

From: Linden Kemkaran, Leader
Amanda Beer, Chief Executive

To: **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee – 23 March 2026**

Subject: Update on Kent and Medway LGR implementation preparation

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

This paper provides an update on the collaborative work between all 14 Local Authorities in Kent and Medway on Local Government Reorganisation, in the interim period between Business Case submission in November 2025 and Ministerial decision in summer 2026, in preparation for the significant work that will be required thereafter.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to:

- (1) **Note** the continued collaborative working between all 14 Councils in Kent and Medway, and the commitment to continue working closely together in anticipation of Ministerial decision expected by July 2026, and then beyond.
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1. Background

- 1.1 In February 2025 the then Minister for Local Government invited Councils in Kent and Medway to submit proposals for local government reorganisation (LGR). After submitting a joint interim proposal in March 2025, Leaders were given a deadline of 28 November 2025 to submit final business cases on reorganisation.
- 1.2 Unlike other areas of the country, all 14 Councils in Kent & Medway were able to work together throughout the process collaboratively and collectively, utilising a single Strategic Business Partner, options appraisal, evidence base, financial analysis, communications, and programme governance, ensuring the work was as efficient and as joined up as possible, as directed by HM Government.
- 1.3 Leaders in Kent and Medway ultimately submitted 5 business cases on 28 November 2025 as follows:

Business Case 1A

A proposal for a single unitary council covering Kent and Medway to include three area assemblies covering the north, east and west of the county.

Business Case 1A is supported by Kent County Council.

Business Case 3A

A 3 unitary option consisting of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale in the North Kent; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Maidstone Tunbridge Wells in West Kent, Ashford, Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe in East Kent.

Business Case 3A is supported by Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Business Case 4B

A 4 unitary option consisting of Dartford, Gravesham and Medway in North Kent; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells in West Kent; Swale, Ashford and Folkestone & Hythe in Mid Kent and Canterbury, Thanet and Dover in East Kent.

Business Case 4B is supported by Dover District Council, Swale Borough Council and Thanet District Council

Business Case 4D

A 4 unitary option with boundary changes consisting of most of Medway, Gravesham, Dartford, Swale, and small parts of Tonbridge & Malling and Maidstone in North Kent. Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, eastern Swale and part of Folkestone & Hythe in East Kent, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks in West Kent, and Maidstone, Ashford, southern Swale, parts of Tonbridge & Malling and part of Folkestone & Hythe in Mid Kent.

Business Case 4D is supported by Medway Council, Ashford Borough Council and Canterbury City Council

Business Case 5A

A 5 unitary option with boundary changes consisting of Gravesham, Dartford and Swanley and parts of Medway in North Kent, Tonbridge & Malling, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and the remainder of Sevenoaks in West Kent, Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe and Dover in South Kent, Faversham, Canterbury and Thanet in East Kent, and the remainder of Medway and Swale in Mid Kent.

Business Case 5A is supported by Dartford Borough Council and Gravesham Borough Council.

- 1.4 A map of each of the business case geographies can be found in Appendix 1 and the full business cases can be viewed on the Kent Council Leaders [website](#).
- 1.5 A Ministerial decision is expected by 16 July 2026. Ministers will decide whether to implement any of the submitted proposals, and with or without modification, based on the criteria, consultation responses, and other relevant information, with final agreement made collectively across HM Government.

Until then, councils will continue the preparatory work outlined in this paper.

2. MHCLG Listening Meetings

- 2.1 In December 2025, civil servants notified Kent & Medway Local Authorities that they would be scheduling one hour 'listening meetings' on each business case submission in February and March 2026. These would bring together senior officers of the Councils supporting each business case with responsible Directors within MHCLG, and give the opportunity for Councils to set out the rationale for proposals, emphasise key points, ask any questions of MHCLG and allow civil servants to ask any clarification questions.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 On 5 February 2026, HM Government launched a statutory seven-week consultation on local government reorganisation in Kent and Medway.
- 3.2 Ahead of the launch, civil servants worked with councils to identify statutory consultees most affected by potential changes, including public sector partners, neighbouring authorities, and key stakeholders. The consultation is open to all interested parties including residents, town and parish councils, businesses, and the voluntary sector, with full details and response instructions available on the HM Government website.
- 3.3 Council communications teams have collaborated closely with Chief Executives and Leaders to ensure the consultation is widely publicised and accessible. A joint stakeholder letter, press release, and social media materials have been issued. While individual councils may support specific business cases, all communications adhere to the Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity and direct prospective respondees to view all proposals on the Kent Council Leaders website.
- 3.4 MHCLG is clear that views from residents and businesses are welcome and will be considered. To support access, councils have made promotional material and paper copies available in all libraries and council offices, with library computers enabling review of the detailed proposals for those who do not have their own devices.
- 3.5 The consultation closes at 23:59 on 26 March 2026. Initial indications are that there is a high level of engagement and a good response rate relative to other areas of the country. MHCLG is expected to publish a summary of responses in due course.

4. Enhanced Discovery Phase

- 4.1 In December 2025, MHCLG shared a list of 'preparatory activities' for councils to progress in the interim period between the submission of business cases in November 2025 and the anticipated Ministerial decision in July 2026. These activities draw on lessons from areas such as Cumbria that have recently undergone reorganisation.
- 4.2 In January 2026, Chief Executives reviewed, tailored, and prioritised the

suggested activities for Kent and Medway, identifying which actions should be undertaken by councils individually and which should be delivered collectively. This will be undertaken through the 'Enhanced Discovery Phase', overseeing 11 'Priority Activity Groups' operating until Ministerial decision in July 2026. The terminology distinguishes this preparatory work from the formal workstreams and programme structures required post-decision (see Appendix 2).

- 4.3 It is important to note that these activities are predominantly back office in nature and involve data and information consolidation that can be done now to ensure that once Ministerial decision is handed down, work on implementation can commence. This work explicitly does not involve thinking about transition, future service delivery or redesign now, and it does not pre-empt Ministerial decision. The aim is to consolidate the information needed to support effective joint discussions on transition after the decision. All work in this phase is required regardless of which business case is selected.
- 4.4 Each Priority Activity Group is led by a Chief Executive, supported by a deputy, a project officer, sector representative(s), a KCC representative, a Medway Council representative, and any additional officers as required. During this initial phase, the programme will use existing staff wherever possible and costs will be met by the authorities providing these staff.
- 4.5 The Project Officer coordinates and drives delivery of each group's priority activities, working closely with the Lead and Deputy Chief Executive. This role is undertaken alongside existing responsibilities and is limited to the duration of the Enhanced Discovery Phase. To strengthen cross-council collaboration, Project Officers are drawn from different authorities to the Lead and Deputy Chief Executives.
- 4.6 A Project Officer Coordination Group, chaired by the Strategic Partnerships Team, brings all Project Officers together to maintain oversight, track progress, escalate risks, and report to the LGR Programme Board. Throughout this phase, Chief Executives will review resourcing arrangements and begin developing a sustainable model for the post-decision programme office and implementation workstreams.
- 4.7 Informed by the 'what if' scenario planning referenced in the previous item, Chief Executives will collectively assess the likelihood and impact of potential scenarios and agree joint responses to ensure Kent and Medway are as well-prepared as possible should these eventualities arise.

5. Governance and Member Oversight

- 5.1 Kent Council Leaders and Kent Local Authority Chief Executives receive regular updates from lead officers. The Chief Executives act as the LGR Programme Board, with individual Chief Executives taking a hands-on role in overseeing Priority Activity Groups to ensure strong coordination and alignment. However, neither Kent Council Leaders nor Local Authority Chief Executives are decision-making bodies and hold no formal delegation. All parties are therefore clear that formal decision-making, member and officer oversight, and the role of individual executives and administrations remain the

responsibility of each sovereign council under its own constitution and delegations. This was demonstrated during the business case submission process, where decisions were taken through each council's individual democratic processes.

6. Finance

- 6.1 As a result of LGR, significant transition costs will be required to establish new councils and close down existing ones. Unlike other areas, Kent and Medway's five business cases are underpinned by shared financial analysis estimating the short and long-term costs and benefits of reorganisation. Current estimates indicate transitional implementation costs of between £99.4m and £139.1m, depending on which model is selected by the Minister. The business cases indicated these costs would be incurred over a five-year transitional period including shadow year where legacy authorities still exist and first 4 years of the new organisation of authorities.
- 6.2 Regardless of the final decision, disaggregation and aggregation costs will not be incurred until 2028/29, following vesting day and the transition to the new unitary council(s). These costs will be funded by the new authority(s) along with the remaining phasing of transitional costs.
- 6.3 Pre-vesting day costs for establishing the new unitary council(s) are estimated at £11.9m, spread partly in 2026-27 and the remainder in 2027-28. These costs will need to be funded by existing legacy councils, including Kent County Council. These pre-implementation costs include establishing a transitional team as well as provisions for systems consolidation, communications, workforce development, transition processes and contingency. The shared pre-implementation costs do not include any workforce exit costs incurred in the shadow year as these would be the responsibility of individual existing legacy authorities.
- 6.4 Chief Executives have agreed an apportionment methodology designed by Kent Finance Officers Group for these costs, and a Memorandum of Understanding will be signed by all councils to ensure that pre-implementation costs are managed consistently across all 14 councils with an equitable distribution between them. The apportionment methodology apportions pre-implementation costs up to vesting day and looks to average the cost apportionment on the basis of population and taxbase as follows:
- Between Unitary and Two-Tier area 50% by 2024-25 Taxbase and 50% Population Estimate
 - In the two-tier area between County and Districts by 80%: 20%
 - Between Districts and Boroughs 50% by 2024-25 Taxbase and 50% by Population Estimate
- 6.5 To date, HM Government has announced two rounds of funding to support preparatory work in 21 areas undergoing reorganisation. In 2025, Kent and Medway received £514,410, which was placed in the Kent County Council Strategic Partnerships Team budget for mutually agreed activity, including the joint procurement the Strategic Business Partner for business case development up to November 2025. Due to the collaborative and collective way

in which Kent and Medway Councils have worked together in a single programme and governance framework to date, £319,550 of this funding remains unspent to contribute to the next phase of the work.

- 6.6 On 16 February 2026, MHCLG announced an additional £63m nationally for the next phase of reorganisation. Based on previous allocations, Kent and Medway are expected to receive £4–4.5m towards pre-vesting day costs. It is proposed that this funding will again be held within the KCC Strategic Partnerships Team budget for jointly agreed work. As with the procurement of the Strategic Business Partner for business case development, Kent and Medway councils have requested that Kent County Council act as lead procurement authority for securing a Strategic Business Partner to support implementation from Ministerial decision to vesting day. Scoping work is underway to establish the required capacity and expertise.
- 6.7 A requirement for a Programme Director position to be recruited to before Ministerial decision and be in place up to vesting day is also agreed. It is envisaged this role will lead the implementation phase of the LGR workstreams. Responsibilities will include strategic management and delivery of the LGR process, the establishment of the shared Programme Management Office, oversight of the Strategic Business Partner, programme risk and compliance, and stakeholder management. This post will be funded through the MHCLG monies received and report to the Kent and Medway Local Authority Chief Executives.
- 6.8 As a result of this Government funding and the trajectory of the work required, it is not anticipated that additional resource will be required from Kent and Medway Council budgets for financial year 2026/27. However, if no further funding from HM Government is forthcoming in the interim, remaining pre-vesting day costs will need to be built into council budgets for 2027/28, in line with the agreed apportionment set out in the Memorandum of Understanding.
- 6.9 KCC's 2026-27 budget was built on the basis that impacts from LGR are likely to be minimal in that year; this is consistent with the financial analysis in this report. KCC's section 25 assurance statement identified that there is no provision within the medium-term financial plan for any set-up or transitional costs incurred by legacy authorities prior to establishment of shadow authorities or vesting of new authorities. This was based on the expectation that any cost would be met within existing budgets and where this is not possible, costs would be met from additional borrowing (including borrowing from long-term reserves). Any borrowing would be short-term and would have to be repaid from the savings arising for new authorities within the pay-back period.

7. Next steps and collaborative timetable

- 7.1 In anticipation of a Ministerial decision in July 2026, collaborative work continues apace to co-ordinate and oversee the Priority Activity Groups' work on the MHCLG preparatory activities, readiness for Ministerial decision including procurement of a Strategic Business Partner, and agreement of the Memorandum of Understanding. Background work continues on promotion of

the statutory consultation, ongoing co-ordination with all 14 councils and regular liaison with civil servants.

- 7.2 A graphic of the timetable setting out the alignment of the local and national timetable can be found in Appendix 2.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to:

Note the continued collaborative working between all 14 Councils in Kent and Medway, and the commitment to continue working closely together in anticipation of Ministerial decision expected by July 2026 and then beyond.

9. Relevant Director:

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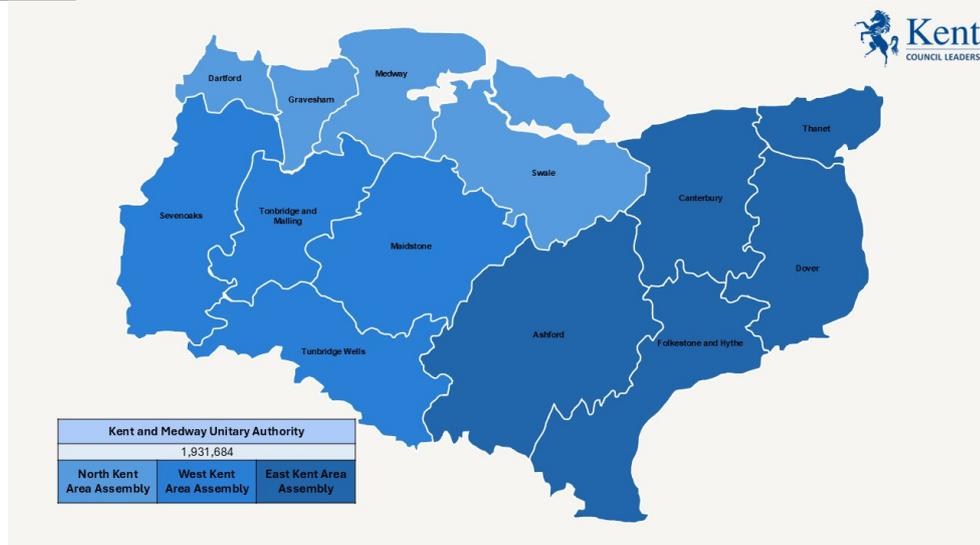
11. Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Geographies of business cases submitted

Appendix 2 – Illustrated local and national timetable to vesting day

Appendix 1 – Geographies of business cases submitted

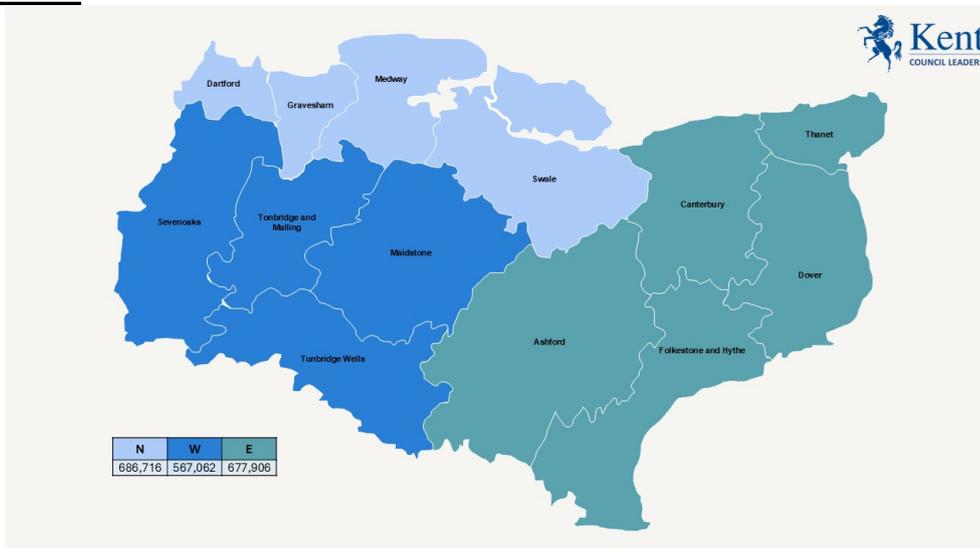
Option 1a



The proposal for a single unitary council covering Kent and Medway to include three area assemblies covering the north, east and west of the county has been supported by:

- Kent County Council

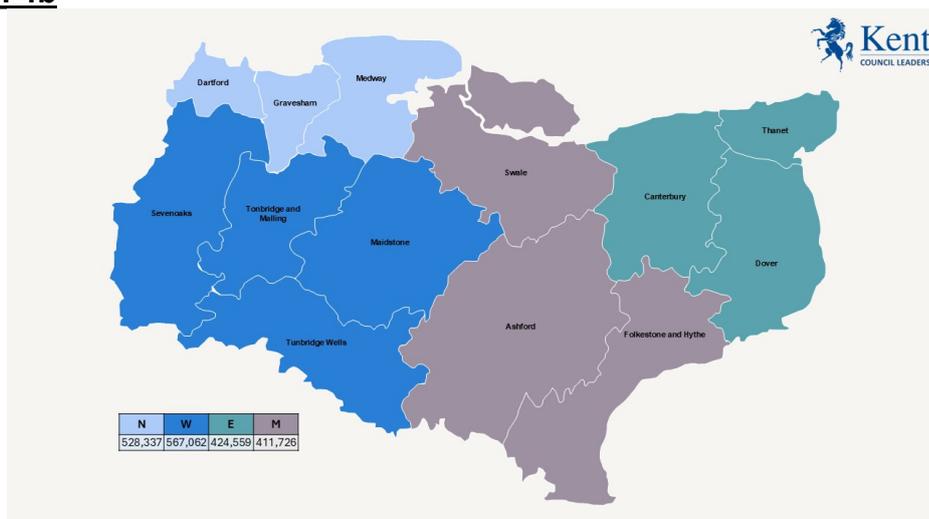
Option 3a



The three unitary option, consisting of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale in the north; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells in the west and Ashford, Canterbury, Thanet, Dover and Folkestone and Hythe in the east has been supported by:

- Folkestone & Hythe District Council
- Maidstone Borough Council
- Sevenoaks District Council
- Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

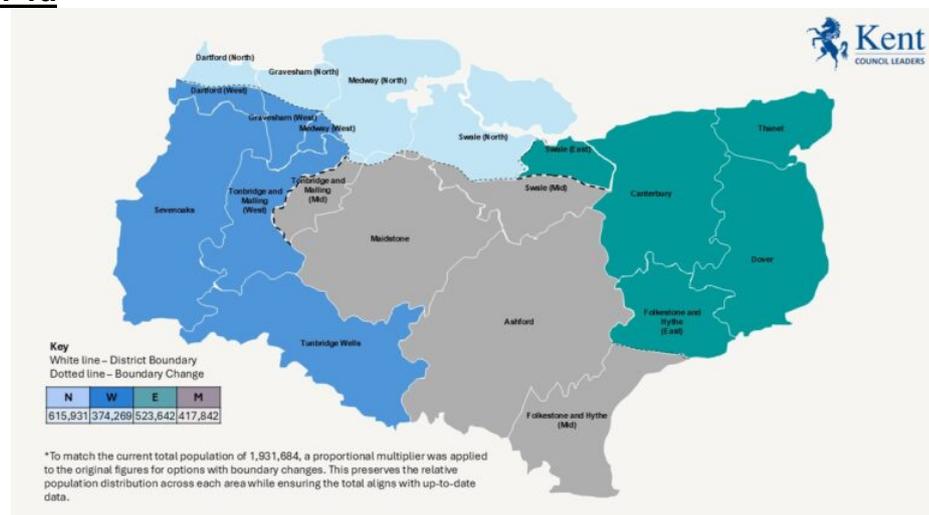
Option 4b



The four unitary council option which stuck to existing boundaries and consisted of Dartford, Gravesham and Medway in the north; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells in the west; Swale, Ashford and Folkestone and Hythe in the middle of Kent and Canterbury, Thanet and Dover in the east has been supported by:

- Dover District Council
- Swale Borough Council
- Thanet District Council

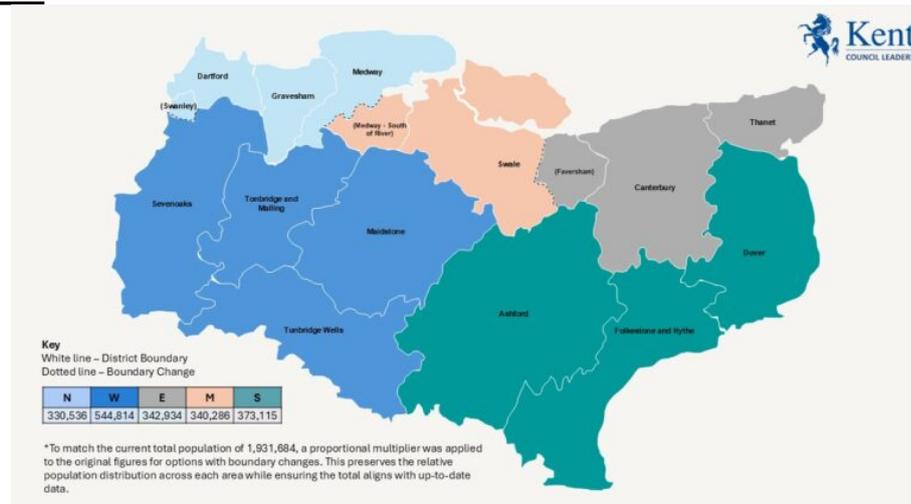
Option 4d



Option 4D would reorganise Kent and Medway into four new unitary councils. North Kent would bring together Medway, Gravesham, Dartford, most of Swale, and small parts of Tonbridge & Malling and Maidstone. East Kent would combine Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, eastern Swale and part of Folkestone & Hythe. West Kent would unite Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks. Mid Kent would cover Maidstone, Ashford, southern Swale, parts of Tonbridge & Malling and part of Folkestone & Hythe. It is supported by:

- Medway Council
- Ashford Borough Council
- Canterbury City Council

Option 5a



Option 5A proposes five unitary authorities for Kent. It would see a council for north west Kent that would take in the existing Gravesham and Dartford boroughs and Swanley which currently sits under Sevenoaks District Council. It would also extend eastwards, taking in areas currently under Medway Council up to the River Medway, and southwards to Snodland. Mid Kent would be formed of the rest of Medway and the rest of Swale. West Kent would combine Sevenoaks, excluding Swanley, Tonbridge & Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. East Kent would be made up of the Faversham part of Swale, Canterbury and Thanet. South Kent would combine Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe and Dover.

It has been supported by:

- Dartford Borough Council
- Gravesham Borough Council

Appendix 2 – Illustrated local and national timetable to vesting day

