.4%

Religion

District	No religion	Christian	Hindu	Muslim	Sikh	All minority religions
Ashford	40.7%	47.6%	2.0%	1.6%	0.1%	6.0%
Canterbury	42.0%	46.6%	0.8%	1.8%	0.2%	4.4%
Dartford	36.5%	48.1%	3.8%	3.5%	1.7%	10.1%
Dover	42.4%	49.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.1%	2.5%
Folkestone & Hythe	41.8%	48.0%	1.5%	1.0%	0.0%	4.5%
Gravesham	32.1%	49.2%	1.4%	3.1%	8.0%	13.5%
Maidstone	40.1%	49.3%	1.4%	1.9%	0.2%	5.0%
Medway	43.0%	45.1%	1.1%	2.7%	1.6%	6.5%
Sevenoaks	39.5%	51.8%	0.7%	0.9%	0.2%	2.7%
Swale	45.3%	47.2%	0.4%	1.0%	0.1%	2.3%
Thanet	44.1%	46.7%	0.6%	1.5%	0.1%	3.4%
Tonbridge & Malling	42.8%	48.7%	0.9%	1.0%	0.2%	3.0%
Tunbridge Wells	40.3%	49.7%	1.0%	1.7%	0.1%	3.8%
Kent and Medway	41.2%	47.9%	1.2%	1.8%	0.9%	5.7%

Findings:

Ethnicity

- In 10 of the districts, 82% or more are White British and 89% or more are ethnically White. These figures are higher than the national average.
- In contrast Dartford and Gravesham have a far more diverse population with approximately a quarter part of a minority ethnic group which is above the national average.
- Within Dartford and Gravesham there are specific communities which are prevalent:
 - In Dartford 9.9% of the population are Asian – with 4.4% of the population Indian
 - In Dartford 10.5% of the population are Black – with 8.4% of the population African
 - In Gravesham 11.2% of the population are Asian – with 7.6% of the population Indian
 - In Gravesham 6.5% of the population are Black – with 4.9% African
- Medway is also more ethnically diverse than other parts of Kent, with 15.7% part of a minority ethnic group. Ashford, Canterbury and Maidstone are also relatively diverse with more than 10% of the population in those districts part of a minority ethnic group.

Religion

- Similarly, Dartford and Gravesham are the most diverse districts in Kent for religion, with 10.1% and 13.5% identifying with a minority religion and the lowest proportions saying that they have ‘no religion’. This includes:
 - In Dartford, 3.8% of the population are Hindu and 3.5% are Muslim
 - In Gravesham, 8.0% of the population are Sikh – the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara is the largest Gurdwara in Europe

Appendix B – Identity: Place

Building ‘pride of place’

In 2022, the Local Government Association (LGA) published the findings and recommendations from ethnographic research titled – ‘[What makes people feel contented where they live, and what makes people deep-rooted and proud?](#)’. One of the places included in the research was Margate. The report included findings and recommendations relevant to how a new unitary authority could shape local place and identity. These include:

- ‘Deep-rooted contentedness’ is a pre-condition for ‘Pride in Place’. Pride in place occurs through external factors and are highly dependent on the particular places – which are difficult for councils to manufacture. Therefore, councils should focus on delivering the conditions for contentedness as a first order priority.
- The drivers for people to feel contentedness with place are:
 - Core material needs are met (e.g. housing and jobs)
 - Good local amenities (e.g. shops and open-spaces)
 - Sufficient social connections
 - An optimistic view of the place’s future, in which they can see their role
- Developing pride in place is a second order priority because it is not necessary for people’s flourishing and It is not always feasible for councils to bring about of. Pride of place may “bubble up organically” but can be “boosted” if councils “tune in to emerging signals”.
- In Margate, the Turner Gallery did not feature as a source of pride. Rather, Dreamland was a more prominent source of pride in place. There are three boosters for pride in place:
 - Something being authentically distinctive and particular about the place. Especially things which are about looking forward to what the place is becoming, not looking back to where it came from.
 - External validation or perceived envy from outsiders
 - Sense of superiority compared to a local “rival” place

Possible features of local identity and place

The diagram overleaf is purely for illustrative purposes. It was developed collaboratively by the workstream based on desk research of distinctive features of different parts of Kent and their own knowledge of the areas in which they live, categorised by 'Place', 'Economy and development', and 'Culture, heritage and identity'. Using the 3UA model, it shows the types of features that could contribute to a sense of local identity within the proposed unitary authorities and which they could promote as part of place-making or identity building initiatives.

The observations of the workstream were that there were enough commonalities across Kent, as well as specific distinctive features within existing districts upon which to build identity and place, and that this could be achieved within a two, three or four unitary model. However, it was felt that the three unitary model would be the most optimal in this regard. The three unitary model creates authorities which are smaller geographically and by population than a two unitary model, but which are large enough to encompass broad and complementary identities which span districts – for example, in the three unitary model the coastal communities in Folkestone and Hythe, Dover, Thanet and Canterbury are grouped together in East; and the entire Thames Estuary area spanning Gravesham, Dartford, Medway and Swale are grouped together in North.

Please note the caveat that this was an exercise conducted solely by KCC Officers, and the features suggested in the diagram are not intended to be exhaustive. An important next step with LGR considerations would be to engage with residents on how they perceive their local identities and what the defining features of a proposed unitary authority area could be.

NORTH

Place

Thames Estuary and North Kent Marshes
Proximity to London
Urban

Economy and development

Proximity to London and London City Airport
University cluster in Chatham
Ebbsfleet Garden City
Thames Gateway redevelopment
Bluewater shopping centre

Culture, heritage and identity

Religious and ethnic diversity - Gurdwara in Gravesend
Sweeps Festival
Rochester Cathedral
Charles Dickens
Maritime history: Historic Dockyard Chatham



WEST

Place

Proximity to London and Gatwick
Affluent commuter towns
Maidstone County Town
Kent Downs and High Weald
Royal Tunbridge Wells - Spa Town

Economy and development

Entrepreneurial, service-based economy
High productivity
Kings Hill Business Park
Food sciences and agricultural training

Culture, heritage and identity

Oast houses
Castles: Leeds, Hever, Scotney, & more
Spa Valley Railway



EAST

Place

Coastal towns and villages
White Cliffs of Dover and coastline
Kent Downs and High Weald; rural areas
Canterbury city
UK Border - Gateway to Europe - Port of Dover, EuroTunnel

Economy and development

Creativity and regeneration in Margate and Folkestone
Otterpool Park Garden Town development
University cluster in Canterbury
Life sciences - Discovery Park, Sandwich
Logistics and border facilities
Food and drink; viticulture e.g. Chapel Down Wine
Retail hubs: Ashford Outlet Centre, Westwood Cross

Culture, heritage and identity

Canterbury Cathedral
Dover Castle
Battle of Britain
Dreamland
Turner Contemporary
Animal conservancy: Howlett's, Port Lympne, Wildwood



Appendix C - How people live their lives

Travel to work

Travel-to-work flows

This table shows the home and work district for all 'usual residents' aged 16 years and over that either live or work in Kent & Medway.

N.B. This is based off Census 2021 data, which took place during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a period of unparalleled and rapid change; the national lockdown, associated guidance and furlough measures will have affected the travel to work topic.

% of column total		Home district														Outside K&M
		Dartford	Gravesham	Medway	Swale	Canterbury	Thanet	Dover	Folkestone and Hythe	Ashford	Maidstone	Tunbridge Wells	Tonbridge and Malling	Sevenoaks		
Work district	Dartford	43.1%	6.3%	1.5%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.5%	0.2%	0.7%	1.9%	27.9%	
	Gravesham	1.9%	37.8%	1.4%	0.4%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.5%	0.4%	5.0%	
	Medway	1.1%	2.6%	44.1%	3.5%	0.6%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.5%	2.1%	0.2%	1.8%	0.3%	8.3%	
	Swale	0.2%	0.4%	1.7%	43.9%	1.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.2%	0.5%	0.9%	0.1%	0.4%	0.1%	2.4%	
	Canterbury	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	1.7%	40.6%	3.5%	4.3%	1.8%	1.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	2.0%	
	Thanet	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	1.6%	42.6%	2.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	
	Dover	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	1.1%	2.1%	39.0%	2.1%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	
	Folkestone and Hythe	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.6%	0.3%	3.4%	40.8%	1.8%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	
	Ashford	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.6%	1.1%	0.3%	1.3%	3.9%	48.1%	1.1%	0.6%	0.2%	0.1%	4.1%	
	Maidstone	0.4%	0.7%	2.5%	1.9%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.5%	2.2%	45.2%	1.3%	3.5%	0.5%	5.9%	
	Tunbridge Wells	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	1.0%	1.9%	48.6%	3.0%	0.9%	15.0%	
	Tonbridge and Malling	0.4%	1.0%	2.0%	0.9%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.6%	4.2%	2.9%	42.8%	1.5%	7.4%	
	Sevenoaks	1.5%	1.1%	0.4%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.6%	1.4%	2.6%	42.3%	17.0%	
	Outside Kent & Medway	15.9%	8.4%	5.0%	2.5%	1.6%	1.1%	1.1%	1.5%	2.5%	3.3%	4.9%	5.2%	10.2%		
	Other (e.g. offshore/outside the UK)	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.8%	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%		
	Does not apply (i.e. not in work)	35.1%	41.1%	40.5%	43.3%	50.2%	48.7%	47.0%	47.8%	40.4%	39.2%	39.5%	38.9%	41.6%		
Grand total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		



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Overall findings:

- Most travel to work is within district boundaries and within proposed unitary boundaries. There are relatively few journeys to work outside of home districts or beyond proposed unitary boundaries.
- In seven of the 13 districts, the second most common travel to work destination is 'outside Kent & Medway' (presumably to London in most cases). The exceptions were Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe (which would all be part of the East or South proposed unitary authorities), and Maidstone and Swale
- Only 12% of workers in Kent and Medway travel more than 20km to work. 71% either work mainly from home (30%) or travel fewer than 20km to work (41%). The remaining 17% of workers were categorised as 'Other' which could include offshore, abroad or no fixed location.

There are some specific travel to work journeys between districts which are prevalent:

- Travel to work is most localised within the proposed East or South boundaries, specifically Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, and Folkestone & Hythe. People travel between these districts, but of these Canterbury is the most significant destination for work. Ashford, to a lesser extent, is also a major destination for work from these districts.
- In comparison, travel *between* North and West proposed boundaries, and travel *from* North and West to 'outside of Kent & Medway' (and vice versa), is more common.
- In Swale, the most common travel to work journey (beyond Swale) is to Medway.
- From Sevenoaks, the most common travel to work journey is to 'outside K&M' followed by Dartford. This is reflective of the large commuter population in Sevenoaks but is also likely explained by the position of Swanley within the M25 and its proximity to Dartford and to London.
- Maidstone is a travel to work journey from different parts of the county, including from Ashford and Medway. But the highest rate of travel is *between* Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling.

Travel-to-learn flows: secondary (KCC only)

This matrix shows the percentage of secondary pupils living in a district by which district their school is based in.

The table includes data on all children in year 7-11 from the School Census in January 2023. Data on children attending schools in KCC but living in Medway or outside Kent has been excluded as we do not hold the equivalent data for KCC pupils attending schools outside of KCC.

		Home district											
School District	Pupils in Year-T1 (January 2023 School Census)	Dartford	Gravesham	Swale	Canterbury	Thanet	Dover	Folkestone and Hythe	Ashford	Maidstone	Tunbridge Wells	Tonbridge and Malling	Sevenoaks
Dartford		86.3%	7.5%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	17.1%
Gravesham		10.8%	89.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.5%	5.7%
Swale		0.1%	0.0%	92.1%	3.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Canterbury		0.0%	0.0%	3.9%	93.1%	1.1%	7.4%	3.2%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Thanet		0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	2.1%	92.5%	0.9%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Dover		0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.8%	6.2%	89.4%	3.8%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Folkestone and Hythe		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	1.9%	89.6%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Ashford		0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.6%	0.1%	0.4%	3.1%	90.1%	1.4%	2.7%	0.1%	0.0%
Maidstone		0.2%	0.6%	2.6%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	3.3%	89.8%	1.0%	19.5%	0.4%
Tunbridge Wells		0.7%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	4.5%	78.1%	12.4%	13.2%
Tonbridge and Malling		0.5%	2.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	3.2%	18.0%	65.2%	28.4%
Sevenoaks		1.4%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%	2.2%	35.1%
Grand Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Overall findings:

- Nearly all primary school pupils attend school within their home district (92-99%).
- While slightly lower proportion than for primary school pupils, the vast majority of secondary school pupils attend school within their home district – with c.90% in most districts.
- The exceptions to this are in West Kent, most notably Sevenoaks where only 35% of secondary school pupils attend school within the district. Tunbridge Wells at 78% and Tonbridge and Malling at 65% also have a relatively lower proportion of secondary school pupils attending school with their home districts.

There are some notable journeys between districts for secondary school pupils which could influence the boundaries of the unitary authorities:

- Canterbury is an important destination for education, with relatively high numbers of pupils from Dover, Swale and Folkestone & Hythe travelling there.
- If travelling out of their districts, pupils in Canterbury are most likely to go to Swale and there is a also high prevalence of pupils travelling in the other direction. This may be due to the proximity between Faversham and Canterbury.
- Dover is also an important destination for education, with relatively high numbers of pupils from Thanet and from Folkestone and Hythe travelling there.
- Pupils in Sevenoaks are almost as likely to travel to Tonbridge and Malling (28.4%) as they are to stay within their home district (35.1%). Also very notable is that 17.1% of pupils in Sevenoaks travel to Dartford and 13.2% travel to Tunbridge Wells. This is likely because of the proximity and because there are grammar schools within these districts, and Sevenoaks is the only district in Kent without any grammar schools.

Emergency hospital admissions

Acute hospital patient flows: emergency admissions

This table shows the percentage of emergency admissions from each district in Kent & Medway into each Acute Hospital.

Data period: April 2023 to March 2024

Data source: Hospital Episode Statistics (HES)

*Other activity relates to out of county organisations and Kent based private or community hospitals.

Emergency admissions 2023/24 as % of total admissions for each district		Hospital Site								Total	% Of Kent & Medway total
		Darent Valley Hospital (Dartford)	Medway Maritime Hospital	The Maidstone Hospital	The Tunbridge Wells Hospital	William Harvey Hospital (Ashford)	QEQM Hospital (Thanet)	Kent & Canterbury Hospital	Other *		
District of residence	Dartford	90.2%	1.2%	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	7.4%	13,732	6.3%
	Gravesham	85.5%	4.6%	1.7%	0.9%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	6.6%	12,933	5.9%
	Medway	2.6%	82.5%	6.1%	1.2%	0.7%	0.1%	1.2%	5.6%	30,823	14.1%
	Swale	0.4%	61.3%	9.1%	2.3%	15.1%	2.0%	3.9%	5.9%	15,620	7.1%
	Canterbury	0.1%	0.4%	0.5%	0.3%	24.4%	50.6%	18.5%	5.3%	13,615	6.2%
	Thanet	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	3.6%	81.1%	10.4%	4.3%	15,188	6.9%
	Dover	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	43.9%	36.9%	14.5%	4.1%	11,631	5.3%
	Folkestone and Hythe	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.3%	82.1%	1.1%	11.9%	4.1%	12,157	5.6%
	Ashford	0.1%	0.2%	1.6%	1.7%	82.6%	0.5%	8.1%	5.1%	14,617	6.7%
	Maidstone	0.4%	1.8%	64.7%	26.6%	2.2%	0.1%	0.7%	3.7%	27,445	12.6%
	Tunbridge Wells	0.1%	0.1%	6.2%	88.3%	0.6%	0.0%	0.1%	4.6%	17,170	7.9%
	Tonbridge and Malling	0.8%	2.6%	39.8%	52.2%	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%	3.7%	18,677	8.5%
	Sevenoaks	32.3%	0.5%	4.7%	51.2%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	10.9%	14,946	6.8%
	Kent & Medway	13.5%	16.9%	14.1%	18.8%	15.8%	11.0%	4.4%	5.4%	218,554	100.0%

Findings:

- Most emergency admissions are within proposed unitary authority areas.
- The majority (61.3%) of emergency admissions from Swale are to Medway
- Emergency admissions from Sevenoaks are split between North and West areas – 32.2% of emergency admissions are to Dartford and 51.2% are to Tunbridge Wells
- There are close links between Tonbridge and Malling and Maidstone – 39.8% of emergency admissions from Tonbridge and Malling go to Maidstone and 26.6% vice versa.
- Health and care partnerships are not contiguous with district boundaries – see map below. The current HCP map most closely aligns with option 1, the three unitary model with DGS and Medway & Swale HCPs covering the area of a North unitary authority albeit with Faversham split from the rest of Swale, and Swanley and North Sevenoaks paired with Dartford and Gravesham.

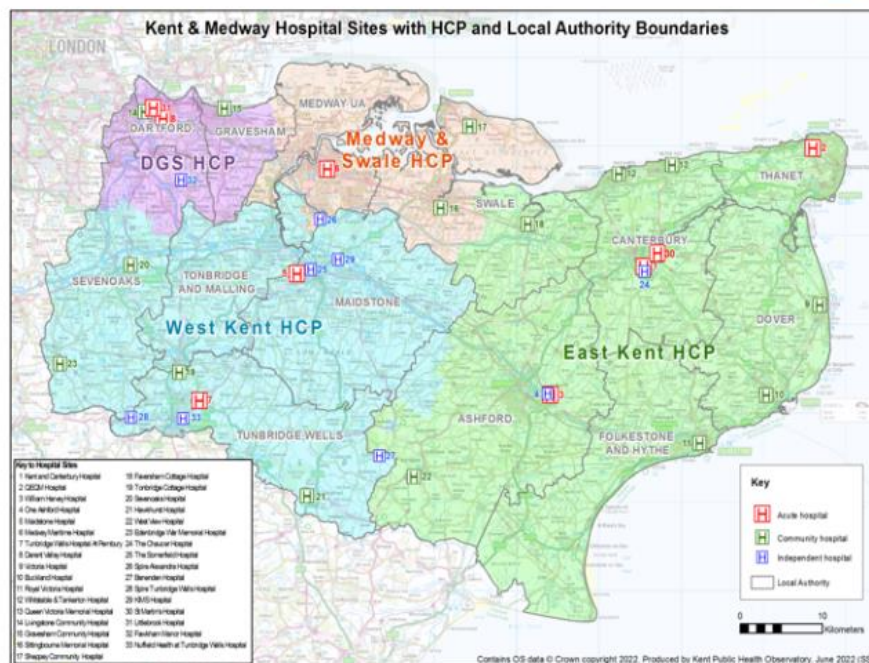
Health and care partnerships

There are some areas where HCPs are not contiguous with district boundaries. The most significant being:

- Faversham & east Swale
- Swanley & north Sevenoaks

Smaller non-contiguous areas are:

- Higham (NE Gravesham)
- Blue Bell Hill (NE T&M)
- Smarden (NW Ashford)



Appendix D - Democracy and representation

Number of Councillors

Background information:

- 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 there is one Councillor per 2,851 people. And based on an electorate of c. 1.35 million in Kent and Medway, there is one Councillor per 2,050 electors.
 - The highest population/electorate per councillor is in Medway where there are 4,792 people and 3,493 electors per Councillor
 - 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 99 Councillors for new unitary authorities, and that exceptions to this need a strong justification.
- In 2018 the LGBCE conducted a review of Cornwall Council's electoral arrangements and [recommended that they reduce the number of Councillors from 123 to 87](#) (with 1 Councillor per division). This worked out at a projected 5,163 electors per Councillor by 2023. When carrying out the review they had three main considerations, notably these do not include an upper or lower cap on the number of electors per Councillor:
 - Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
 - Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity.
 - Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

The table below sets out the following based on *population* figures:

Proposed unitary authority	Total population	Population per councillor – 99 Councillors	Number of councillors to meet Kent average of 2,851 population per Councillor
Option 1- 3UA			
North	661,559	6,698	232
East	663,111	6,682	233
West	551,223	5,568	193
Option 2 – 4UA			
North	508,492	5,136	178
East	452,858	4,574	159
South	363,320	3,670	127
West	551,223	5,568	193
Option 3 – 4 UA			
North	508,492	5,136	178
East	415,712	4,199	146
Mid	400,466	4,045	140
West	551,223	5,568	193
Option 4 – 4UA			
North	508,492	5,136	178
East	525,949	5,313	180
Mid	470,657	4,754	165
West	370,795	3,745	130
Option 5 – 2UA			
East	816,178	8,244	286
West	1,059,715	10,704	372
Option 6 – 1UA (benchmark)			
Kent & Medway	1,875,893	18,948	658

The table below is based on electorate figures:

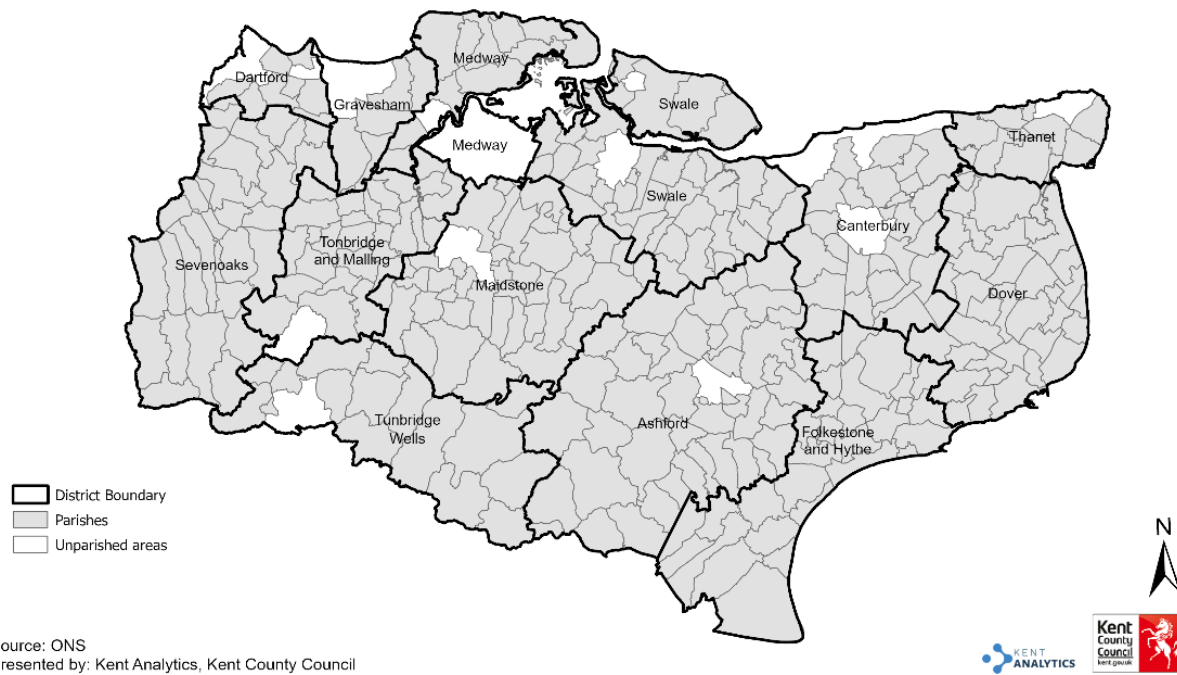
Proposed unitary authority	Total electorate	Electorate per councillor – 99 Councillors (LGBCE's advised maximum)	Number of councillors to meet Kent average of 2,050 electorate per Councillor	Number of Councillors to meet Cornwall's average of 5,163 electorate per Councillor
Option 1- 3UA				
North	477,222	4,823	233	92
East	464,222	4,689	226	90
West	407,167	4,133	199	79
Option 2 – 4UA				
North	367,424	3,711	179	71
East	321,747	3,250	157	62
South	252,519	2,551	123	49
West	407,167	4,133	199	79
Option 3 – 4 UA				
North	367,424	3,711	179	71
East	298,941	3,020	146	58
Mid	275,325	2,781	134	53
West	407,167	4,133	199	79
Option 4 – 4UA				
North	367,424	3,711	179	71
East	369,135	3,729	180	71
Mid	336,801	3,402	164	65
West	275,497	3,711	134	53
Option 5 – 2UA				
East	574,266	5,801	280	111
West	774,591	7,824	378	150
Option 6 – 1UA (benchmark)				
Kent & Medway	1,348,857	13,625	658	261

Parish and Town Councils, and unparished areas

Findings:

- There are over 300 parish and town councils in the Kent and Medway area. Overall, 56% of the population in Kent and Medway live in parished areas and 44% live in unparished areas. The areas which are covered by this level of representation tend to be rural and those which are not covered tend to be urban. More than 70% of the population [live in urban areas](#).
- Most of the large towns do not have a Town Council or any other type of council at that level, these include (ordered by population size) –
 - Maidstone (Maidstone)
 - Gillingham (Medway)
 - Dartford (Dartford)
 - Chatham (Medway)
 - Ashford (Ashford)
 - Rochester (Medway)
 - Margate (Thanet)
 - Royal Tunbridge Wells (Tunbridge Wells)
 - Gravesend (Gravesham)
 - Canterbury (Canterbury)
 - Sittingbourne (Swale)
 - Tonbridge (Tonbridge and Malling)
 - Herne Bay (Canterbury)
 - Whitstable (Canterbury)
- This is not the case in Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, and Sevenoaks districts which are all fully parished, including the following Town Councils (ordered by population size):
 - Folkestone
 - Dover
 - Deal
 - Sevenoaks
 - Swanley
- In Thanet, the only unparished area is Margate which is its largest town covering c.60k population. Ramsgate and Broadstairs both have Town Councils.
- It is notable that the largest town council – Folkestone – cover a population of c.50k. All of the areas larger than this do not have a town council.
- The districts with the highest proportion of the population living in unparished areas are: Medway (86%), Gravesham (84%), Canterbury (72%), and Dartford (56%).

Parish & Non-civil parish boundaries in Kent & Medway 2024



Appendix E – Enhancing Community Engagement

Kent and Medway Local Identity

Kent is a large and diverse geography with significant differences across the county in terms of deprivation, rurality, economic growth, unemployment, benefits uptake and more¹, and any solution to local government reorganisation in Kent must be cognisant of the diversity, local identity of the districts whilst considering issues of financial viability.

Kent and Medway possesses strong local identities, and Kent and Medway's political leaders are rightly proud of the unique identities of their local areas and want the best for the communities they serve. Given the county's size and diversity of civic identities, the vision for local government reorganisation would lead to large governance structures that could risk not being reflective of the identities of the communities that make up Kent and Medway. This will therefore require a system with a distinct localism offer which builds on the strength of civic society and uses local intelligence to strengthen decision making that is responsive to differences in needs, challenges and opportunities.

Current Decision Making Arrangements in Kent and Medway

KCC decision-making

- Kent County Council (KCC) Members (councillors) are the decision and policy makers. They use information from council officers and represent the views of their residents. KCC operates a Leader and Cabinet system.
- Officers have a responsibility to provide information, facts and figures to elected members to support their decision-making. Once decisions are made, officers are then responsible for implementation and making sure services are delivered to residents.
 - [Corporate Management Team \(CMT\)](#)
 - [Council wide responsibilities of Directors](#)
- The [constitution](#) sets out how the council operates and decisions are made.
- Decisions to be taken by Cabinet or Cabinet Members that are expected to have a significant impact on the budget, or on the services, KCC provides, are called 'key' decisions. Key decisions to be taken over the next six months are updated each month in the [Forthcoming Executive Decisions \(FED\)](#).
- [Council committees](#) meet regularly to make decisions on policy and budgetary matters for council services. Several of these are statutory.
- There are also a number of [Select Committees](#). These are akin to sub-committees, and generally look at topics in a focused, in-depth way. These forms will propose decisions to the Cabinet or relevant Cabinet Member.
- External to County, District/Borough/City decision-making, there exists a range of [outside bodies](#).

Medway Council decision-making

- Medway Council has similar [decision-making processes](#) in place. The main difference is that they are already an all-purpose, unitary, council.

¹ [Kent Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation](#)

District/Borough/City decision-making

- The Districts have a similar decision-making process in place:
 - [Ashford](#)
 - [Canterbury](#)
 - [Dartford](#)
 - [Dover](#)
 - [Folkstone and Hythe](#)
 - [Gravesham](#)
 - [Maidstone](#)
 - [Sevenoaks](#)
 - [Swale](#)
 - [Thanet](#)
 - [Tonbridge & Malling](#)
 - [Tunbridge Wells](#)

Local Democracy in Kent – Town and Parish Councils

There are currently over 300 Town and Parish Councils in Kent and a further 11 parishes in Medway; all of which have limited decision making powers primarily covering allotments, village greens, burial grounds and crematoriums, car parks and community centres/village halls and some street lighting.

Parish and Town Councils can raise funds to meet the costs of administration and provision of services through setting a precept which forms part of council tax bills levied on council tax payers within the parish. They are also the most local form of government and can provide a local voice for the community; responding to consultations and raising concerns with the relevant organisations as well as acting as consultee on planning applications².

Discussions have been ongoing with the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) to explore ways in which greater powers, funding and responsibilities could be devolved to Parish and Town Councils³. KALC's role in representing local councils will be to ensure that the Parish and Town councils are included in the ongoing discussions and changes that will occur as a result of local government reorganisation⁴.

A number of areas are unparished in Kent, including many of the major towns. In preparation for Local Government reorganisation (LGR) several District Councils' Democratic Services teams are undertaking preparatory work which would see these areas have a Town Council. This would enable some continuity of current civic functions, for example the process of mayor-making. The Government is reportedly due to publish a 'Communities White Paper', and its position on whether new Town and Parish Councils will have the ability to levy a precept is as yet unknown; this will potentially have a significant impact on the capabilities and viability of any new bodies.

Details of the known community governance reviews where there are geographical areas without existing parish or town councils are shown below:

Ashford Borough Council – Considering a potential review of Ashford's urban and unparished areas, recognising that the introduction of unitary authorities could create the opportunity for town and parish councils to take on greater responsibilities and give residents more ownership and control of services delivered on their behalf. A more localised council could give residents a bigger say and there would be an additional tier of councillors to represent residents, focusing on more immediate local issues⁵

² [Maidstone Borough Council Community Governance Review Terms of Reference 2022/23](#)

³ [Kent Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation](#)

⁴ [Devolution | Kent Association of Local Councils](#)

⁵ [Report Title: Community Governance Review of Ashford Borough's Urban Area](#)

Maidstone Borough Council – With the rapid timetable of proposed local government reorganisation, Maidstone proposed a review of the unparished and neighbouring areas of Maidstone Town (‘Urban Area’) in January. It was felt that with the introduction of unitary councils, there may be a ‘gap’ created between residents and local representatives and felt ‘more acutely in areas without a parish council’⁶. It is proposed that the final recommendations will be approved in April 2026.⁷

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council – in June 2025 launched a formal consultation to start a community governance review into the creation of a town council in Tonbridge; they note that a town council may be seen to offer a more locally focused and responsive part of local government under any new proposed local government reorganisation arrangements⁸.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council – In June 2025 launched a formal consultation considering if new parish and/or town council(s) should be created to represent the unparished areas of Tunbridge Wells. It is highlighted that it is important to engage with the consultation now should local government reorganisation take place in Kent⁹.

Canterbury City Council – Undertook the Whitstable community governance review which concluded in October 2024 with a decision to not go ahead with the adoption of a town council. It was felt that a Town Council would not represent the best interests of the community in light of rejection of the proposal by the majority of respondents, concerns raised about the additional costs associated with a town council precept and lack of support for an additional layer of governance¹⁰.

It is important to note that some of this activity is, in part, being driven by a concern that the introduction of unitary authorities through local government reorganisation may result in a loss of a locally focused government and the potential for residents to lose their voice when engaging on local issues. In the [Kent Interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation](#), it was noted that there are further opportunities to explore as proposals are developed about the future role of Town and Parish Councils.

Current strategic relationships with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector

The Civil Society strategy for Kent was agreed in 2021 and recognised the role and contribution of charities and voluntary organisations to our local communities and charities as a core part of that; setting out our commitments to supporting a strong and vibrant civil society in Kent.

Due to the current democratic geography of Kent, the VCSE sector has to work in partnership in different ways across the county, across both KCC, Medway Council and the twelve district/borough councils. It has an essential role in engaging with residents and providing services on behalf of local government and other strategic partners such as Kent Police and NHS Kent and Medway

As of 2022/23, there were 2951 registered charities in Kent with 431 of those active across both Kent and Medway; KCC Analytics data shows that the majority of active organisations are micro and small although the highest proportion of income comes from larger organisations.

⁶ [Maidstone Borough Council Community Governance Review - Maidstone Urban Area - January 2025](#)

⁷ [Community Governance Review - Maidstone Urban Area - Indicative Timetable and Actions](#)

⁸ [Review into a town council for Tonbridge – Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council](#)

⁹ [Tunbridge Wells Community Governance Review - 2025](#)

¹⁰ [Agenda for Council on Thursday, 24th October, 2024, 7.00 pm | Canterbury City Council](#)

The majority of charities in Kent are providing services, with the most common beneficiaries being the general public, followed by children and young people, and charities are unevenly distributed across the county with concentration in major urban areas, within individual districts¹¹.

The Civil Society Covenant Framework, currently being developed by Central Government, highlights the importance of strategic authorities engaging with the VCSE and fostering a relationship that acknowledges all that civil society does for local communities and the services it provides on behalf of local government. The upcoming covenant will be based around four key principles¹²:

1. **Recognition:** to ensure a strong and independent civil society
2. **Partnership:** to ensure effective service delivery and policy making, and shared learning of best practices
3. **Participation:** to ensure people and communities can be heard and make a difference
4. **Transparency:** to ensure civil society and government have the information needed to best serve people and communities

KCC has already made progress in embedding these principles in our practice and engagement with the sector through engagement mechanisms such as the VCSE Strategic Partnership Board and the [Kent and Medway VCSE Steering Group](#). This provides a vehicle for the VCSE to be heard in strategic conversations and allows for greater sharing of information and opportunities for collaboration and co-design.

It should also be noted that several members of the VCSE Steering Group are also Chairs of the four [Health and Care Partnership Alliances](#) to support engagement with the wider sector and these meetings are attended by both local government (county and district councils) as well as NHS representatives.

It is essential that, regardless of what mechanism is used for community engagement, the VCSE must play a role in enabling the new unitary authorities to access and amplify community voices, especially those who are harder to reach for the strategic authorities.

Models to Enhance Community Engagement

Regardless of the number of unitary authorities chosen for Kent and Medway, it will be imperative to design meaningful models of community and local place engagement, with a more localised focus on the needs and identity of an area and with the appropriate representation from both town/parish councils as well as civil society and the wider general public. This is reflective of their importance in both community cohesion and their links to local identities.

From 2006 to 2013, **12 Local Boards operated in Kent**, each one covering a District council area and with County councillors for these areas as members of the Local Board.

The role of the boards was to effectively act as a community group, holding regular public meetings and providing an opportunity for the public to raise issues that affected their communities as well as allocating funding to local projects.

The boards were established by KCC to provide County council members with the opportunity to work more closely with the public and voluntary and private sector partners locally through a regular forum for community consultation and participation. It was hoped that this would generate discussion and

¹¹ [Kent Analytics VCS Report - January 2025](#)

¹² [Civil Society Covenant Framework launch - GOV.UK](#)

debate on matters of particular relevance to the area and consider the specific public service needs of the local community and the effectiveness of existing services.

The boards met four times a year and were open to the public and publicised locally and in the local media.

It is proposed that a similar model of 'local' or 'community' boards could be one of several suitable conduits to enhance community engagement in a new unitarised landscape, building on learning of similar examples across the country. These are detailed below and are suggested as possible options for unitary authorities to explore.

Potential Future Models for Engagement

Leader's Question Time

Since 2017, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has hosted 'Question Time' events; aiming to highlight and answer questions on local issues posted by members of the public¹³. Events are held quarterly and provide an opportunity for residents to have a voice on any concerns that matter to them.

Similarly, the Mayor of London holds 'Mayor Question Time' events ten times a year, residents of London can submit questions accessibly online on the full range of matters within the mayoral remit, including policing, fire service and transport, with any questions not answered during the meeting receiving a written response¹⁴.

Medway Council are currently trialling questions to Cabinet Members at Cabinet Meetings as an addition to those at Full Council meetings, with an online form for residents to submit their queries and opportunities to attend meetings to ask their question in person¹⁵.

In a similar way to the mechanism employed by Directly Elected Mayors, the new unitary council Leaders could hold public Leader's question time sessions to enable the public to engage with their local authority.

Surrey Community Boards

In their recently published plan for local government reorganisation Surrey County Council plan to "build stronger and simpler arrangements for local community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment, using a wide range of inclusive approaches to leverage current good practice"¹⁶.

Their plan acknowledges that it is the towns and villages that are the "real places" that residents identify with and their proposed two unitary councils will work with partners and residents in collaboration so public services are more locally focused and responsive in delivering outcomes that matter most to communities.

To achieve this, they are developing a community engagement approach using towns and villages as the focal point of their approach and considering the role of Town and Parish councils to strengthen local engagement and decision making as well as the possible creation of local committees comprising of unitary councillors and community area partnerships and boards.

¹³ [Mayor's Question Time - Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#)

¹⁴ [Questions to the Mayor | London City Hall](#)

¹⁵ [Asking a question at a Full Council or Cabinet meeting | Asking a question at a Full Council or Cabinet meeting | Medway Council](#)

¹⁶ [Final Plan - Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation - Surrey County Council](#)

The creation of community boards is being tested in Autumn 2025 in several localities across the region, considering key considerations such as geographic coverage, decision-making parameters, officer support requirements and costs.

It is anticipated that their community boards would include representation from the following:

- Unitary Councillors
- Residents Associations
- Businesses and BIDs
- Education and FE's
- Housing Associations
- Surrey Residents
- VCSE
- Fire
- Police
- NHS Primary Care Networks
- Council Officers
- Town / Parish Councillors

The vision for Community boards is that they would be used to convene local partners to understand key issues drive collaboration and deliver local improvements in partnership with communities.

This concept builds on the idea of local boards that KCC previously implemented in Kent and could be a welcome opportunity to provide meaningful reach to local communities to engage and localise decision making and could be a useful roadmap on which to base our own community engagement model.

Somerset Local Community Networks

Somerset Council created 18 'Local Community Networks' to encourage community engagement and development and local partnership working with the aim to improve outcomes for residents and to provide a strong connection between local government, residents, businesses and partners¹⁷.

Core membership is made up of the following, with some variations determined locally by each network:

- The elected Somerset Council Councillors representing the electoral divisions covered by the Local Community Networks
- An elected representative from each City, Town or Parish Council within the area covered by the Local Community Networks
- Representatives from the following groups or organisations:
 - Local Neighbourhood policing team
 - Somerset National Health Service
 - Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service
 - Education
 - Representatives from Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise Organisations
 - Representatives from Businesses or Trade Groups

¹⁷ [Local Community Network questions and answers](#)

It was proposed that the networks will meet six to eight times each year, starting in Summer 2023. Approaching Somerset council about their success with this model could be helpful when designing our own approach to community engagement in Kent.

Funding Considerations

A 'community board' model will require funding in order to sufficiently meet the needs of community engagement, both in regard to staffing to administer the process and ensure equity of service across the entire Kent geography as well as to potentially fund projects in locations identified by the boards.

In the Somerset model it is reported that Local Community Networks will be able to access funding, both local and national, in order to address priorities for their area and will be able to influence the budgets and policies of the new council. Further information will need to be sought to understand how this works in practice.

In the previous model used in Kent for Local Boards, KCC's Cabinet and Cabinet Members could consult on strategic issues affecting a Local Board's area and each county councillor could recommend local projects for financial support. At the time, up to a total of £10,000 a year per county councillor. Each Local Board also considered bids for larger local projects (up to £20,000) which were funded from a separate rate fund of £500,000 for Kent as a whole.

KCC's former Local Board model employed 'Community Liaison Managers' (CLMs) to work with each of the county's 12 boards. Unitary authorities could choose to resource a liaison/manager equivalent role to work with each Board, similar to KCC's previous local board model. Their role could be to liaise across the boards in a singular unitary as well as work in collaboration with other CLMs in other unitary authorities in order to share best practice and opportunities for partnership working.

It is possible that Town / Parish councils could be used as the 'anchor organisations' for a community board structure, using funds raised through their precept to support the work of the board. However, it is worth noting that parish councillors are unpaid volunteers and there may be capacity constraints that could hinder their involvement. Further conversations will need to take place with KALC in order to understand how they can best engage with a localised engagement model, especially in areas without a Town/Parish council.

There may also be options for funding from strategic partners if their organisations are embedded into the community board model based on their current funding activity of the VCSE and community work:

- The Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) gives considerable funding¹⁸ to the VCSE in Kent in support of victim-based services through the Home Office Domestic Abuse (DA) and Stalking Perpetrator Interventions Grant and Victim Services Grant funding. There may be a willingness to fund partnership working across a community board model if it were seen to be in support of their organisational objectives.
- NHS Kent and Medway's work with the VCSE is supported by a [memorandum of understanding](#) between the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board and the VCSE, setting out how these partners will engage and collaborate to embed the VCSE sector in system level governance and decision making arrangements across the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System (ICS).

¹⁸ [Victim Services Funding OLD](#)

- Due, in part, to this commitment to the VCSE, NHS Kent and Medway has supported community-based work in partnership with KCC via the Crowdfund Kent programme¹⁹. The programme, designed to give local organisations and groups the opportunity to take forward projects and ideas to improve their local area could also be used a source of funding for community boards, with members of the public ‘pledging’ to projects taking place in their local area as well as continuing to provide an opportunity for strategic partners to work in collaboration with one another to fund community-led programmes.

A further consideration for the allocation of funding, that improves the sense of localised investment and engagement, could be in the form of ‘participatory budgeting’. This is a funding model in which citizens are involved in the process of deciding how public money is spent. In the UK, this is most often seen in the form of small scale community grant allocations and can improve local involvement through increased volunteering and the formation of new groups, increasing confidence in local service providers, and increasing control for residents over the allocation of resources²⁰.

In a 2011 National Evaluation of Participatory Budgeting in England²¹, considering six different areas of the UK, results showed that participatory budgeting could change mainstream services, attracting additional funds into deprived areas from other funders, leading to different types of projects receiving funding than might otherwise been the case. It also enhanced the ability of providers to address local service needs amongst hard to reach groups and served to improve residents’ and organisations’ self confidence in tackling neighbourhood issues and working with public sector organisations.

Kent County Council has used this concept of participatory budgeting through the Crowdfund Kent programme, with VCSE organisations and community groups in Kent creating projects that are most needed in their local communities and receiving not only funding support from public sector organisations but also from members of the public.

Unitaries could choose to utilise this form of resident participation in their engagement forums, where a specific sum is allocated to community boards (or their equivalent) and the public can decide how to spend this money in their local area, ensuring a localised approach to community funding.

¹⁹ [CrowdFund Kent - Home](#)

²⁰ [Participatory Budgeting | Local Government Association](#)

²¹ [National Evaluation of Participatory Budgeting in England](#)

Specific Considerations for 2 Unitary Option

Authorities which cover larger geographic areas, and larger and more diverse populations would likely face greater challenges in engaging with residents and communities at the local level. However, robust formal and informal engagement mechanisms could mitigate the removal of the district layer of community engagement while providing a streamlined approach that could reduce duplication and dilution that can be experienced in the current two tier system.

In respect to community engagement and the value of retaining current well established relationships such as those with the VCSE, strategic partners and Town / Parish Councils, this work has identified that regardless of the model chosen, a new method of more localised engagement and a continuation of pre-existing partnership arrangements, would be most beneficial to the residents of Kent.

It would be essential, especially in models that have higher numbers of unitary authorities, that there is a consistency of approach to community engagement to avoid unequal community participation and potential disparities.

Community Engagement

- The 2UA option could offer slightly improved local representation than a 1UA model due to the smaller geographic area covered, however the areas of 'East' and 'West' contain diverse populations with differing local identities across coastal, rural and urban areas which would require a tailored approach.
- Gravesham and Medway have no Town councils while Dartford only has one, and the majority of the population across these areas live in an unparished area. This means a model that anchors engagement around Town/Parish councils would be inaccessible to the majority of those populations and therefore would struggle to be representative of local identities and needs.

Specific Considerations for 3 Unitary Option

Due to the specific combination of districts within this model, with shared local identities and the coterminosity with other strategic partners, this model would be optimal when considering wider engagement with the community, and most notably, with strategic partners.

Community Engagement

- The 3UA model is roughly coterminous with how other organisations and partnerships organise themselves including Kent Police, HCPs and economic partnerships:
 - The boundaries of Kent Police divisions most closely aligns with this option, however there may be slight variations across boundaries that would need further mapping and consideration:
 - North Division– Medway, Swale, Dartford, Gravesham.
 - West Division – Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone.
 - East Division – Ashford, Dover, Canterbury, Folkestone, Thanet, Canterbury
 - It is likely that if a move to devolution were to run concurrently or follow local government reorganisation in Kent, that powers for the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC) would be subsumed by the new Strategic Authority/Mayoral Combined Authority and therefore this would align with the three unitary model, providing greater opportunity for collaboration across shared spaces and local identities.
 - The current structure of engagement with the VCSE is via the VCSE NHS representatives group and through the alliances, aligned to one of the four Health and Care Partnerships. The Health

and care partnerships are not contiguous with district boundaries, however the current HCP map most closely aligns with option 1 (3UA); albeit with Faversham split from the rest of Swale, and Swanley and North Sevenoaks paired with Dartford and Gravesham.

- On the basis of the points above, if KCC were to want to align the new unitaries with our strategic partners, this option would be optimal and would implement a more coterminous administrative landscape in which for strategic partners to collaborate in partnership.
- Smaller governance structures in the 3UA model may allow authorities to address community need at a more localised level and allow for better adaptation and responsiveness to community feedback.

Specific Considerations for 4 Unitary Option

It is likely that a 4UA Option would be optimal for maintaining local connection and responsiveness, empowering communities and ensuring their voices are heard.

Community Engagement

- A 4UA model, in which the proposed unitary authorities cover smaller areas and populations, would be ‘more local’, and should therefore be more reflective of local identities and more conducive to place making and identity building. Smaller, more localised teams could work towards effective communication between residents and local representatives.
- The workstream considered opportunities and challenges for local engagement to exist on a spectrum. An authority representing a smaller area and population would be closer to the residents and communities and would have fewer relationships to manage. In this context (capacity and resource permitting) it is likely that they would be more capable of developing flexible and locally suitable models of engagement.
 - The 4UA model options would therefore be most able to develop and maintain engagement models that were flexible and suitable for local residents, communities and the VCSE.

Specific Considerations for 1 Unitary Option (benchmark)

Community Engagement

- A single unitary would cover the whole county area – encompassing urban, rural and coastal areas, areas of deprivation and affluence, and differences in diversity. A blanket approach to engagement would be unlikely to be effective and it would be very challenging for such an authority to develop and maintain flexible and suitable engagement models for all areas.
- However, robust formal and informal engagement mechanisms could mitigate the removal of the district layer of community engagement, while providing a streamlined approach that could reduce duplication and dilution that can be experienced in the current two tier system.
- This model might require consideration of new or enhanced mechanisms to facilitate more localised democracy and decision-making to prevent the Unitary from being too remote – this would require significant resource.
- VCSE organisations will engage with their respective LA for funding/commissioning – larger and infrastructure organisations will be more comfortable engaging with fewer UAs, while small and micro VCSE will also want to engage at a much more local level, and will need to be factored into any local community board arrangements.

Appendix F - Parish and unparished boundary maps

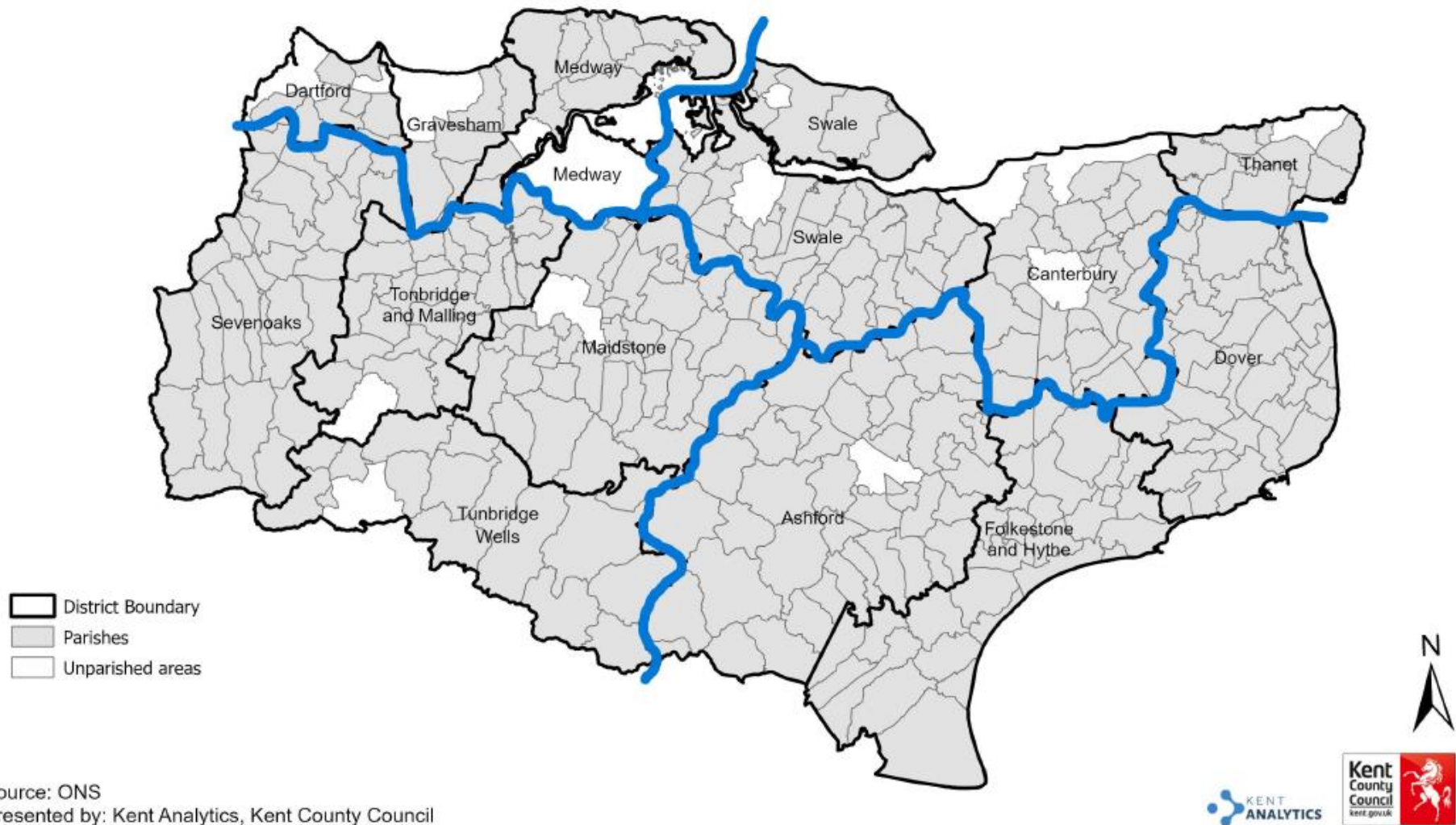
Parish & Non-civil parish boundaries in Kent & Medway 2024

Opt 1 3UA



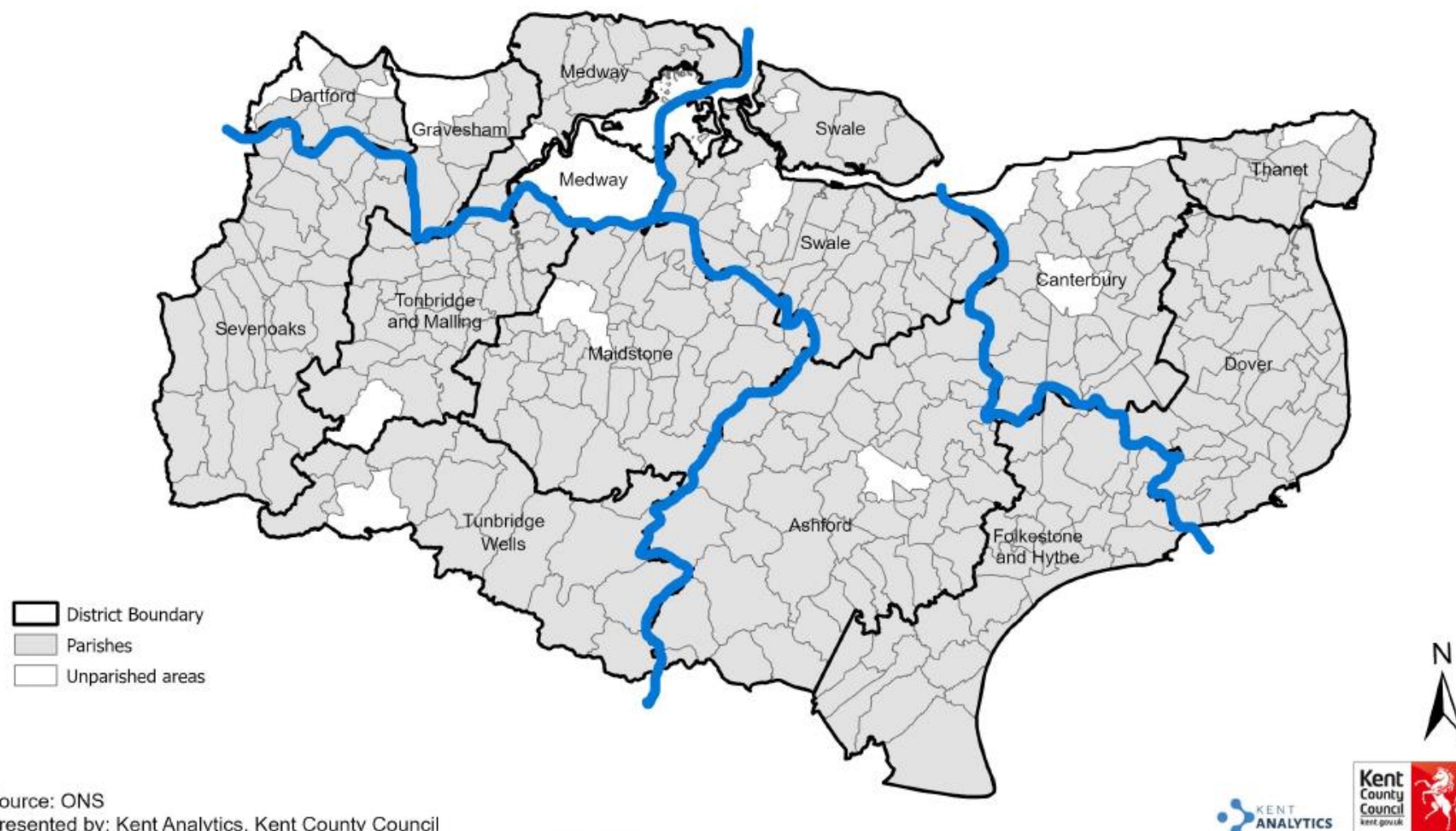
Parish & Non-civil parish boundaries in Kent & Medway 2024

Opt 2 4UA



Parish & Non-civil parish boundaries in Kent & Medway 2024

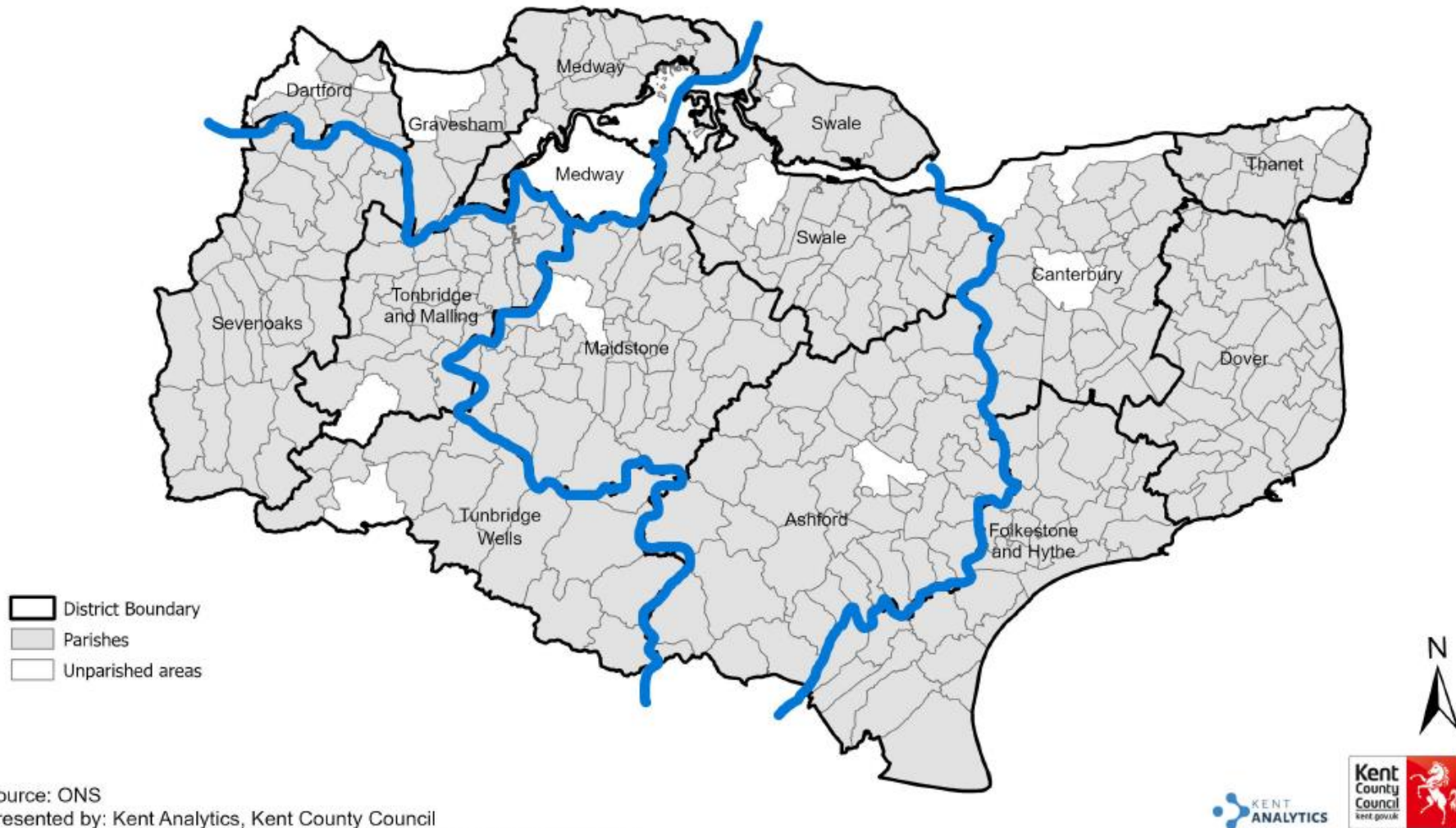
Opt 3 4UA



Source: ONS
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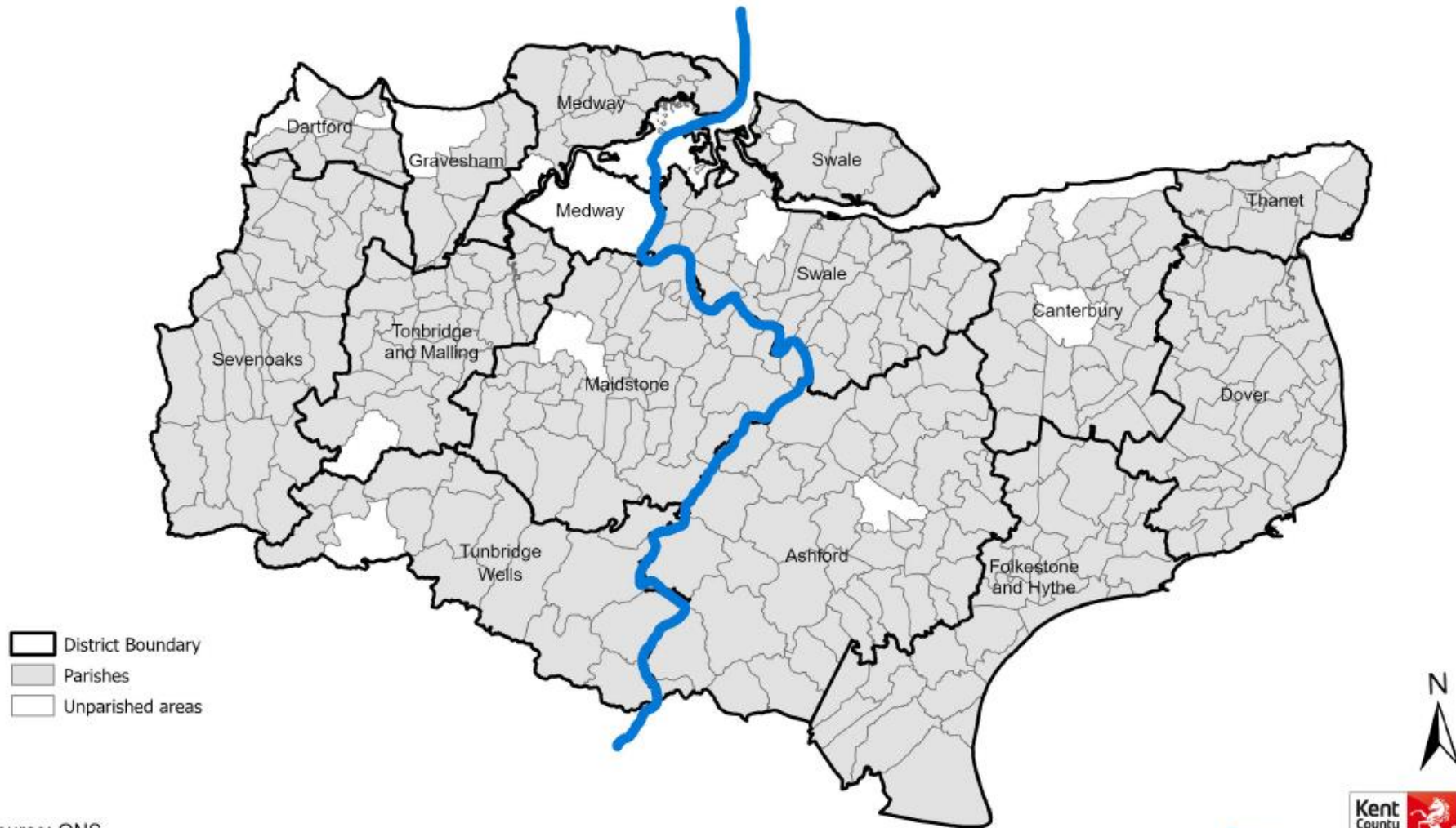
Parish & Non-civil parish boundaries in Kent & Medway 2024

Opt 4 4UA



Parish & Non-civil parish boundaries in Kent & Medway 2024

Opt 5 2UA



Source: ONS
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Parish & Non-civil parish boundaries in Kent & Medway 2024

Opt 6 1UA

