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By email: EnglishDevolutionLGENquiries@communities.gov.uk

10 January 2025

Dear Jim,

Re: Kent and Medway request to be included in Devolution Priority Programme

Further to the publication of the English Devolution White Paper on the 16 December and your letter of the same date, we write in response to your invite for requests to join the Devolution Priority Programme. As the Leaders of Kent County Council and Medway Council, the two upper tier local authorities for Kent and Medway, we formally ask to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme.

We are grateful for the webinars with your officials following publication of the White Paper, and the subsequent follow up meeting with Baroness Taylor on the 20th December which was very helpful. You will already be aware that we have undertaken significant engagement with District and Borough Council Leaders given the time available over the Christmas and New Year period, as well as briefing Kent & Medway MPs and other key stakeholders.

We are confident that Kent and Medway can meet the timetable set out by the Government for local areas on the Devolution Priority Programme to create the Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) and hold the first Mayoral election in May 2026.

Whilst there is some mixed feeling from District and Borough Council Leaders about the speed of moving forward with devolution on this timetable, and a desire to ensure that the period in which the structure of the new Strategic Authority (SA) will be a Mayoral County Combined Authority (MCCA) prior to the completion of local government reorganisation is minimised, there is also general acceptance of the clear direction and expectation on devolution that has been set out by the Government.

We are committed to there being parity of esteem across all councils in Kent and Medway as we progress with devolution, and will continue to work in a collaborative and constructive way to design an MCCA structure in a way that continues to support our collegiate approach.

We also acknowledge that in asking to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme, we are accepting a parallel process of local government reorganisation for Kent and Medway. Again, in discussions with the Leaders of District and Borough Councils in Kent, there is general understanding of the clear direction of travel and expectation set out by the Government.

However, there is greater range of views in regard to both the number of unitary councils that could be created, their exact geographies and the speed at which we should seek to implement new structures. These issues are being actively considered through the Kent Leaders Devolution Sub-Group and we are confident that through this collaborative work, a stronger consensus will emerge in the next few months.

It is already clear that there is a stronger leaning from many of the District and Brough Councils, as well as from our own two respective councils, that given the inherent challenge of restructuring 14 councils concurrently, and the wider pressures that KCC (and subsequently successor authorities) must bear given our location at the Gateway to Europe with associated border/asylum issues, getting reorganisation right in Kent, is the greatest priority. Those critical issues will sit alongside a clear desire to ensure recognition of historic place within the new unitary authorities.

On that basis, we will work collaboratively over the next few months to put together a realistic timetable for the implementation date for the new unitary councils in line with the timetable within the White Paper.

We recognise that the framework for devolution set out in the White Paper represents a once in a generation opportunity for Kent and Medway to radically reshape local government and local public service delivery for the benefit of our residents and businesses. We remain ambitious to seize that opportunity in a way that is pragmatic, deliverable and, above all, ensures continuity of the vital services our 1.9m residents rely on every day during a period of significant change.

We look forward to hearing from you and your officials in due course.

Yours sincerely



Roger Gough
Leader, Kent County Council



Vince Maple
Leader, Medway Council