

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 3 November 2025.

PRESENT: Mr M Harrison, Mr A Brady, Mr M Brown, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr M Ellis, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Mr M A J Hood, Mr H Rayner, Mr M J Sole (Substitute for Mr A J Hook), and Mrs P Williams.

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms L Kemkaran and Mr S Jeffery.

OFFICERS: Amanda Beer (Chief Executive), Jenny Dixon-Sherreard (Strategy Manager), Dave Shipton (Head of Financial Strategy), Paul Royel (Director of Human Resources & Organisation Development), Matt Wagner (Chief Analyst), Ben Watts (Deputy Chief Executive), David Whittle (Director for Strategy Policy Relationships & Corporate Assurance), Tim Woolmer (Head of Strategic Partnerships), and James Clapson (Democratic Services Officer).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

13. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Hood who was substituted by Mr Sole.

14. Declarations of Interest
(Item 2)

There was a general declaration of interest noted from all Committee Members who were also District, City or Brough Councillors, namely; Mr Brown, Mr Sole, Mr Ellis, Mr Hood and Mr Brady.

15. Minutes of the meeting held on 30.09.2025
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

16. Interim report on KCC's public survey on LGR
(Item 4)

1. Mr Wagner presented the report, during which he made the following key points:
 - a. The results of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Residents Survey would be shared with the other 13 Kent and Medway Authorities.
 - b. The final results aligned with the findings of the partial results that were before the Committee.
 - c. The executive summary provided an overview of the findings that were grouped into the following four headings:
 - Options on LGR and council size,
 - Belonging and connections,
 - What residents want,
 - Views on cost implications.
2. The following comments were made by the Committee during consideration of the item:
 - a. The survey could have been an opportunity to assess public appetite for devolution in Kent.
 - b. The inter-district connections matrix indicated that option 1a would draw some communities don't feel a strong connection to each other.
 - c. It was a shame that more young people had not engaged with the survey as they would be the ones most affected by LGR in the long term.
3. The administration provided the following responses to questions raised:
 - a. The Kent Leaders had commissioned a survey, however KCC conducted its own survey to gather responses about finances and council tax.
 - b. Only 32% of respondents disagreed that minimising council tax increases should be the most important consideration.
4. The Officers provided the following responses to questions raised:
 - a. The survey did not include questions relating to devolution because there was not a timetable or plans for devolution in Kent at this time. The intention was for the survey to focus specifically on LGR.
 - b. Option 1a would not be compliant with the Government's devolution policy position which required multiple authorities to come together. The Council would need to seek devolution powers through a different means.
 - c. The sample size generated a margin of error of around 3 percent.
 - d. The number of respondents compared well to other KCC surveys.
5. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee note the views expressed by the respondents of the survey, and that they will be included in KCC's final business case to Government.

17. KCC's draft Strategic Business Case for LGR
(Item 5)

1. Mr Whittle presented the report, during which he made the following key points:
 - a. Thanks were offered to everyone involved in preparing the business case in such a short time scale.
 - b. The Secretary of State indicated that all proposals should have a shared evidence base to allow for easier comparison between the options. This has been achieved in Kent and Medway but has not always been achieved elsewhere in the Country.
 - c. Kent County Council (KCC) decided to develop its business case internally because the Council wished to approach the task from a different angle to the other 13 authorities.

- d. The business case was not designed to be an implementation plan or act as an operating model for a new council. It was intended to allow the proposal to be compared against the other proposals.
 - e. The Government would ultimately decide how LGR would take place within Kent.
 2. The Chair permitted Mr Jeffery to address the Committee about the item. During his address he wished for more information on why an option was being proposed that did not meet the Government's requirements for devolution.
 3. The following comments were made by the Committee during consideration of the item:
 - a. The proposal to have a single unitary authority was not compatible with the current requirements for devolution.
 - b. The current KCC model has seen levels of debt increase, it seems that a single unitary authority might continue along this path of increasing costs. A different approach was needed.
 - c. Area assemblies were not legally constituted and could be disbanded by the unitary authority. Decision making ultimately remained with the unitary authority.
 - d. 118 Councillors may not be sufficient to adequately represent residents.
 - e. The workload would be significant for the Councillors as it would include both Country and District Council matters. The £23,000 allowance would be insufficient to allow Councillors to work full time on the role. Councillors were more likely to be older and retired or semi-retired which would make them less representative of their constituents.
 - f. It would be more difficult for independent candidates to successfully stand due to the logistics of canvassing a large area.
 - g. The proposal put forward showed that there would be cost savings in the future.
 - h. It was possible that the Fair funding Review 2.0 could be less generous for rural areas, this could result in a less of funding for Kent.
 - i. The risks and costs of disaggregation of services increases as the number of unitary authorities increases.
 - j. Multiple small unitary authorities were unlike to achieve service cost savings if they could not already be achieved by KCC at a county scale.
 - k. The proposal would create a democratic deficit with less people making decisions for more people.
 - l. There was no indication of how enhanced community engagement would take place.
 4. The administration provided the following responses to question raised:
 - a. Although the proposal did not meet the Government's current requirements for devolution, the area assemblies would help to facilitate a local connection with communities.
 - b. A single unitary authority was felt to be an appropriate body that would have the capacity to accept devolved powers and resources if they were passed down from the Government.
 - c. The business case showed that the single unitary authority proposal combined strategic capability through its size and local representation through the area assemblies. It offered value for money, met the Government's criteria for LGR, reflected the uniqueness of Kent, and had significantly less disaggregation complications than any other proposal.
 - d. There could be some efficiencies generated from having multiple departments working together under one authority, however, there was already very close partnership working. These efficiencies were difficult to quantify at this stage because the joint working policies and strategies of the new authority were not in place.

5. The Officers provided the following responses to questions raised:
 - a. The figures included in the report did not make any assumptions about the findings of the Fair Funding Review 2.0. Once the information was available for the existing authorities, the models could then be applied to the different proposals.
 - b. The ability of the authorities to service their debt was more important than the amount of debt each held. The costs of the LGR transition and the servicing of existing debts would need to be met through existing budgets and reserves. No additional money was expected from the Government to fund transition costs.
 - c. The Government's devolution policy was clear, however, there was no timetable for further rounds of devolution for two-tier areas.
 - d. No modelling had been undertaken to establish exactly how many Councillors would be needed for any of the proposals.
 - e. There would be a need for any new unitary authority to harmonise council tax charges within eight years.
 - f. There were currently 658 councillors across Kent and Medway; combined, they received around £5.1million in basic allowances each year. The single unitary authority proposal used an indicative basic allowance rate for councillors of £23,000, totalling around £2.7million per year, however it would be for the new authority to agree and set the remuneration rates for its Councillors.
 - g. The business case acknowledged that the Councillors would have a larger role. There would be a need for enhanced support arrangements to help manage workloads, such as support staff and the usage of technology to maximise efficiency.
 - h. The indicated cost savings were felt to be reasonable and achievable. The implementation plan would provide more details around the costings and savings that could be expected.
 - i. Some shared service arrangements could be put in place across multiple unitary authorities which may help to reduce cost and disruption if the devolution process was initiated. This would be a decision for any new authority to make.
 - j. Time scales remained tight and work would continue to prepare for the next steps with the 13 partner authorities, without prejudging the Government's decision.

6. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee note proposed decision to approve and submit KCC's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway

18. Update on the Kent and Medway joint process for LGR business case development
(Item 6)

1. Mr Woolmer presented the report and advised that after the submission, the Kent Leaders would continue to work together to prepare for the Government's decision and the actions that would need to be taken afterwards.
2. The following comments were made by the Committee during consideration of the item:
 - a. The proposal of a single unitary model did not seem to align with the intentions of LGR.
 - b. To submit a proposal that did not have support from any of the other 13 authorities would be a unilateral action that could not be described as collaborative working.

3. The administration provided the following responses to questions raised:
 - a. The administration did not feel that LGR was necessarily required for Kent, however Option 1a was the best option for the people and business in Kent.
 - b. A number of the Authorities would also be submitting the proposal that they felt was the best for their residents. None of the options had universal support from all 14 Kent and Medway Authorities.
 - c. Some of KCC's partners felt that a single unitary would be best for the area.
4. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee note the continued collaborative working between all 14 Councils in Kent and Medway, the progress made on the business case development and the commitment to continue working closely together up to 28 November 2025 submission date and beyond

19. Work Programme
(Item 7)

1. RESOLVED to note the work programme.