

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council

DECISION NUMBER:

26/00028

Executive Decision – Key**26/00028 – Procurement of a Strategic Partner for Local Government
Reorganisation in Kent and Medway****Decision:**

As Leader of the Council, I agree to:

Approve the procurement of a Strategic Partner, with Kent County Council acting as the lead commissioning authority on behalf of the Kent and Medway councils, for securing of relevant specialist advice and resource to facilitate and assist with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) activity.

Approve that Kent County Council will hold any MHCLG Local Government Reorganisation funding received on behalf of Kent councils, to be used solely for LGR transition and implementation planning activity.

Delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Local Government Reorganisation, and the Section 151 Officer to accept and deploy relevant MHCLG funding intended to support all Councils in Kent and Medway to prepare for and implement Local Government Reorganisation.

Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to, negotiating, finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision.

Reasons for decision:

To support councils in Kent and Medway transition to new Unitary Council(s), following the Ministerial decision July 2026, Kent and Medway councils have requested that Kent County Council act as lead procurement authority for securing a strategic partner to support implementation from the Ministerial decision to vesting day April 2028. For the Kent LGR Programme, the transition period are Phases:

- Phase 3: Foundational (Decision, July 2026 to Shadow Elections, May 2027)

- Phase 4: Readiness (Shadow Elections, May 2027 to Vesting Day, April 2028)

This decision is required now to ensure that appropriate support is in place as soon as the government decision is made, enabling councils to progress implementation at pace and in a coordinated way.

Financial implications:

The total value of the Strategic Partner contract is not yet confirmed. While consultancy and strategic partner services have been procured previously, the scale and volume of work required for a reorganisation of this size, diversity and complexity has not been delivered for a council arrangement of this kind. It is anticipated that the total cost will exceed £1 million and therefore will meet the Key Decision criterion.

To support transition to new Unitary Council(s), Kent and Medway councils are procuring a Strategic Partner to provide implementation support from the Government's decision (expected July 2026) through to vesting day for the new Unitary Council(s) (April 2028).

Kent and Medway Chief Executives have agreed an apportionment methodology, designed by the Kent Finance Officers Group, for sharing the costs of transition to establish new councils. This has been formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by all 14 councils, supported by letters of assurance and comfort from all Chief Executives.

The methodology apportions pre implementation costs up to vesting day and averages cost shares using population and taxbase, as set out below:

- 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

On 16 February 2026, MHCLG announced an additional £63 million nationally to support the next phase of reorganisation. On 25 March 2026, as part of decisions in DPP areas, MHCLG confirmed that this funding would be allocated to areas on a basis of £900,000 per new unitary authority. Depending on the number of new unitaries the Minister establishes in the summer, Kent and Medway are therefore expected to receive between £900,000 and £4.5 million.

MHCLG advised that this funding would be paid to the council whose Chief Executive is designated as the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the relevant new unitary footprint. However, MHCLG has indicated that this arrangement is negotiable, and Kent and Medway councils have made clear their preference for the funding to be received jointly into a shared programme funding pot hosted by KCC.

If the MHCLG funding is still paid directly to individual councils, the Memorandum of Understanding agreed by all Kent and Medway authorities still requires that such

funding is transferred to KCC, which will continue to hold and manage the funding on behalf of the 14 Councils.

It is therefore proposed that MHCLG funding allocated to Kent and Medway will be used to meet the costs associated with procuring and engaging the Strategic Partner and will require no spend from the Councils budgets for 2026-27. This is further supported by paying the Strategic Partner in instalments during the length of the contract, subject to the Strategic Partner achieving agreed contractual milestones and Key Performance Indicators.

Legal implications:

The proposed decision is only related to procurement, therefore there are no legal implications.

Relevant and the required legal advice will be sought as part of the procurement governance process, including of key documents, specification, evaluation criteria and the contract.

Equalities implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken for this decision. It is anticipated that the procurement of a Strategic Partner to support LGR will not result in any negative impact on people with protected characteristics. As the proposed decision relates solely to the commissioning of specialist support and does not directly change policies or service delivery arrangements. Equality considerations will continue to be embedded throughout LGR as the programme progresses.

Data Protection implications:

There are no data protection implications for Kent County Council or other local authorities in Kent and Medway associated with the procurement of strategic partner for LGR. Any DPIAs will be developed to support the implementation of LGR if required at any point during the programme.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The proposed decision will be considered at the Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation Cabinet Committee on 14th May 2026.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Deliver implementation using internal council capacity only. This option was discounted as councils do not have sufficient capacity or specialist expertise available to deliver LGR implementation at the required pace and scale without creating unacceptable risk to core service delivery. The complexity of reorganisation in Kent and Medway, including its size and the number of councils involved, exceeds what could reasonably be managed through existing resources alone.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

.....

Signed

.....

Date