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 Thursday, 14 May 2026.

PRESENT: Ms S Emberson (Vice-Chair), Mr O Bradshaw, Mr A Brady, Mr M Brown, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr M Ellis, Mr J Eustace, Mrs M Fothergill, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mrs M Lawes, Mr T Mole, Mr H Rayner, Mr S Dixon and Mr D Sian.

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms L Kemkaran (Leader of the Council) and 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), Tim Woolmer (Head of Strategic Partnerships), Edward Thomas (Strategy Manager) and James Clapson (Democratic Services Officer).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

30. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mrs Williams who was substituted by Mr Sian, and Mr Harrison who was substituted by Mr Dixon.

31. Declarations of Interest
(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

32. Minutes of the meeting held on 23.3.2026
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2026 be approved and signed as a correct record.

33. LGR update (national update including progress in DPP areas)
(Item 4)

1. The Leader introduced the item, which provided an update on national developments relating to Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) since the previous meeting of the Committee. The report covered some of the Government decisions from the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) areas, learning from these decisions, and the implications for Kent and Medway.

2. Mr Thomas presented the report and covered the following points:
   a. Since the last Committee meeting, ministerial decisions had been announced for four DPP areas: Essex, Hampshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. The report included a summary table setting out the outcomes of these decisions and other relevant contextual information.
   b. The Secretary of State had advised that the DPP decisions did not set precedents for non-priority areas, however several consistent themes had emerged including; a flexible application of the guidance regarding number of people residing within each new unitary, and ability to incorporate modifications to the existing electoral boundaries that was previously indicated undesirable.
   c. The Government's assessment criteria appeared to include considerations relating to economic growth, housing delivery and local identity. However, detailed information on how these criteria were being weighted was currently unavailable.
   d. The Government had confirmed a minimum level of funding for each new unitary authority, and the Kent and Medway councils had agreed local arrangements for administering this funding collectively.
   e. The Structural Change Orders (SCOs) for DPP areas were expected to be issued after the Government's summer recess, this represented a delay from previous timescales but the intended end date for the process remained unchanged.
   f. Joint committees would comprise of equal representation from any existing unitary councils, and from the county and district councils.
   g. Councils were expected to use existing powers to establish community engagement structures such as area or neighbourhood committees, and Councils were required to engage with Town and Parish Councils.

3. The following points arose from Members' comments and questions:
   a. None of the options achieved a majority of support across the Kent and Medway Councils. Despite this, the Councils continued to work closely together to prepare for LGR. This preparation work took place without pre-determining the Government's decision and was needed to enable the Council's to act in line with the Government's implementation timeline.
   b. LGR was a government directed process, it would be irresponsible for the Council not to take steps to prepare. Preparatory activity was proportionate, phased and flexible, undertaken in accordance with normal governance processes and best value duties.
   c. The Council had provided feedback to the Government in support of Option 1a.
   d. Service delivery would continue as usual during the transition period, and councils were expected to act in the spirit of the anticipated statutory controls while maintaining operational stability.
   e. Members could be provided with a breakdown of which option had been chosen by Government for progression in areas where a decision had been made. This could include which political party led the council that had submitted the option.
   f. Further information regarding the constitution of joint committees would be brought before the Committee at a future date.

g. The Council's External Auditors, Grant Thornton, produced a report on the impact of LRG that could be shared with Members.

4. RESOLVED that the Committee note the update on Local Government Re-organisation.

34. Update on Service Complexity Assessments (KCC internal preparation for LGR)

(Item 5)

1. The Leader introduced the item, which provided an update on progress with the Service Complexity Assessments (SCAs) being undertaken to support the Council's internal preparation for LGR.

2. Ms Dixon-Sherreard presented the report and covered the following points:
   a. The SCA methodology had been designed and tested through pilot exercises. Phase one of the programme was formally launched at the end of April and there were now over 170 services actively participating.
   b. The purpose of the SCAs was to provide a comprehensive understanding of how services operated, identify operational and statutory complexities, and assess the potential risks associated with transition or disaggregation of services under different LGR scenarios.

3. The following points arose from Members' comments and questions:
   a. The uncertainty generated by LGR had implications for long term contracts, procurement arrangements, workforce recruitment and workforce retention. A report on workforce considerations was due to be considered by the Personnel Committee.
   b. The Council had a duty to ensure best value for the residents of Kent when tendering new contracts. Careful consideration was needed to ensure that contracts enabled the Council to carry out its current functions while also remaining fit for purpose following LGR. A report regarding contracts and procurement during the LGR process would be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.
   c. The SCAs were intentionally comprehensive and designed to avoid assumptions about where complexity or risk might arise.
   d. Some external consultancy support was necessary to support the scale and pace of the work needed to meet the Government's timeline. Consultants would work in conjunction with internal staff.
   e. The methodology had been shared with the other Kent and Medway Councils who have begun to undertake their own SCA's.
   f. The data collection phase would continue through May, followed by analysis in June. An initial set of findings were expected in July. This timetable was intended to ensure that the Council had robust evidence base ahead of the anticipated ministerial decision.

4. RESOLVED that the Committee note the progress and next steps in delivering the Service Complexity Assessment process.

35. 26/00028 Procurement of a Strategic Partner for Kent and Medway LGR Programme

(Item 6)

1. The Leader introduced the item, which set out proposals for the joint procurement of a strategic partner to support phases three and four of the Kent and Medway LGR programme. The strategic partner would provide programme management capacity and specialist expertise, to support the planning process and the transition of services to the new unitary council/s.

2. Mr Woolmer presented the report and covered the following points:
   a. All 14 Kent and Medway authorities had agreed that the scale and complexity of LGR meant that additional specialist capacity would be required. KCC had been asked to act as the lead procurement authority on behalf of the authorities.
   b. The strategic partner would not hold any decision making powers. Their role would be to provide advice, guidance, assurance and additional capacity to support the safe and lawful transition of services, while ensuring that these day-to-day functions continued to be delivered effectively.
   c. Funding had been announced by Government to support the next phase of LGR. The costs expected to arise in the 2027/28 financial year would be considered as part of budget setting process. They would be managed in accordance with the agreed cost-sharing arrangements that existed between the 14 authorities.

3. The following points arose from Members' comments and questions:
   a. The target was to have a strategic partner in place by the middle of May 2026.
   b. The majority of pre-investment day costs would occur in the 2027/28 financial year. It was estimated that around 8% of the overall transition cost would need to be borne by the existing councils.
   c. The exact cost of the contract was unknown at this stage but was expected to exceed £1million. It was bought before Members for consideration because it was a key decision.
   d. The proposed approach would help to ensure the Council's readiness, while retaining flexibility and avoiding over commitment. It would also avoid the need for multiple smaller procurements and reduce the risk of delays following a ministerial decision. The scale of support could be adjusted as the exact requirements became clearer.

4. RESOLVED that, the Committee endorse the proposed approach and support the recommendations to the Leader as set out in the proposed Record of Decision.

36. Work Programme

(Item 7)

RESOLVED to note the work programme.