

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION CABINET COMMITTEE

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

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

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

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

20. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 1)

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

Mr Hespe was present on behalf of the Leader.

21. Declarations of Interest
(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

25. KCC Service Preparation *(Item 6)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29. Work Programme *(Item 10)*

RESOLVED to note the work programme.