



**Miatta Fahnbulleh MP**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Devolution,  
Faith and Communities

By Email

Linden Kemkaran  
Leader's Office  
Sessions House  
County Hall  
Maidstone  
Kent ME14 1XQ

Email: [linden.kemkaran@kent.gov.uk](mailto:linden.kemkaran@kent.gov.uk)

11 March 2026

Dear Minister,

Further to your letter of 12 February 2026, co-signed by Matthew Pennycook MP, I write regarding your request, with a submission deadline of 20 March 2026, for expressions of interest (EoI) in establishing Foundation Strategic Authorities (FSAs) in areas outside the Devolution Priority Programme.

I have given this issue considerable thought. Whilst I recognise there is appetite across all councils in Kent and Medway for greater devolved powers from Westminster and Whitehall, in current circumstances, this most recent request, is not one that KCC is able to support.

Until your ministerial statement of the 12 February 2026, the advice and position from MHCLG regarding devolution to Kent and Medway could not have been clearer. Devolution would not be on offer until sufficient progress had been made on local government reorganisation, and only the successor unitary council(s) could request, and then consent, to the creation of a new strategic authority.

That was, in essence, the position of MHCLG since Kent and Medway was not selected for inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) in January 2025.

It was on this basis that the new Reform administration in KCC developed its proposal for Option 1A - a single unitary council for Kent and Medway with three constituent 'area assemblies' - which is currently one of the five options for LGR in Kent and Medway that MHCLG is currently undertaking a consultation on.

Whilst the business case for Option 1A makes clear that the KCC Reform administration would welcome further devolution of certain powers to Kent and Medway, we are also explicit in our rejection of the assumption in government policy that this could only be achieved through a new additional Strategic Authority placing ever greater demands on the Kent council taxpayer.

Our position is that a single unitary council for Kent and Medway could operate at the scale necessary to be designated the strategic authority for the area, and would be able to receive and discharge devolved powers efficiently and effectively.

It is clear to me that any decision to submit an expression of interest for an FSA by KCC, either unilaterally or jointly with other councils, would critically undermine the business case for Option 1A.

I stand fully behind Option 1A as the best option for local government reorganisation in Kent and Medway. Doing anything to undermine it whilst the MHCLG public consultation is still ongoing would be a serious breach of faith with the businesses, residents and partners who have already submitted, in good faith, their views and opinions on all the options out to consultation.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this latest *volte face* in government policy - extending the FSA offer to non-DPP areas - represents a significant change of direction whilst the relevant consultation processes remain live. I would also respectfully ask that consideration be given to the considerable legal and procedural risks of issuing an EoI request in areas where LGR consultations are still ongoing, given the inherent link between reorganisation and devolution.

In short, it is my view that KCC cannot submit an EoI for an FSA until the Secretary of State has made the final decision on LGR options for Kent and Medway currently in consultation.

Whilst I have no doubt that this will disappoint my fellow council leaders who are eager to make progress on devolution, I want to be explicit that KCC wishes to remain a good partner to all councils in Kent and Medway.

Existing strategic relationships and joint working across all Kent and Medway councils has remained strong, even where we disagree on LGR options. To that end, whilst KCC is not able to sign an EoI now, KCC officers will still support joint working and planning arrangements across LGR and devolution.

Our intention is not to fetter the ambition of other councils, but to protect our own position in regard to Option 1A.

The most obvious way to move beyond this impasse is for the Government to make the decision on LGR sooner rather than later. The current timetable for non-DPP areas of a final decision by mid-July 2026 leaves all councils, our staff, our service users and our residents in an unnecessary limbo that can easily be avoided. I call on you to bring that decision significantly forward and to do so without delay.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linden Kemkaran". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

Linden Kemkaran  
**Leader of Kent County Council**