# Special Council – Supplementary agenda No.1

**A special meeting of the Council will be held on:**

**Date:** 13 November 2025

**Time:** 7.00pm

**Venue:** St George's Centre, Pembroke, Chatham Maritime, Chatham ME4 4UH

## Items

**5 Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution - 4D Business Case** **(Pages 3 - 898)**

Please enclosed the business cases developed across Kent for Local Government Reorganisation:

Appendix 1: Option 1A, One unitary Business Case (pages 3 – 110)

Appendix 2: Option 3A, Three unitary Business Case (pages 111 – 298)

Appendix 3: Option 4B, Four unitary Business Case (pages 299 – 484)

Appendix 4: Option 4D, Four unitary Business Case (Modified) (pages 485 – 706)

Appendix 5: Option 5A, Five unitary Business Case (pages 707 – 897)

**For further information please contact Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services on Telephone: 01634 332509 or Email:**
**democratic.services@medway.gov.uk**

**Date: 5 November 2025**

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# Kent County Council's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway

***One Kent, One Council, Our Unique County***

**DRAFT for County Council, 6 November 2025**

DRAFT

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# 1. Foreword

*Placeholder – Foreword to be included in final Strategic Business Case*

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**Linden Kemkaran, Leader**
**Kent County Council**
**November 2025**

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# 2. Executive Summary

## Kent and Medway: A county of national significance

Kent and Medway is a county of scale, complexity, and consequence. As the UK's gateway to Europe, our geography is unique - bordering the capital and the continent, with the Port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel forming critical arteries for national trade and security. Our 1.9 million residents live across a diverse landscape of coastal towns, rural communities, and urban centres, with no single dominant city. This polycentric structure brings both opportunity and challenge.

Our economy is broad and resilient, generating £44 billion GVA annually, with strengths in logistics, life sciences, construction, and creative industries. Yet, we face stark disparities, particularly in East and North Kent, where deprivation, housing pressures, and health inequalities are most acute. These challenges are compounded by border-related pressures, including the arrival of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and pressure on local road networks. Kent and Medway bears the brunt, but these are national issues that impact the country's economy and resilience.

In the face of this complexity, Kent and Medway has a strong track record of partnership working. Our coterminous arrangements with key partners including Kent Police and NHS Kent and Medway, and many well-established pan-Kent and Medway partnerships, such as Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, provide a solid foundation for integrated public service delivery. These partnerships are built on trust, scale, and shared purpose and they exist at a Kent and Medway level because that is what works best here.

## KCC's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation

**This Strategic Business Case sets out Kent County Council's (KCC) proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Kent and Medway – a single unitary with three Area Assemblies, balancing scale and capacity with local responsiveness.** It has been developed through detailed internal analysis, independent financial modelling, and active participation in the joint Kent and Medway process. While KCC has developed this case independently, we remain committed to collaboration and transparency with our partner councils.

Our approach is rooted in a vision for better outcomes through financially sustainable, community-rooted, and digitally enabled public services. We support the design principles agreed across Kent and Medway - resident-centric, integrated, data-driven, financially resilient, and future-focused. However, our route to achieving these outcomes is distinct. For KCC, the overriding priority is the long-term financial resilience of local government in Kent and Medway. Our strategic outlook as the largest council in the area, responsible for 73% of all council spending and with statutory responsibilities to support some of the most vulnerable people in our communities means we cannot allow LGR to risk creating councils that will fail in their duties to Kent and Medway residents.

## A unique county needs a unique solution: the Kent Council

Kent and Medway's geography and position make it one of the most complex and strategically significant areas in the country. Its border location, combined with deep disparities in deprivation between East and West, creates uneven demand and financial pressures that require coordinated, county-wide responses. The peninsular geography limits market options and workforce mobility, reinforcing the need for scale, resilience, and strategic coherence in service delivery.

The current county-wide model enables Kent and Medway to manage these challenges effectively. It provides the critical mass needed to maximise economies of scale, maintain service capacity, and deliver consistent outcomes. This structure not only benefits local communities but also supports national interests - Kent and Medway are a reliable partner to Government in managing issues of national importance.

Disaggregating the county into multiple unitary authorities would severely compromise this strategic capacity. It would fragment services, risking 'postcode lotteries' for residents and deterioration of service quality, particularly in high-risk areas such as social care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Increased costs would come from duplicating senior roles and back-office costs and reduced purchasing power. This would be to the detriment of the entire county, but for some areas it is an existential threat.

On top of managing the majority of the county's highest and most costly needs for council services, a smaller unitary in East Kent would be quickly overwhelmed by the statutory responsibility and financial burden of safeguarding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. The loss of scale would make it harder to absorb demand shocks and maintain service quality for all children and families. Infrastructure management would also suffer. Kent's strategic road network cannot be effectively overseen in isolated pockets. Protocols like Operation BROCK require county-wide coordination to prevent gridlock and maintain national connectivity. Fragmentation would make such coordination impractical, risking disruption not just locally but nationally.

There is no realistic way to mitigate these disadvantages. Shared service arrangements are unlikely to withstand the pressures of Kent and Medway's complexity and tend to result in poorer outcomes and higher costs. Crucially, there is currently no timeline for establishing a Strategic Authority, meaning disaggregation would dismantle the only existing structure capable of maintaining county-wide cohesion.

**In short, breaking up Kent and Medway would not only weaken local service delivery, it would undermine the county's ability to respond to national challenges, destabilise critical response arrangements, and erode the strategic resilience that currently benefits the whole country.**

**KCC is clear: the most viable option for LGR in Kent and Medway is a single unitary authority - the Kent Council. This model is uniquely designed to meet the scale, complexity, and strategic importance of our county. It delivers the benefits of reorganisation while avoiding the risks of fragmentation.**

**The Kent Council would:**

- ☑ Avoid the substantial risks of disaggregation of key services and loss of scale that are unsustainable given the unique challenges Kent faces – avoiding disruption that could have both a local and national impact.
- ☑ Maximise the financial savings available through the process of LGR in both the short- and long-term, putting the entire area on a firmer financial footing and quickly reinvesting into services.
- ☑ Keep Kent and Medway together, respecting our area's strong identity, protecting well-established partnerships and tried and tested service delivery arrangements.
- ☑ Provide high-quality and effective services, benefiting from a critical mass of capability and capacity across the area and ensuring a consistent service for everyone who needs support.
- ☑ Speak up for Kent and Medway with one powerful and cohesive voice.
- ☑ Shape the future growth of our county in a coordinated and strategic way, aiming for a high quality of life for all.
- ☑ Accelerate and invest in Public Service Reform, transforming how public services work for people and places.
- ☑ Through Area Assemblies, provide local responsiveness, flexibility and innovation in community services, working with local partners and people.
- ☑ Embed an enhanced community engagement approach that suits modern life and that is focused on tackling problems rather than servicing layers of governance.
- ☑ Have fewer, empowered and well-supported councillors with a meaningful role and influence, streamlining local democracy and improving accountability.
- ☑ Avoid the costly and bureaucratic addition of another layer of local government through a Mayoral Strategic Authority – the Kent Council would provide the strategic capacity for the devolution of powers and funding that Government is seeking, capitalising on Kent and Medway's existing scale and experience.
- ☑ Ensure a smooth transition, with minimal change and disruption to residents and minimal cost.

## What the people of Kent and Medway and our key stakeholders think

KCC believes that any discussion about the future of local government in Kent and Medway must include the voice of our residents and the key stakeholders that work in and know the area best. Between the hurried Government process for LGR, a new administration for KCC, and the time taken to work with other councils in the joint process, time to engage with people at this stage has been short. However, this has been a priority for KCC and an intensive period of engagement has been undertaken so that the views and preferences of our residents and key partners can be included in this Strategic Business Case. We are grateful to the xxxx *(to be added)* people who completed our online survey, and the many partners who took the time to tell us their views. The most important things for people in Kent and Medway about the future of local government and LGR are:

*Summary of key engagement points to be added here in the final Strategic Business Case*

## The most financially sustainable option for Kent and Medway

Local authorities in Kent and Medway face significant financial challenges, particularly in adult social care, children's services, and SEND. These pressures are unevenly distributed, with higher demand in East and North Kent.

**A single unitary will cost less and deliver greater savings quicker**

- Avoids the costs and risks of disaggregating key countywide services which could add up to £68 million per year in other options.
- Delivers the highest net recurring benefit of £69 million per year, cumulative £457 million after 10 years which is more than double the highest predicted cumulative saving for any of the multi-unitary options.
- The difference in cumulative benefit between a single unitary and the three-unitary option equates to between £340 to £478 on Band D council tax over a ten-year period (and even more for other options).
- Incurs the lowest transition costs - £99 million compared to up to £139 million for other options.
- Delivers the fastest payback period - 3.3 years compared to up to 14 years (or potentially never) in other options.

**A single unitary is fairer and sustainable for the whole county**

- Avoids concentrating unsustainable financial pressures on individual unitaries, particularly in East Kent. Spend per head on adult social care could vary by nearly £200 between individual unitaries, for example.
- A single rate of council tax across the county and a wide tax base, evening out disparities in revenue raising potential.
- Assuming average harmonisation, most households in a single unitary would pay less council tax than if they were resident in one of the multi-unitary options.
- Avoids unitaries inheriting uneven distributions of legacy debt, which currently varies hugely from £0 to £2134 per head in different parts of the county.

The following table provides comparison of key financial information across the options being considered for Kent and Medway.

| LGR option | Implementation costs (one off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | 1a enhancement / Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period (years) | 10-year cumulative impact of transformation (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1a | (99.4) | 75.0 | (6.0) | 69.0 | 3.3 | 457.4 |
| 3a | (127.7) | 69.4 | (19.7) - (29.2) | 49.7 - 40.2 | 5.4 - 6.7 | 132.1 – 226.5 |
| 4b | (130.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) - (48.6) | 34.6 - 18.9 | 7.8 - 14.3 | (80.6) – 76.7 |
| 4d | (135.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) - (48.6) | 34.6 - 18.9 | 7.9 - 14.5 | (85.6) – 71.7 |
| 5a | (139.1) | 65.7 | (46.0) - (68.1) | 19.7 - (2.4) | 14.0 – no payback | (298.1) – (77.9) |

**The range demonstrates the sensitivity of changing just one of the cost assumptions in the model between 0% and 1% for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and*

*children's social care. The range is not required for 1a as there is no disaggregation of social care.*

*** Recurring savings = gross reorganisation savings minus disaggregation costs*

The single unitary is the clear financial choice – sustainable, fair and quickly unlocks maximum savings to reinvest into services for Kent and Medway residents.

## Right for Kent and Medway and a strong fit for Government

Kent Council is a strong fit for the government's criteria for Local Government Reorganisation. It meets all requirements for scale and efficiency, protecting service quality and enhancing engagement with our communities.

| Criterion | Single unitary | Multiple unitaries |
|---|---|---|
| Establishing a single tier | Meets all requirements; maximises scale and equity | Creates disparities in tax yield, service quality, and financial resilience |
| Efficiency and resilience | Highest savings, lowest costs, fastest payback | High transition costs, low savings, long or no payback |
| High-quality services | Maintains scale and consistency; avoids fragmentation | Risks to safeguarding, social care, and SEND services |
| Local consensus | Delivers value for money and fairness; respects local identity | Reinforces East/West divide; adds complexity and variation |
| Supports devolution | Devolution-ready; avoids need for MSA | Adds cost; undermines strategic coherence |
| Community engagement | Enhanced community engagement approach and Area Assemblies | Smaller scale but limited capacity for engagement |

## The Kent Council – effective, efficient and fit for the future

**Better for people**

The Kent Council will use its scale and capacity to maximise the opportunities from LGR, giving Kent and Medway residents a council that delivers value for money, services that work for them and building communities that thrive. It will deliver better services for people by integrating public services around individuals and communities, enabling a shift from reactive crisis management to proactive prevention. With a single strategic authority, services such as social care, housing, education, and public health can be designed and delivered holistically, reducing duplication and ensuring residents receive the right support at the right time. The council's scale will allow for more effective commissioning, stronger partnerships with the NHS and Police, and better use of data and digital tools to anticipate needs and personalise services. This integration will improve outcomes, reduce long-term costs, and ensure that vulnerable residents are not lost in a fragmented system.

**Better for places**
For places, the Kent Council will provide the strategic capacity to plan and invest in infrastructure, housing, and economic development at the scale required to meet the county's complex and growing needs. A single council will enable coordinated spatial planning, ensuring that housing growth is sustainable and supported by the necessary transport, health, and education infrastructure. It will also strengthen Kent's voice with government and investors, attracting funding and shaping policies that reflect the county's priorities. By aligning economic development, skills, and planning strategies, the Kent Council will support thriving local economies and ensure that all communities - urban, rural, and coastal - benefit from growth and investment.

By consolidating services and governance into a single authority, the Kent Council will unlock the ability to plan and deliver visible, everyday services more effectively. From cleaner streets and better-maintained parks to more responsive local highways and accessible leisure facilities, the council will be able to reinvest savings into the services that matter most to people's daily lives. This will not only improve quality of life but also restore public confidence in local government by demonstrating clear, tangible value for money. While the scale of the Kent Council would be an inherent advantage, it is also critical that a large unitary authority remains in touch with and responsive to the diverse needs of Kent and Medway's communities and ensure that people feel represented and heard. We have therefore designed the model for the Kent Council to acknowledge and mitigate these risks, thinking beyond traditional ways of working in local government where this will allow the Kent Council to best serve its residents.

**Local leadership, local decisions**
The creation of three Area Assemblies in North, East, and West Kent will ensure that the Kent Council remains closely connected to the communities it serves. These Assemblies will be empowered to make decisions on how community services are run, enabling a more tailored and responsive approach that reflects the distinct identities, needs, and priorities of local areas. Aligned with natural patterns of travel, healthcare, and policing, and mirroring existing service delivery footprints, the Area Assemblies will provide a practical and democratic mechanism for local voices to influence service design and delivery. By embedding decision-making at a more local level for community services, the Kent Council will combine the benefits of strategic scale with the agility and insight needed to respond effectively to community concerns and aspirations.

**Engagement and local democracy that works for people**
The Kent Council will invest in a modern, practical approach to community engagement that prioritises real problem-solving over unnecessary layers of governance. Rather than replicating costly and bureaucratic structures, the council will embed engagement into the way it works—through a Strategic Engagement Framework, a dedicated Community Engagement Team, and a toolkit of inclusive methods such as citizen assemblies, digital platforms, and local partnerships. This approach will ensure that residents are not only heard but actively involved in shaping services that reflect their needs and priorities. By working with trusted local networks, including town and parish councils and the voluntary sector, the Kent Council will build strong, responsive relationships with communities, ensuring that engagement is meaningful and suits the way people want to interact with their council.

Streamlined governance will be achieved by reducing the number of councillors from 658 across Kent and Medway's current councils to a proposed 118, delivering nearly £2.5 million in annual savings on basic member allowances compared to now. This reduction strikes a careful balance- ensuring the Kent Council remains a workable size while maintaining strong democratic representation. Councillors will be supported by a dedicated Member Support Unit and a simplified committee structure, enabling them to focus on strategic leadership and community advocacy. With smaller electoral divisions than the current county council and enhanced tools to manage casework, councillors will be better equipped to serve their communities meaningfully and effectively.

**A smooth transition**

A single unitary model offers the most straightforward and least disruptive path to reorganisation, avoiding the complexity and cost of disaggregating services across multiple new authorities. By building on existing capacity and infrastructure, this approach enables a smoother transition with minimal impact on residents and frontline services. KCC is committed to working with the other councils in Kent and Medway and with Government to plan and implement the new arrangements, ensuring services remain safe, legal, and effective from day one. At the same time, this model creates the strongest foundation for long-term transformation - unlocking opportunities to modernise services, improve outcomes, and deliver better value for money across the whole area.

**Kent and Medway stands at a crossroads. The opportunity for Local Government Reorganisation must not be wasted on models that fragment services, entrench inequality, and increase costs. The Kent Council offers a bold, practical, and financially responsible solution - one that reflects the scale, identity, and strategic importance of our county. It will deliver better services, stronger communities, and a more resilient future for all our residents.**

**One Kent. One Council. Our Unique County.**

# PART ONE –
# INTRODUCING KENT AND MEDWAY AND OUR APPROACH TO LGR

DRAFT

# 3. Introduction

## Introducing Kent and Medway

Kent and Medway is a large, diverse region strategically placed between the UK's gateway to continental Europe and London. Covering around 1,400 square miles and 13 local authority areas, it includes large urban centres, coastal towns, market towns, and wide rural spaces. Its unique geography, natural assets, and international connections shape how people live, work, and travel. Around 1.9 million people live in Kent and Medway across 760,000 households, and both the population and housing stock are growing. Kent and Medway's identity is shaped by its role as the main gateway to Europe, through the Port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel, and by its spread of towns and communities rather than a single dominant city.

**Population and demography**

Population growth has been strong over the past 20 years (about 7% in the last decade and 18% over 20 years), with household growth following a similar trend. The age profile is changing as the baby-boom generation ages, but Kent and Medway still have a slightly higher proportion of children than both the South East and England averages, showing its strong appeal to families. Population and housing growth is expected to continue over the coming decades, increasing demand for housing, infrastructure, and public services.

**A polycentric, connected economic geography**

Kent and Medway is made up of many centres. Medway is the largest urban area, but no single area dominates. North Kent has seen major regeneration along the Thames Estuary. East Kent includes Dover, the UK's biggest passenger port, a university cluster in Canterbury, and a string of coastal towns with growing creative economies, plus Ashford as a major growth centre. West Kent has a higher share of jobs, thanks to its dynamic, service-based economy. This economic geography creates complex travel patterns, both within Kent and into neighbouring areas such as London, making reliable transport systems crucial to the economy and residents' quality of life. Between the towns, there's a diverse rural economy, including some of England's most productive farmland and important environmental sites.

**Economic scale and structure**

Kent and Medway's economy is significant, generating about £44 billion GVA a year. It's broad-based, with wholesale and retail, health and care, business services, construction, and hospitality sectors providing significant employment. Construction is especially strong and highly productive. Alongside everyday sectors, there are high-potential clusters across Kent: life sciences at Discovery Park and our universities, creative and digital industries, and food production and agritech. Most businesses are small or medium-sized, which brings economic resilience and entrepreneurship, but also highlights the need to support firms to invest in new technologies to improve skills and boost productivity. Employment has grown strongly but job density is still below the national average, partly due to people commuting out of Kent. Unemployment is low, but economic inactivity has risen in some coastal and estuary communities since the pandemic. Productivity is about 94% of the UK average, with West Kent performing above and East Kent below the national benchmark. These differences reflect variations in sectors, skills, transport, and housing.

**Skills and productivity**
Qualification levels have improved, with fewer people having no formal qualifications and more reaching NVQ4 and above. Still, there's a gap at higher levels compared to the UK average, especially in some coastal and estuary areas. This limits access to better jobs and makes it harder for businesses to recruit for growth roles. Partnerships between employers, colleges, and universities have strengthened, including through the Local Skills Improvement Plan. The focus now is on widening participation, raising attainment, and linking skills to Kent's strengths in life sciences, creative-digital, and agritech, as well as boosting innovation in small businesses.

**Gateway to Europe: Dover, Eurotunnel, and the Strategic Corridor**
The Port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel are the UK's main short-straits crossings for passengers and freight, vital for national supply chains and exports. They support a large local transport and logistics industry. However, when there is disruption at the border, due to poor weather, industrial action or sheer demand at peak holiday season, disruption and congestion on Kent's roads and local networks is significant. Traffic management on the M20 and nearby routes, in the form of Operation BROCK, can disrupt local journeys, public transport, and access to services, and affect town centres across the M20 corridor. Whilst the impact of border disruption has national implications, the solution is managed locally, through strong coordination between Kent partners to keep borders flowing and transport network resilient.

**Infrastructure and digital connectivity**
The last decade has seen major investment in transport: better junctions, town-centre links, active travel schemes, and rail improvements, including High Speed One, which has transformed access across much of Kent. But gaps remain: transport improvements need to keep up with growth, bus networks and active travel need strengthening, and we need to get full benefits from international rail at Ashford and Ebbsfleet, plus improve resilience on short-straits corridors during disruptions. Digital infrastructure has improved a lot, with superfast and gigabit coverage growing quickly, but rural and outlying areas still lag and need more attention to ensure everyone is connected.

**Spatial disparities and inclusion**
County-wide averages hide big differences. Disadvantage is concentrated in coastal East Kent and parts of North Kent, and can be seen in neighbourhoods in most larger towns. These areas face lower skills, poorer health, weaker access to good jobs, older and poorer-quality housing, and limited transport options. Productivity and pay are lower, economic inactivity, including due to ill-health, is higher, and outcomes for children and young people are more fragile. As of June 2025, more than 3,300 children were living in temporary accommodation in Kent and Medway. Fuel poverty affects about 10% of households in many areas, increasing health risks. The need for an inclusive approach which links skills, health, housing renewal, transport, town-centre investment, and employer engagement is necessary to change long-term prospects, especially in many coastal communities.

**Housing supply**
Housing supply has improved but is still below targets. From 2018 to 2023, new homes averaged about 7,277 per year, which is still 24% below Local Plan requirements (about 9,528 per year). This shortfall has limited affordable housing and increased pressure on

prices. Affordable homes have made up about 23–24% of new builds recently, but that's still well below what's needed (over 5,000 affordable homes per year). Limited supply, high prices and rents, and housing allowance rates that haven't kept up have driven homelessness and increased spending on temporary accommodation. Housing quality affects health and wellbeing, with many homes not meeting decent standards and some having serious hazards, especially in the private rented sector.

**Health, housing, and wider determinants**

There are strong links between housing and health: damp and mould worsen respiratory problems, cold homes increase falls and winter deaths, and climate change brings risks from overheating and flooding. Temporary and insecure housing can harm children's development, wellbeing, and education. The Kent and Medway Integrated Care system recognises the importance of housing in prevention, recovery, and discharge, and the need to align health, housing, and care to reduce pressure on acute services. As the population ages, there will be more need for specialist and accessible homes and community support to help people live independently.

**Key future trends for Kent and Medway**

Looking ahead, these trends are expected to shape Kent and Medway's economy, communities, and service needs over the next decade:

- **An ageing population and changing demographics**: The population will continue to grow and age, increasing demand for health, social care and specialist housing. Prevention, independence and accessibility in mainstream homes will become more important.
- **Growing social and spatial inequalities:** Without targeted action, disparities between coastal and estuary communities risk deepening, with implications for health, skills, employment and fiscal pressures across public services.
- **Education and skills:** Persistent higher-level skills gaps compared to national averages constrain productivity growth. Expanding employer-led pathways, technical education and adult upskilling aligned to growth sectors will be critical.
- **Housing demand, affordability and condition:** Continued population growth and household formation will sustain demand pressures. Accelerating plan-led delivery, with the necessary support social and physical infrastructure, to broaden the affordability and tenure mix, and tackling non-decent stock and energy efficiency will be required.
- **Digitalisation of the economy and public services**: Technology adoption will continue across sectors, changing skills requirements whilst supporting new ways to access a wider range of services and changing how services are delivered, raising the dependency on universal digital connectivity.
- **Border pressures and highways resilience:** The short-straights crossing will continue to impact Kent's strategic roads especially when there is disruption, requiring resilient, coordinated multi-agency response in the short-term, but requires long-term strategic investment to improve capacity and resilience.

## How we developed the Strategic Business Case

### Purpose

In February 2025, councils in Kent and Medway received a statutory invitation from government to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) by 28 November 2025. In preparation to meet the government deadline, reorganisation models for Kent and Medway were evaluated and appraised against published government criteria, supported by detailed financial and service modelling. Kent County Council (KCC) has considered options independently and as part of a joint Kent and Medway process led by Kent Council Leaders. This business case presents the rationale for KCC's preferred model, built upon detailed analysis of shared evidence.

### Commitment to the joint approach

While KCC has developed this business case independently, consistent commitment to the joint process has remained. In line with government expectations for councils to contribute to a shared evidence base, KCC has pro-actively shared information and analysis with partner authorities, to ensure all councils have access to information about the likely impacts of LGR on current KCC services. Equally, KCC has considered evidence provided by other councils in shaping this proposal.

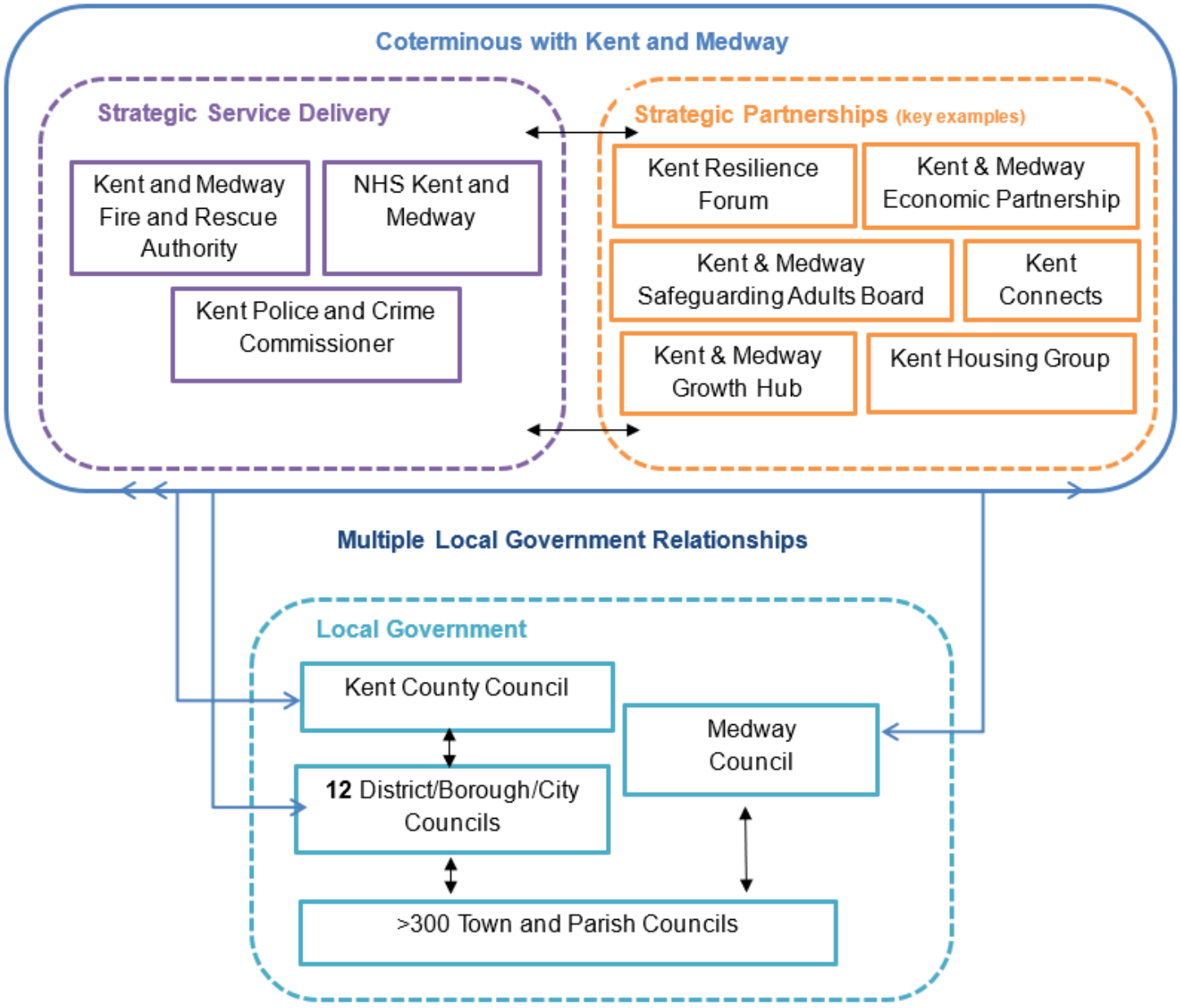
To support comparability of financial analysis across options, KCC commissioned KPMG, Kent and Medway's strategic partner for LGR, to develop the financial case using data from all councils. This ensures that the methodology used to model costs and benefits for KCC's preferred option is consistent with that used for the other Kent and Medway options. KCC will continue to be open, pro-active and transparent while working with partner authorities as we navigate LGR for Kent and Medway.

### Challenging timelines

In addition to ambitious government timelines for the submission of LGR proposals, KCC's timescales were constrained further by the need to respond to significant change during the proposal development period. Not least, the KCC elections in May 2025 which marked a major political shift for the county, ending almost 30 years of Conservative control. Induction of a new administration, establishment of a new leadership and formation of governance structures has significantly impacted timelines. While contributing to the joint LGR work for Kent and Medway, KCC simultaneously supported a new administration in understanding the opportunities and challenges presented by LGR for KCC services and residents.

Running a joint LGR proposal development process across Kent and Medway has been complex given the nature and number of stakeholders involved. Complexity was compounded and timelines impacted by the submission of additional proposals from individual Kent and Medway councils at a late stage in the process. KCC's continued commitment to the joint process meant that the decision to proceed with the development of a business case independently was not made until the outcome of the joint options appraisal had been presented and fully considered by KCC Members.

## Current model of local government and public service partners in Kent & Medway




The geographical area of Kent is governed through a two-tier local authority structure. KCC operates as an upper-tier authority, delivering countywide services such as social care, highways, and public health. Beneath this, twelve district, borough, and city councils function as lower-tier authorities, responsible for more localised services including housing, planning, and waste collection. Medway Council, a unitary authority, delivers both upper- and lower-tier functions within its boundaries.

Key statutory bodies responsible for delivering Police, Fire and Rescue, and NHS services operate coterminously across Kent and Medway. These organisations are well-established and play a vital role in the effective delivery of public services throughout the county. Recognising the benefits of aligning with the Kent and Medway footprint, many additional strategic partnerships have adopted the same geographical remit. This alignment

strengthens collaborative strategy development, enables more integrated and efficient service delivery, makes most effective use of resources and enhances Kent and Medway's collective national voice. Prominent partnerships operating across the Kent and Medway area include the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), Kent Housing Group (KHG), the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board and the Kent Estates Partnership.

**Case study: Kent and Medway Economic Partnership**

Both the previous and the current Government recognise that local and national government can play their most effective role in boosting economic growth when working across an identifiable *functional economic area*. For many years, this has been robustly proven across multiple sectors to be the Kent and Medway footprint.

Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) has existed in various incarnations since 2009. It was established by KCC as a strategic cross-county approach to economic growth between local government and business long before such structures were mandated in the form of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) by the government in 2011. Previously part of the South East LEP, KMEP now functions as the area's Local Growth Board after the dissolution of LEPs in 2024, having endured and adapted itself to successive governments' models for locally led growth.

KMEP is led by a board comprising local authorities, business representatives, the further and higher education sectors, and is always chaired by a representative from the private sector. The partnership has overseen and facilitated numerous growth initiatives over the years, such as reviewing and prioritising projects for the Government's Local Growth Fund and Growing Places Fund to achieve maximum local economic impact. It has also provided a coherent public-private sector voice to champion the county's growth, for example supporting the Lower Thames Crossing and the campaign to bring back international rail to the county.

In terms of current and future impact, KMEP is responsible for the Kent and Medway Economic Framework, which sets an ambitious direction for the county's economic growth agenda across business, skills, infrastructure, investment and place. Supporting this, KMEP oversees partnerships and strategies to address skills gaps, employment support and health-economy initiatives across the county. It is also establishing the Kent & Medway Innovation Partnership to connect businesses with academia and local government, boosting the county's research & development sector.

All of this has long established the partnership as a trusted and open body with which the county's businesses, public sector and Government can confidently engage to drive forward projects to propel the county's prosperity and jobs creation. This trust is further enhanced by KMEP's long-established Business Advisory Board, which provides essential economic intelligence to the partnership, acting as both consultative forum and dissemination network across Kent and Medway's private sector.

**Case study: The Kent Estates Partnership**
This strategic partnership was established in 2015 to support the One Public Estate programme, bringing together public sector partners and other stakeholders from across Kent and Medway. Partners include all District Councils, KCC, Medway Council, NHS Kent and Medway, Kent Fire & Rescue Service, Kent Police, Secamb, University of Kent at Canterbury and Parish Councils via Kent Association of Local Councils. The Partnership finds opportunities to share space ideas, service redesign and promote growth through the development and use of public sector land. To date its work has secured over £17 million across 17 projects to kick start development and housing. It has also led a nationally recognised innovation programme that has seen 10 council offices and 3 NHS sites make accommodation available to enable staff across the public sector to access accommodation throughout the county.

## Shared Vision for Kent and Medway

In collaboration with Kent and Medway councils, a shared vision and supporting design principles have been developed.

Our shared vision for Kent is:

**Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially sustainable and accountable local public services delivered in partnership with communities.**
Our ambition for Kent's future is bold and resident-focused. We will deliver local government that is financially resilient, community-rooted, and digitally enabled, delivering services that are simpler, smarter, and more joined up.

Over the next five years, our shared aspiration for Kent is to:

- ✓ Build trusted, transparent relationships with residents through open communication and active engagement.
- ✓ Enable a seamless, resident-first experience offering the right way for each resident to engage with us, including the ability to complete transactions online—quickly, simply, and securely.
- ✓ Deliver place-based, people-centred services, focused on early intervention, prevention, and improving life chances.
- ✓ Strengthen local identity and maintain a deep sense of place and belonging.
- ✓ Use data and technology smartly to personalise support, anticipate needs, and improve outcomes.
- ✓ Work in strong partnership with health, education, police, and community organisations to meet residents' needs.
- ✓ Build community resilience to social, economic, and environmental challenges through inclusive, forward-thinking services.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment to residents, staff, and place, balancing ambition with stability, innovation with identity, and change with care.

**Design Principles**

To achieve our shared vision for Kent a set of guiding principles have been developed by Leaders across Kent these principles provide a blueprint for future council design.

| Design Principle | Description |
|---|---|
| Service & resident centric | - Design services around resident needs with a "resident-first" mindset.<br>- Maintain strong community identity and local accountability.<br>- Ensure equity in service access and outcomes across Kent. |
| Integrated & collaborative | - Enable seamless, joined-up service delivery across public services.<br>- Build on existing partnerships and promote shared responsibility and budgets.<br>- Embed co-location and community-based service design. |
| Data-driven & digitally enabled | - Invest in modern digital infrastructure which allows our service delivery and enabling activity to be joined up, and automated where appropriate.<br>- Leverage data and AI to support early intervention, improve decision-making, and target resources effectively.<br>- Ensure transparency and open data to build trust and inform priorities. |
| Financially resilient & efficient | - Adopt place-based financial planning and maximise asset efficiency.<br>- Create lean systems with fluid resource allocation based on demand.<br>- Secure long-term funding and manage transition costs carefully |
| Empowered & future focused workforce | - Retain and support skilled staff through predictable roles and strong leadership.<br>- Break down silos with collaborative problem-solving structures.<br>- Modernise terms and conditions for a more agile, attractive public service offer. |
| Clear, consistent & bold leadership | - Be brave, honest, and aspirational in setting direction and expectations.<br>- Deliver a clear, shared vision and values, internally and externally.<br>- Ensure messages on devolution, change, and local ambition are well understood. |

While KCC supports the shared vision and design principles, there is a divergence in views regarding the most effective route to achieve them. KCC is responsible for 73% of local government spending in Kent and Medway. Our scale and experience provide a countywide perspective - particularly in recognising that financial sustainability must be a core principle of any future governance model. Like councils across the country, those in Kent and Medway are facing mounting financial pressures, especially in high-cost areas such as Adult

Social Care, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Children's Services, and housing. For this reason, the financial resilience of local government in Kent and Medway and the value for money provided for our residents is fundamental to our position on LGR.

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# 4. Options Appraisals

This section sets out the findings of both KCC's internal options appraisal, which was shared with all Kent and Medway councils to support business case development, and the joint options appraisal which was completed by KPMG on behalf of Kent Council Leaders.

## KCC internal options appraisal (March – July 2025)

**Purpose**

Following local government elections in May 2025, and the formation of a new administration at KCC, it was essential that newly elected Members fully understood the opportunities and challenges presented by LGR for Kent and Medway. In line with Government guidance to adopt an options appraisal approach when assessing potential models, KCC undertook an internal appraisal to support the new administration in shaping its position on LGR. This appraisal evaluated the relative merits and risks of each option against the Government's criteria and principles for reorganisation. The findings from this initial assessment were subsequently presented to elected Members of the County Council for their consideration.

**Options considered**

Initially, six different options of unitisation were considered as part of the options appraisal:

- Option 1b: single unitary covering Kent and Medway
- Option 2a: two unitaries (East and West Kent)
- Option 3a: three unitaries (North, East and West Kent)
- Option 4a: four unitaries (North, East, South and West Kent)
- Option 4b: four unitaries (North, East, Mid and West Kent – *with Folkestone and Hythe in Mid Kent)
- Option 4c: four unitaries (North, East, Mid and West Kent - *with Maidstone in Mid Kent)

Please note that we have used the same numbering of options as the other Kent and Medway councils to ensure consistency and ease of comparison between business cases. A map of each option is provided later on in this section.

Options 3a, 4a, 4b and 4c were identified through the joint Kent Council Leaders' discussions and information on these options was submitted to Government by some councils alongside the Interim Plan in March 2025. These were therefore included because they were the options that were known to have been identified within Kent and Medway at that point. Options 1b and 2a were also included by KCC with the aim of ensuring that the internal options appraisal provided a broad range of options to help Members reach an informed position. Importantly, each option covers the existing Kent and Medway area and the different geographic configurations are contiguous with existing district and borough boundaries.

**Approach**

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data was used to support the initial options appraisal against the government criteria, drawing upon both internal and independent

analysis to ensure multiple viewpoints were considered and to avoid any potential biases. The evidence base consisted of the following pieces of information:

| Government criteria | Evidence used |
|---|---|
| A. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government | Option profiles, financial assessment and housing delivery analysis |
| B. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks | Option profiles, financial and transformation assessments |
| C. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services to citizens | Transformation assessment and financial assessment on disaggregation |
| D. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views | Engagement and democracy & local identity assessments |
| E. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements | Devolution assessment |
| F. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment | Democracy & local identity assessment |

Financial assessment

This incorporated analysis by KCC's Finance division and externally commissioned modelling from Newton and PwC. It considered council tax yield and the distribution of spend on key KCC services in the potential new unitaries, council tax harmonisation and levels of debt and reserves. The assessment also considered the findings of the County Councils Network (CCN)/Newton report on the disaggregation impacts on people-based services. Initial financial modelling from PwC provided overall additional operational costs and benefits and initial transition costs arising from new unitary scenarios.

Engagement assessment

This assessment pulled together findings from relevant consultations in Kent including annual Budget consultations and consultations on service changes, as well as national evidence, to provide a 'proxy' engagement position to support the internal options appraisal as far as possible. A direct public engagement exercise was then undertaken later in the process as part of developing the business case to gather feedback from residents and key stakeholders (a summary of the findings is provided in section 6 of this Strategic Business Case).

Democracy & local identity assessment

This assessment provided evidence for criteria around the importance of local identity, culture and heritage in developing proposals for new unitary geographies. It considered travel to work, education and hospital flows to identify the natural travel patterns of Kent and Medway residents. It also considered the potential ratios of councillors to residents in the unitaries for the options included compared to Boundary Commission guidance, as well as opportunities for community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

Transformation assessment
This assessment considered the opportunities and disbenefits that each option could have in realising the potential for transformation, whilst also looking at the potential for wider public sector reform with partners.

Devolution policy assessment
This assessment considered the extent to which each option would support devolution and how effectively the unitary councils in each option could operate with a Mayoral Strategic Authority at a later time.

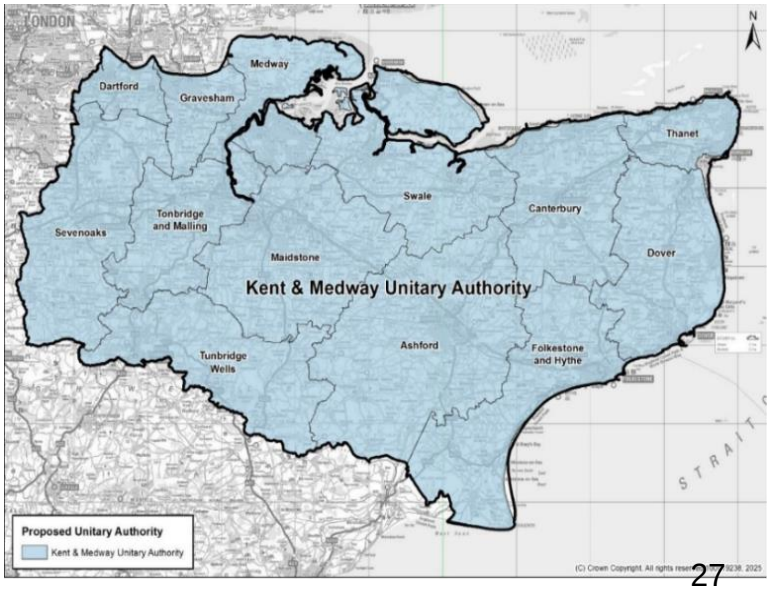
Additional pieces of analysis
In order to ensure evidence was available to cover all parts of the Government criteria, some additional evidence and analysis was collated. Options profiles with population and demographic information were developed to provide an overview of the proposed unitary areas in each option and some of the disparities between them. Analysis on housing growth was conducted based on previous housing delivery and predicted growth to identify any challenges in delivering housing that the unitaries considered might face.
Each individual assessment report has been appended to this business case so that they can be viewed in their entirety. Similarly, all data sources have been provided as appendices for transparency and ease of reference.

**Scoring and rationale**
The assessment reports outlined above were used to score each option against the Government's criteria, along with a set of sub-criteria based on Government's description. Each criterion was judged equally as the Government has been clear weighting will not be applied when considering LGR proposals. Following completion of the options appraisal, a critical friend review was provided by officers who had not been involved in developing the evidence base or options appraisal, to ensure that the process was as robust, balanced and logical as possible based on the evidence available.

The outcome of the initial options appraisal is presented below. Please note the information has been significantly summarised and a more detailed explanation can be found in the rationale document (Appendix X), which sets out the reasons why each option scored the way it did, drawing on the relevant evidence from the evidence base.

Option 1b - single unitary covering Kent and Medway

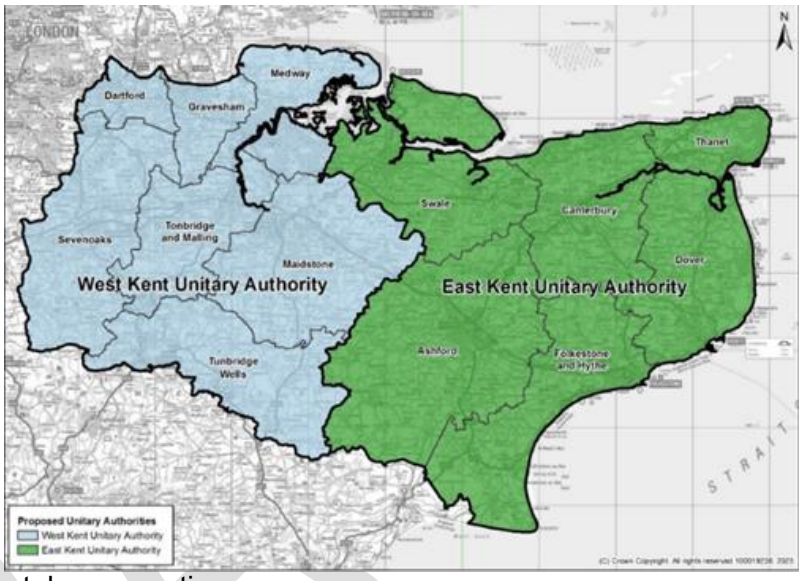
- A single unitary authority for Kent and Medway offers the most financially viable model - delivering the highest net recurring benefit (£49.4m/year), lowest transition costs (£23.2m), and fastest payback (under one year), while avoiding disaggregation costs and risks.



- This model provides the scale and resources needed to deliver high-quality public services, support invest-to-save initiatives, and manage legacy debt strategically across the county.
- Despite its strengths, due to size the model may struggle to reflect local identities or meet specific community needs, exceeds recommended councillor-to-elector ratios, and cannot support devolution arrangements due to lack of neighbouring partners.

Option 2a – two unitaries (East and West Kent)

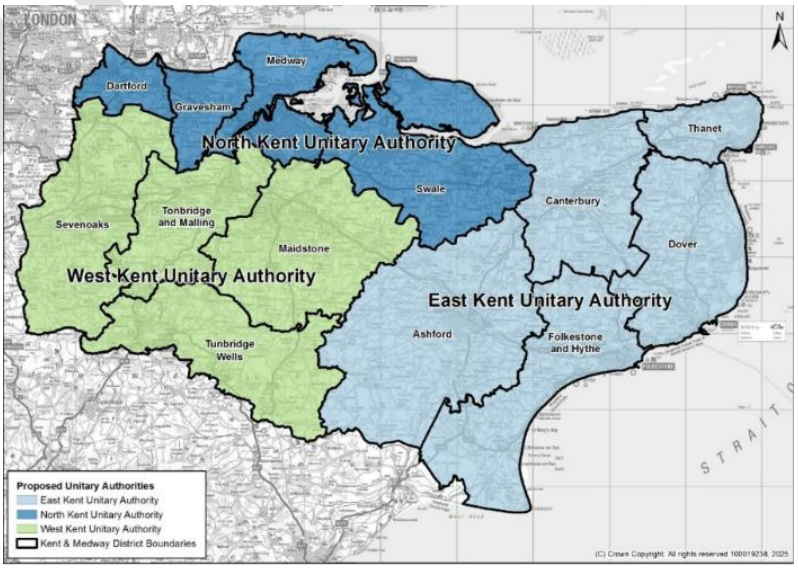
- This is the most financially viable multi-unitary option, offering a net recurring benefit of £16.5m, transition costs of £25.8m, and a payback period of 3.8 years, with the most balanced debt distribution.
- This model combines the capacity for large-scale transformation with the ability to tailor services locally, though East Kent would bear disproportionate responsibilities for border infrastructure, UASC, and coastal regeneration.




- Population disparity (23%) and higher per-resident spend in East Kent raises concerns about fairness, while the model risks creating a West vs East dynamic and may reinforce perceptions of imbalance between affluent and deprived areas.

Option 3a – three unitaries (North, East and West Kent)

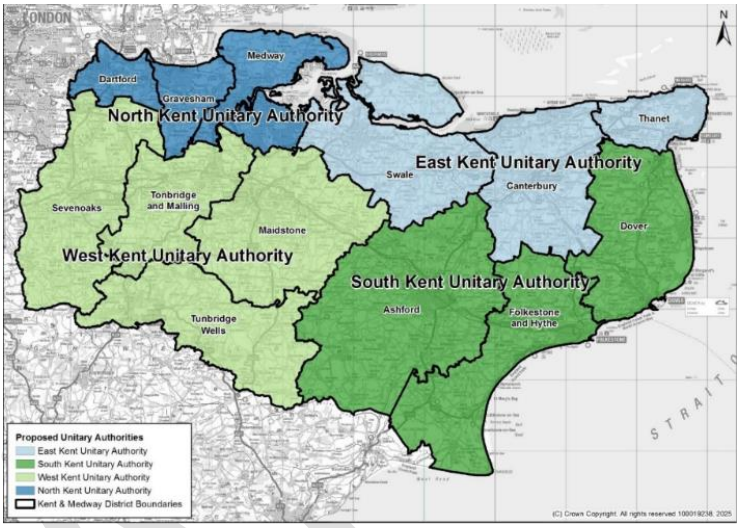
- Modelling estimates initial transition costs of £42.6m, an annual net recurring benefit of £9.3m and a relatively lengthy payback period of 8.2 years. The estimated total additional costs for people-based services following disaggregation is £14.9m.
- This option best meets Government population guidelines, with the most evenly split authorities



(20% disparity), and supports devolution through well-aligned functional economic areas suitable for a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

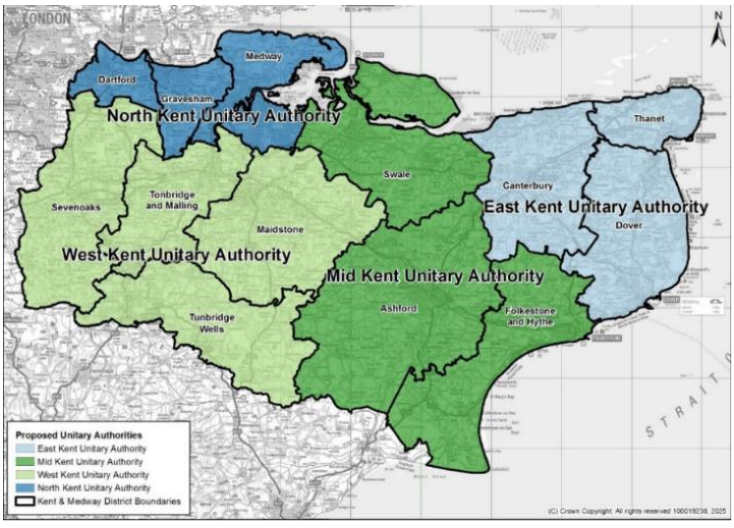
- The proposed boundaries reflect local identities and existing service patterns, but East Kent would inherit higher adult social care legacy costs and debt levels, raising concerns about equitable resource distribution.

Option 4a – four unitaries (North, East, South and West Kent)




- The model incurs the highest transition costs (£54.7m) and results in a recurring net annual **loss** of £5.4m, with no payback period – i.e. the initial costs would never be paid back. Disaggregation adds £22.7m in costs for people-based services, concentrating high statutory spend in South and East Kent.
- All four proposed unitaries fall within the Government's 300k–800k population range, but show a 34% disparity between the smallest (South Kent) and largest (West Kent). This contributes to the model having the least equitable council tax distribution, with South Kent receiving £173m less than West Kent.
- This option carries the greatest risk of service disruption, diluted expertise, and market destabilisation. While it offers increased local responsiveness, it also separates key infrastructure (e.g. Manston Arrivals Centre from other border infrastructure) and introduces governance complexity.

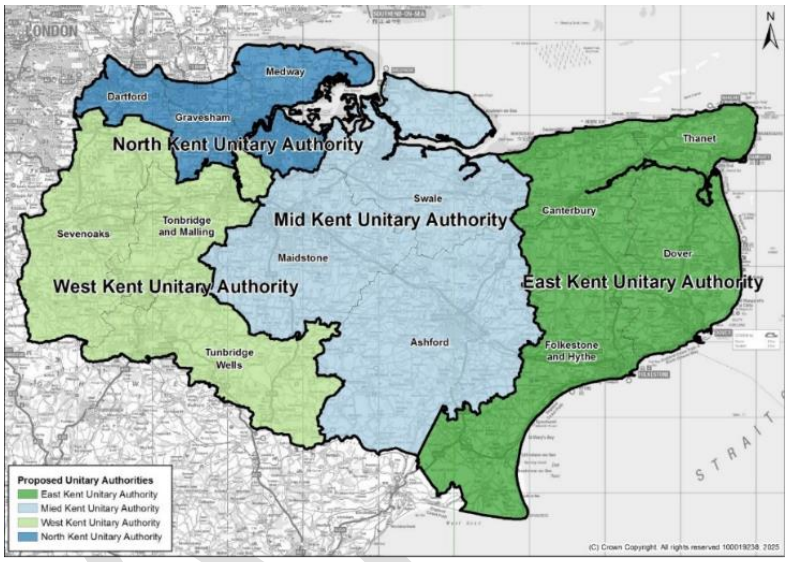
Option 4b – four unitaries (North, East, Mid and West Kent)




- Like other four-unitary models, 4b offers no net financial benefit, incurs high transition costs, and lacks a payback period. This option creates a 27% population gap between the largest (West Kent) and smallest (South Kent) unitaries, which results in unequal debt distribution.
- Disaggregating services adds £20.8m in costs for people-based services. Although

unlike option 4a, separating high-cost areas (e.g. Folkestone & Hythe from Dover and Thanet from Swale) helps spread the highest cost areas for adult and children's social care.
- The model misaligns with existing service boundaries and local identities, separates key border infrastructure, and risks inhibiting public service reform. While it improves councillor ratios and local responsiveness, it introduces complexity and fragmentation.

Option 4c – four unitaries (North, East, Mid and West Kent)




- Like the other four-unitary models, this option offers no net benefit, incurs high transition costs, and has no payback period. Disaggregation adds an estimated £19m in additional costs for people-based services.
- This option creates a 29% population gap between the smallest (West Kent) and largest (East Kent) unitaries—the second highest among all options. It also results in the greatest disparity of debt and creates the most affluent version of a West Kent unitary while concentrating deprivation and high social care spend in East Kent, with a £928 vs £670 per-resident spend disparity.
- The model misaligns with existing service boundaries and local identities, separates key border infrastructure, and risks inhibiting public service reform. However, it supports increased local responsiveness and aligns well with recommended councillor-to-resident ratios.

**Outcome of internal options appraisal – development of a new model**

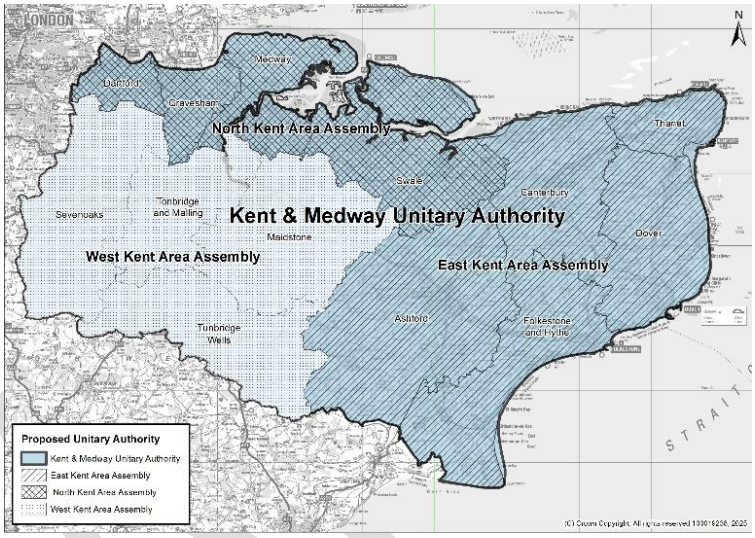
The findings of the initial options appraisal were presented to elected Members for consideration. It was clear that a single unitary option was the most viable for Kent and Medway in terms of financial sustainability, debt management, demand management and economies of scale compared to all other model options. Crucially, it was also the only model that mitigated the substantial risks and costs associated with disaggregation. *A detailed assessment of implications for Kent and Medway when considered alongside the county's unique position and associated challenges can be found in section 8 'The geographic and spatial reality of Kent'.*

However, it was also accepted that the model presented limitations around enabling community engagement and ability to reflect local identity (which were particular strengths of the three-unitary option). In recognition of this, a new model was proposed: **the creation of a single unitary for Kent and Medway, with three Area Assemblies in North, East and West Kent**.

## Subsequent options appraisal for a 'hybrid' single unitary (August 2025)

To assess the viability of this new proposed option, KCC conducted a separate options appraisal using the same methodology and assumptions that were applied to the other options in the initial options appraisal. As with the other options considered and as set out by government, the six criteria were weighted equally. The outcome of this initial assessment is summarised below.

**Option 1a - single unitary covering Kent and Medway with three Area Assemblies**




- Like option 1b, this model is also likely to offer lower transition costs, higher net benefits, and a shorter payback period than the multi-unitary options. It also avoids £16.2m in annual disaggregation costs by keeping social care and SEND services countywide, and spreads legacy debt evenly across Kent and Medway.
- A single unitary paired with Area Assemblies balances strategic capacity with local responsiveness. Assemblies in North, East, and West Kent reflect travel, education, and healthcare patterns, supporting local identity without fragmenting services or infrastructure.
- Despite its strengths, this model does not support devolution arrangements due to its single-authority footprint and could require significantly more elected Members than recommended by the LGBCE.

## Joint Options Appraisal (September 2025)

Ten potential options were raised at the start of the joint options appraisal process, but Kent Council Leaders jointly agreed to rule out three options, leaving seven remaining in scope for the options appraisal:

- Option 1a – single unitary covering Kent and Medway with three Area Assemblies in North, East and West Kent
- Option 3a: three unitaries in North, East and West Kent
- Option 4a: four unitaries in North, East, South and West Kent
- Option 4b: four unitaries in North, East, Mid and West Kent (*with Folkestone and Hythe in Mid Kent)
- Option 4c: four unitaries in North, East, Mid and West Kent (*with Maidstone in Mid Kent)
- Option 4d: four unitaries in North, East, Mid and West Kent (with boundary changes)
- Option 5a – five unitaries in North, East, Mid, South and West Kent (with boundary changes)

**Approach**
Working with council partners, KPMG assessed each proposed option against the government's criteria, using a scoring matrix of High, Medium and Low. With direct reference to the government criteria and linked guidance, 14 evaluation criteria were defined for options to be assessed against. For each evaluation criteria, a series of metrics were identified, with a statement of "what good looks like" agreed as well as a definition of 'High', 'Medium' and 'Low'. All options were then scored against all metrics with average results for each criterion presented in an overall dashboard (see Appendix X).

**Scoring and rationale**
Although different methodologies were used for scoring, the overall findings of both options appraisals (KCC's and the joint one) were broadly similar. To avoid duplication, the remainder of this section does not individually assess how each option scored in the joint options appraisal; rather, it summarises where the two options appraisals agree, and where they differ.

Similarities:

- The joint options appraisal noted that an advantage of option 1a is that it 'retains the economic area of Kent and maximises the existing tax base for allocation across Area Assemblies'.
- It identified, as KCC's did, that the 'biggest driver of additional transition complexity and cost are the number of unitary authorities being proposed'. It also concluded that option 1a had the most potential to 'deliver efficiencies through larger economies of scale'.
- Option 1a scored highly in the joint options appraisal for delivering sustainable public services, as a single unitary could 'potentially avoid service fragmentation entirely by maintaining a single top-tier authority. It ensures continuity of service delivery, simplifies governance, and reduces transition risk'.
- The joint appraisal acknowledged, as KCC's did, that option 1a 'minimises ongoing costs of disaggregation through a single approach to people services' (Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and SEND). It also anticipated 'lower implementation costs due to low levels of disaggregation'.
- Similar to the KCC's conclusion, the joint appraisal acknowledged that option 1a helps manage legacy debt by pooling 'reserves and assets in a single unitary to be allocated across Kent and Medway'.
- It similarly recognised that option 1a 'aligns with existing NHS Kent and Medway ICB boundaries and the footprint of many partners, including Kent Police', potentially aiding public service reform.
- The joint appraisal identified, as KCC's did, significant challenges for option 1a around 'addressing local concerns with either a very low member: elector ratio or a very large number of members'.
- Regarding devolution, the joint appraisal agreed with KCC's assessment that option 1a provides only 'one constituent member which would therefore require an exception from Government to secure a devolution deal'.

Differences:

- The joint options appraisal scored local identity lower than KCC's options appraisal did because of the 'size and scale of the single unitary', although it did acknowledge that the

structure does ‘represent the historic boundaries of Kent’. It argued that ‘whilst Area Assemblies might help retain some place-based connection, concerns were raised about dilution of local voices’.

- Regarding community engagement, the joint appraisal scored option 1a lower than KCC did, stating it was ‘to be determined how Area Assemblies would engage with and empower communities’. It argued that with a large population, there would be a ‘risk that community engagement and empowerment would be lost through operating too remotely from residents and partners’.

**However, KCC’s administration concluded that these issues could be sufficiently managed through design of the model option, especially given the enhanced capacity that the single unitary would have to invest in community engagement.**

The joint appraisal also considered two further options that KCC did not model in the internal options appraisal – options 4d and 5a. Both of these options introduce boundary changes, extremely complex in the case of 4d, which makes it very difficult to provide an accurate data-based assessment of the viability of these two options. It is important that any future model for local government in Kent and Medway is respectful of established natural communities and existing service delivery arrangements – both options 4d and 5a cut across these boundaries. Options 4d and 5a are also not compatible with the KCC administration’s position that financial sustainability is paramount, with modelling undertaken by KPMG showing that both options would carry the same inherent financial risks as the other four unitary options, but with added costs for boundary changes. Option 5a would also incur additional disaggregation costs by creating an extra unitary.

**Critically, nothing material within the joint options appraisal contradicted KCC’s initial assessment or changed the view of KCC that a single unitary is the right solution for Kent and Medway.**

# 5. Engagement with Kent and Medway residents and stakeholders

*In the final Strategic Business Case, the headline findings from KCC's public survey on LGR will be included here (with the full report as an appendix).*

## Stakeholder Engagement

As part of the development of this business case, engagement activity has been undertaken with over 160 key stakeholders in Kent and Medway. This includes representatives from health, education, police, and fire services, the voluntary sector, local businesses and Kent and Medway MPs. The purpose of this engagement has been to gather initial feedback on KCC's preferred option for LGR in the limited time available at this stage, so this can be included in the Strategic Business Case to Government.

*This interim summary outlines the responses received to date, highlighting initial themes and observations. It will be updated as further contributions are received to ensure a complete and accurate reflection of stakeholder feedback.*

**Summary of Stakeholder Feedback**
Stakeholders felt there could be opportunities for Kent and Medway of a single unitary authority along the following themes:

Identity and geography of Kent
Some respondents noted that Kent's historic identity and geography could be undermined without county-wide administration and leadership. It was the view of some that local government requires a clear lead figure, such as a Council Leader or Mayor, to represent and lead on county-level issues. A number of respondents also expressed a strong attachment to place that they felt a single-unitary model honoured.

Strategic planning
It was suggested that certain services, such as planning and transport/highways, would benefit from being managed at a county-wide level. Some respondents felt that a single unitary authority could enable stronger alignment across housing, transport, health, social care, education, and utilities, supporting an "infrastructure-first" approach.

Reducing duplication and competition
Several respondents felt that the current two-tier system leads to unnecessary duplication of governance, bureaucracy and competition between statutory bodies for centralised funding, which a single unitary model could help to eliminate.

Clarity for residents
Some respondents believed that a single unitary authority would provide greater clarity for residents regarding service responsibilities. It was suggested that simplifying local government structures could improve outcomes, accountability, and integration for communities.

Efficiencies and cost savings
It was the view of some that dividing the county into multiple authorities could exacerbate

economic disparities, particularly in the east. A single unitary model was seen as more equitable and capable of delivering cost savings through reduced duplication. Some respondents also identified advantages in merging smaller authorities to enhance purchasing power and improve value for money in procurement and commercial activity.

Governance
Some respondents felt that a single unitary authority would enable councillors to make more strategic decisions with a county-wide perspective, reducing the influence of narrow or localised agendas and focusing more on broader benefits.

Attracting talent
It was suggested that a single unitary authority could be better positioned to attract high-calibre applicants and create more appealing career opportunities. Some respondents believed this model could support top-level recruitment and help secure scarce expertise to drive meaningful change.

Some stakeholders expressed reservations about specific elements of the proposed single unitary model. These concerns broadly fell into the following areas:

Impacts on local identity and community engagement
Some respondents were concerned about potential risks to local accountability and a reduction in local knowledge, particularly in coastal and rural areas. It was the view of some that a single unitary authority could be less democratic and less representative of Kent's diverse communities, placing neighbourhoods further from decision-making processes. For this reason, some stakeholders indicated a preference for smaller unitary authorities that are closer to local issues. It was suggested that any single unitary model must include a robust approach to community engagement to mitigate this perceived distance.

Potential disruption and delays to services and decision-making during transition
Some respondents noted the risk of disruption to existing services during the transition period. It was felt that certain services, such as housing and regeneration, could be deprioritised within broader corporate restructuring. There were also concerns that, in other areas, LGR has been used to defer difficult decisions to newly formed authorities, resulting in substantial delays.

The following specific elements of the process, proposal or service delivery were covered in a number of stakeholder responses received so far:

Area Assemblies
Stakeholder views on the Area Assembly model were mixed. Some respondents saw potential for Assemblies to mitigate risks to local accountability and knowledge within a single unitary structure, particularly if they are well-resourced, clearly empowered, and build on existing partnerships. Others felt more clarity was needed on how they would work, and cautioned that without a robust structure, Assemblies risk becoming ineffective or duplicative. Some suggested that strengthening Town and Parish Councils may offer a more locally grounded alternative.

Coterminosity of services

Stakeholder views on coterminosity were mixed. Some respondents supported the single unitary model, noting alignment with other organisations operating across Kent and Medway and welcoming the potential for streamlined partnership working. Others expressed concern that the model may not reflect existing organisational structures within their services.

Housing and infrastructure

Some respondents identified a strong case for a county-wide strategic approach to housing and infrastructure under a single unitary authority. It was felt that services such as planning require consistent policy and coordination at scale, and that a single authority could unlock opportunities for increased council housebuilding, more effective use of public land, and stronger engagement with national partners. However, concerns were raised about potential disruption to local delivery capacity during the transition, particularly at a critical time for housing supply.

Many stakeholders expressed interest in being involved in the implementation of the new unitary arrangements which is welcomed – working with stakeholders will be a key principle of our approach to a successful transition.

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# PART TWO – THE CASE FOR A SINGLE UNITARY

# 6. Financial assessment

## Financial assessment summary

Local authorities in the Kent and Medway area face a number of significant financial challenges, in particular the rising demand, cost and complexity of providing crucial adult social care services to a growing and ageing population with pressures on social care providers, high cost of children's social care placements, and the rapidly increasing cost of SEND services. These challenges are in the context of an uneven distribution of demand for services and deprivation across the Kent and Medway area, with higher levels of need in Northern and Eastern areas compared to Western areas. There are also significant disparities in the distribution of service providers with higher concentration of provision in some areas compared to others. Currently KCC's scale and county-wide responsibilities mean that these challenges can be mitigated, and inequalities are lessened through the distribution of spend and resource.

**A single unitary authority has lower transition costs and delivers greater savings**
With LGR, there will be transition costs to set up new councils and additional costs to disaggregate county-wide services in multi-unitary models, as well as the ongoing annual costs to run these services in their new geographic areas. As is set out below, the financial modelling conducted by KPMG clearly indicates that multi-unitary models result in higher LGR transition costs and deliver lower annual savings, compared to a single unitary authority for the Kent and Medway area.

- In a single unitary authority there will be **no disaggregation costs for people-based services.**
- There will be significant **recurring annual savings of £69m.**
- A single unitary authority will **avoid substantial implementation costs** and will achieve **good economies of scale.**
- The estimated **'payback period' following transition is 3.3 years.**
- After 10 years, the single unitary model is forecast to achieve **savings of £457.4m.**

The following table provides comparison of key financial information across the options being considered for Kent and Medway.

| LGR option | Implementation costs (one off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | 1a enhancement / Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period (years) | 10-year cumulative impact of transformation (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1a | (99.4) | 75.0 | (6.0) | 69.0 | 3.3 | 457.4 |
| 3a | (127.7) | 69.4 | (19.7) - (29.2) | 49.7 - 40.2 | 5.4 - 6.7 | 132.1 – 226.5 |
| 4b | (130.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) - (48.6) | 34.6 - 18.9 | 7.8 - 14.3 | (80.6) – 76.7 |
| 4d | (135.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) - (48.6) | 34.6 - 18.9 | 7.9 - 14.5 | (85.6) – 71.7 |
| 5a | (139.1) | 65.7 | (46.0) - (68.1) | 19.7 - (2.4) | 14.0 – no payback | (298.1) – (77.9) |

**The range demonstrates the sensitivity of changing just one of the cost assumptions in the model between 0% and 1% for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and*

*children's social care. The range is not required for 1a as there is no disaggregation of social care.*

*** Recurring savings = gross reorganisation savings minus disaggregation costs*

**A single unitary authority is financially sustainable and fairest for the entire county**
As well as having higher transition costs and lower savings potential, multi-unitary models would lead to significant financial disparities between councils. New local authorities in Eastern and Northern areas could inherit unsustainable financial challenges due to a combination of high levels of need, limited revenue raising potential and large debts.

- In a single unitary authority, there would be a **single rate of council tax** for the entire area. Whereas, in a multi-unitary model, some residents would have to pay more.
- In a single unitary authority, **council tax would be raised from across the entire area** and distributed where needed. Whereas in multi-unitary models the West Kent unitary authority would have much greater revenue raising potential compared to unitary authorities in Northern and Eastern areas.
- **The level of debt currently held by councils in Kent and Medway is unequal**, with low levels of debt in Western areas and higher levels in Northern and Eastern areas. In any of the multi-unitary options, these debts could be concentrated in smaller councils which could prove very challenging for them to service.
- **The levels of reserves currently held by councils are also unequal**, with higher levels of reserves in Western areas. Low levels of reserves could impact the ability of new unitary authorities to pay the implementation costs of LGR and to service inherited debts.
- **The costs of people-based services are unevenly distributed, with particularly high costs for ASC and CSC in Northern and Eastern areas**. In a multi unitary model these costs would be concentrated in smaller councils which could prove unsustainable.
- As well as being unevenly distributed, **the overall costs for people-based services would be higher in a multi-unitary model**. Modelling by Newton estimated that annual costs for people-based services in a single unitary model would be £16.2m lower than the baseline, whereas the costs in a four unitary model would be £20.8 higher, **a difference of £37m**.

**A single unitary authority is viable, efficient and fair - it is the responsible choice**
A single unitary authority is the most financially resilient option and provides the greatest value for money for the residents of Kent and Medway. While there will still be spending challenges, a single unitary authority will ensure that no area in Kent and Medway is at a financial disadvantage or receives lower quality services, compared to other areas following reorganisation.

- It is **the most efficient** as it avoids duplication of roles and services and ensures a consistent standard of delivery across the whole area.
- Even allowing for enhanced investment in community engagement and the proposed Area Assembly model (explained further in Part three of this Strategic Business Case), the running costs are lower than in any of the multi-unitary options. The single

unitary model therefore **strikes a balance between being reflective and responsive to local communities and strengthening financial resilience**.

- A single unitary authority benefits from being able to **raise revenue from across the entire area** and is **the fairest for council taxpayers** as there will be a single rate of council tax.
- **Inherited debt and the ability to service the debt will be distributed across the entire area rather than concentrated in smaller councils**.
- Demand for people-based services will be met by revenue and resources drawn from the entire area, ensuring that **no part of the county faces unsustainable spending pressure to deliver vital services**.

## Approach

As part of KCC's commitment to joint working with the other 13 councils in the area, KCC has contributed to the development of a shared evidence base, including for the financial sustainability analysis. The evidence presented in the 'Financial benefits of unitarisation' section is from this work carried out by KPMG and is part of the shared evidence base, meaning that it has been carried out on a like-for-like basis and is directly comparable to other business cases.

**Collaborative working on finance across Kent councils**

All fourteen S151 Officers are members of the long-standing Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG) and for LGR have been responsible for the following key activities:

- Developing working relationships and shared understanding of finances, which will be a key enabler of successful LGR
- Informing a shared financial baseline
- Reviewing and collectively updating assumptions behind a base case model for inclusion in proposals to Government.

**Approach to modelling the financial impact of LGR**

Appendix X provides more detailed description of assumptions, approach and results of the financial modelling.

All finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have collaboratively reviewed and informed the financial modelling to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to Government.

The financial model aims to:

- Quantify the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options.
- Compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings, costs, and payback.

The financial model estimates savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs calculated with reference to a series of benchmarked LGR business cases, the characteristics of the options being put forward and the characteristics of local government in Kent.

Whilst being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all Kent Finance officers agree that LGR does not in itself provide the solution to the scale of the financial challenge faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG) have collectively agreed on the following position on the analysis carried out:

- LGR, whilst generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.
- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be funded.
- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new authorities may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new authorities.

This financial case for the single unitary model includes further analysis by Newton and by KCC Finance Officers relating to disaggregation of people-based services. It also includes analysis by KCC Finance Officers on council tax harmonisation, debt, reserves and value of investments based on publicly available data. This is in the section ‘Other financial considerations’.

## Financial benefits and costs of unitarisation

KPMG’s financial model is made up of three calculators –

- Implementation costs – estimates the one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model
- Disaggregation costs – estimates the additional recurring expenditure that results from moving to a new unitary model
- Reorganisation savings – estimates the annual high-level savings potential from efficiencies that can be unlocked through reorganisation (e.g. workforce, governance, systems etc.)

The following table provides comparison of key financial information across the options being considered for Kent and Medway.

| LGR option | Implementation costs (one off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | 1a enhancement / Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period (years) | 10-year cumulative impact of transformation (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1a | (99.4) | 75.0 | (6.0) | 69.0 | 3.3 | 457.4 |
| 3a | (127.7) | 69.4 | (19.7) - (29.2) | 49.7 - 40.2 | 5.4 - 6.7 | 132.1 – 226.5 |
| 4b | (130.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) - (48.6) | 34.6 - 18.9 | 7.8 - 14.3 | (80.6) – 76.7 |
| 4d | (135.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) - (48.6) | 34.6 - 18.9 | 7.9 - 14.5 | (85.6) – 71.7 |
| 5a | (139.1) | 65.7 | (46.0) - (68.1) | 19.7 - (2.4) | 14.0 – no payback | (298.1) – (77.9) |

**The range demonstrates the sensitivity of changing just one of the cost assumptions in the model between 0% and 1% for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care. The range is not required for 1a as there is no disaggregation of social care.*

*** Recurring savings = gross reorganisation savings minus disaggregation costs*

### Implementation costs

The estimated one-off implementation costs for transitioning to the single unitary model are **£99.4m**. This is substantially lower than the implementation costs for any of the multi-unitary models, which have been estimated between **£127.7m** for the three unitary model and **£139.1m** for the five unitary model. The costs associated with implementing the single unitary model are broken down in the table below.

***One off implementation costs for the single unitary model***

| Category | Description | Mid Case (£000) |
|---|---|---|
| Workforce - Exit | Compensation paid to employees because of restructuring/redundancies, including redundancy payments, pension strain, TUPE, salary harmonisation, and other contract termination fees. | 41,194 |
| Workforce - Development | Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities. | 4,478 |
| Transition - Team | Implementation programme team including Legal, Contract Negotiation, Project and Programme Management, and specialist support. | 12,873 |
| Transition - Culture and Communications | Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. This should inform the public, stakeholders, and employees of proposed changes and address concerns. | 3,582 |
| Transition - Processes | Work required to harmonise processes and facilitate effective service transition. This includes specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition, and new policies and procedures. | 8,731 |
| Consolidation - Systems | Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration, commonality of cyber security, and training for new systems. | 6,269 |
| Consolidation - Estates and Facilities | Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases. | 5,731 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Contingency | Additional 20% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates. | 16,572 |
| | **Total** | **£99,429** |

The single unitary model avoids some of the major costs associated with implementation that would occur in a multi-unitary model. This includes avoiding costs associating with disaggregating current KCC systems compared to the other models and an assumed £3m implementation cost per additional unitary authority.

Implementation costs in the single unitary model are phased over a shorter period of time compared to the multi-unitary models, with most costs incurred within three years, as set out in the table below. This is because the transition process will be materially different in that it will be a centralisation programme rather than a disaggregation programme. This means that payback will be achieved sooner, resulting in greater savings at the 10-year mark.

***Implementation costs phasing for single unitary model***

| Category | Shadow year – 27/28 | Year 1 – 28/29 | Year 2 – 29/30 | Year 3 – 30/31 | Year 4 – 31/32 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Workforce - Exit | 5% | 15% | 40% | 40% | |
| Workforce - Development | 10% | 50% | 40% | | |
| Transition - Team | 25% | 40% | 30% | 5% | |
| Transition - Culture and Communications | 20% | 50% | 30% | | |
| Transition - Processes | 5% | 25% | 40% | 30% | |
| Consolidation - Systems | 5% | 25% | 40% | 30% | |
| Consolidation - Estates and Facilities | | 5% | 25% | 30% | |
| Contingency | 10% | 30% | 30% | 30% | |

**1a enhancement / Disaggregation costs**

In the single unitary model, there is no disaggregation of people-based services. In comparison to the multi-unitary models this produces a major recurring saving. The estimated recurring costs of **£6.0m** in the single unitary model relate to the costs to run the three Area Assemblies, and the place-based services which they will have responsibility for, and the enhance community engagement function as set out in the table below. These costs are not phased as they are assumed to be incurred from day 1.

The costs for the Area Assemblies were estimated using the jointly agreed methodology for disaggregation which was jointly agreed to by the 14 councils, with data provided by KCC. The same modelling assumptions and cost categories were used as the other LGR options, including management, IT, and commissioned spend.

While these are not strictly disaggregation costs as they will still be run by a single unitary authority, they are an extra recurring cost which will be incurred due to the structures of the single unitary authority. They have therefore been included alongside the disaggregation calculation for comparison and transparency.

***Enhancement costs for the single unitary model***

| Category | Description | Mid Case (£000) |
|---|---|---|
| Cost of community navigators | As part of the additional community engagement team it is expected there will be 27 additional community navigators. These are expected to be KCC grade 10 posts. | 1,100 |
| Cost of supervisors | Also, as part of the additional community engagement team, there will also be three additional supervisors at KCC grade 12. | 164 |
| Enhanced contact centre | To support the 1 unitary, the existing contact centre will be enhanced. This is currently a contracted and it is assumed that the scope of the contract will be extended. | 1,000 |
| Enhanced consultation team | Also to support the 1 unitary, the consultation team will also be enhanced by adding 3 additional FTE to the existing team of 4. | 221 |
| Area Assemblies | Additional costs associated with Area Assemblies – relating to highways maintenance, economic development, family hubs, community services, environmental management and community safety. | 3,509 |
| | **Total** | **6,024** |

As well as ensuring the continuity of critical services, maintaining people-based services at the county-wide level has clear financial benefits. This will guarantee the financial sustainability of these services, particularly in light of geographic disparities in demand for services (as is detailed under 'Other financial considerations').

While there is an additional cost to run the Area Assemblies and place-based services in our model, as well as the enhanced community engagement function, these costs are immaterial in comparison to the substantial disaggregation costs that the multi-unitary models will incur. The single unitary model therefore strikes a balance between being reflective and responsive to local communities and strengthening financial resilience.

**Reorganisation savings**

The estimated recurrent savings that would be achieved for the single unitary model is **£75.0m**. These savings are higher than would be achieved in any of the multi-unitary models. This is because a single unitary would achieve maximum economies of scale, whereas with each additional unitary authority the potential savings are eroded. A detailed breakdown of the savings for the single unitary model is included in the table below.

***Reorganisation savings for the single unitary model***

| Category | Description | Mid Case (£000) |
|---|---|---|
| Optimising Leadership | Reviewing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication and enhance operational efficiency, by merging similar responsibilities into fewer and more impactful positions. | 10,838 |
| Right Sizing the Organisation | Determining the right size of the organisation, proportionate to the services that are being delivered, offset by the costs of new technology and upskilling individuals. Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation. | 20,843 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Consolidating Corporate Services | Consolidating back-office functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT) to streamline operations, enhance efficiencies and unlock savings. | 8,337 |
| Procurement & 3rd Party Spend | Centralising procurement to determine resultant costs/savings through relative purchasing power and renegotiating terms with suppliers.<br>Where appropriate, consolidating similar contracts for service delivery, presents an opportunity to renegotiate terms and achieve economies of scale with suppliers. | 12,506 |
| Service Contract Consolidation | Understanding current and joint service arrangements between Councils, and what savings (or costs) may be incurred on consolidation.<br>Determining the optimum sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced. This will need to consider both financial and operational efficiency and will consider existing arrangements with third parties. | 10,421 |
| Proportionate Democratic Services | Reviewing the costs of democratic services (elections, committee support, etc.) to be proportionate to the new authority. Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (e.g. committees, elections). | 2,918 |
| Improved Digital & IT Systems | Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes, can lead to significant time and cost savings.<br>Unified platforms and systems rationalisation reduce licensing, support, and admin overheads. | 5,002 |
| Asset & Property Optimisation | Reviewing property portfolio to ensure alignment with the council's overall objectives and community needs. | 7,503 |
| Customer Engagement | Enhancing customer contact facilities, determining the needs of citizens in the new authority and developing a proportionate customer contact centre, where appropriate including self-service through digital channels, to improve customer engagement, satisfaction and drive operational efficiencies and cost savings. | 2,501 |
| Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes | Exploring consolidation of fleets and any route efficiencies, to reduce costs and minimise environmental impact.<br>Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs. | 2,501 |
| Contingency | 10% contingency included to allow prudence in estimates | -8,337 |
| | **Total** | **75,035** |

As with implementation costs, the phasing of these savings are delivered over a shorter period than in the multi-unitary models, mostly within three years as set out below, meaning that the full benefit of reorganisation will be realised sooner.

***Reorganisation savings phasing for the single unitary model***

| Category | Year 1 – 28/29 | Year 2 – 29/30 | Year 3 – 30/31 | Year 4 – 31/32 | Year 5 – 32/33 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Optimising Leadership | 10% | 40% | 40% | 10% | |
| Right Sizing the Organisation | 10% | 40% | 40% | 10% | |
| Consolidating Corporate Services | 10% | 40% | 40% | 10% | |
| Procurement & 3rd Party Spend | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Service Contract Consolidation | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |
| Proportionate Democratic Services | 80% | 20% | | | |
| Improved Digital & IT Systems | 5% | 30% | 30% | 30% | 5% |
| Asset & Property Optimisation | 10% | 15% | 25% | 25% | 25% |
| Customer Engagement | 20% | 40% | 40% | | |
| Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes | | 20% | 45% | 35% | |
| Contingency | 15% | 30% | 30% | 20% | 5% |

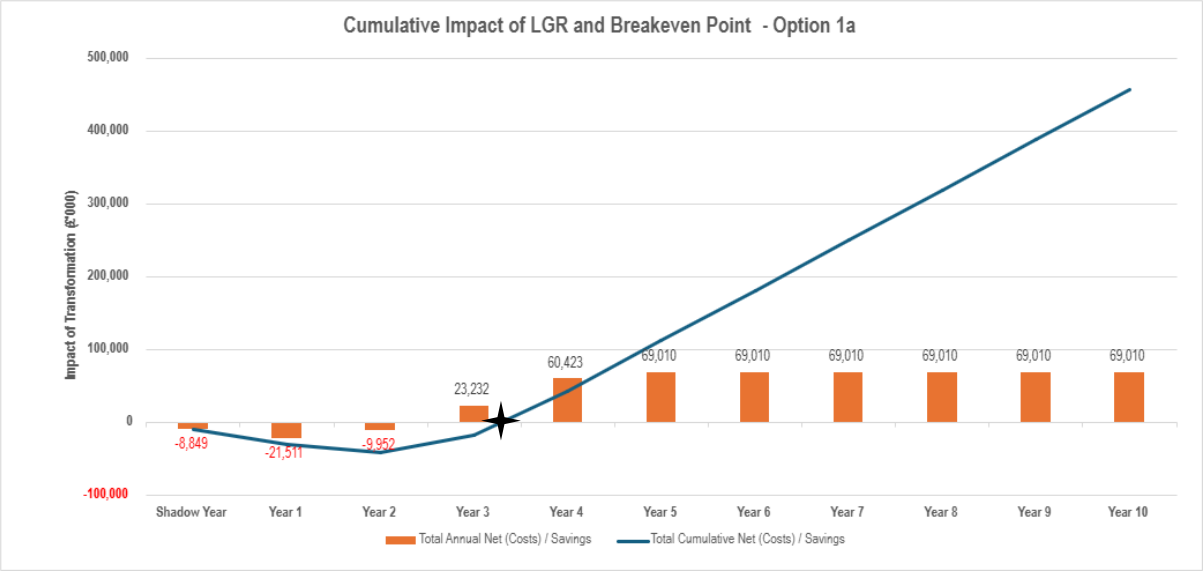
**Net recurring annual saving, payback period and 10-year cumulative impact**
The net recurring saving, once all implementation costs and savings have been phased in, for the single unitary model is **£69m per year.** This is a greater recurrent saving than would be made in any of the multi-unitary models with estimates ranging from £49.7m saving in option 3a to a potential additional cost of £2.4m in option 5a.

In the single unitary authority, the estimated payback period, allowing for phased costs and savings, is **3.3 years**. This is far quicker than any of the multi-unitary options, in particular options 4b and 4d which could take over 14 years to payback, and option 5a which may never achieve payback.

For option 1a, the 10-year cumulative impact of transformation is a saving of **£457.4m** which is more than double the highest estimated saving for the multi-unitary options even at the higher end of the range (option 3a). The 1a impact is broken down over the 10-year period in the table and graph below.

***10 year impact for the single unitary model***

| (£000s) | Shadow 27/28 | Yr 1 28/29 | Yr 2 29/30 | Yr 3 30/31 | Yr 4 31/32 | Yr 5 32/33 | Yr 6 33/34 | Yr 7 34/35 | Yr 8 35/36 | Yr 9 36/37 | Yr 10 37/38 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Implementation costs | -8,849 | -24,366 | -35,609 | -28,312 | -2,293 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1a enhancement costs | 0 | -6,024 | -6,024 | -6,024 | -6,024 | -6,024 | -6,024 | -6,024 | -6,024 | -6,024 | -6,024 |
| Reorganisation savings | 0 | 8,879 | 31,681 | 57,568 | 68,740 | 75,035 | 75,035 | 75,035 | 75,035 | 75,035 | 75,035 |
| Annual net savings | -8,849 | -21,511 | -9,952 | 23,232 | 60,423 | 69,010 | 69,010 | 69,010 | 69,010 | 69,010 | 69,010 |
| | | | | | | | **Cumulative impact of transformation after 10 years** | | | **£457,405** | |




The difference in cumulative benefit between a single unitary and the multi-unitary options on Band D council tax over a ten-year period is:

3a – between £340 and £478
4b – between £560 and £791
4d – between £567 and £799
5a – between £787 and £1,111

## Other financial considerations

For the following analysis conducted by Newton and by KCC Finance Officers, options 4d and 5a have not been included as part of the comparison. For the Newton analysis, this is because the analysis was conducted prior to these options being proposed. For the analysis conducted internally by KCC, this is because the boundaries for these options do not align with existing district boundaries.

When calculating 'per head of population' measures, the KCC internal analysis used mid-2023 projections of population per district.

### Council tax harmonisation

Council tax harmonisation is the process of aligning council tax rates across different areas when multiple councils merge into a single unitary authority. Under our proposal for a single unitary authority this process would apply to all 14 councils in the Kent and Medway area, meaning that there would be a single rate of council tax covering the entire area. This is in contrast to the current situation or to any of the multi-unitary models, in which there would be multiple council tax rates across the area, with some residents paying more than others depending on where they live.

Council tax harmonisation is a legal requirement for new unitary authorities and they must set a uniform level of council tax by year 8 of their existence. The approach to council tax harmonisation will be a decision for the new unitary authority. They may choose to harmonise in year 1 or gradually, by incrementally increasing and decreasing rates in

different areas towards a uniform level. They will also need to decide the rate at which they harmonise to, whether that be to the lowest predecessor rate, or at an average point between the different predecessor rates. A gradual approach would mean smaller changes in council tax rates for residents in some local areas, but it would also mean there would be a period in which there are different rates of council tax in different areas within the single unitary authority and depending on the approach taken could lead to lower council tax yields compared to harmonising in year 1.

The table below sets out the current Band D council tax rates for the 14 councils and their taxbase for 25/26. In two-tier areas the rates are combined to give an overall amount. In the Kent and Medway area the highest Band D rate is in Folkestone & Hythe at £1,966 and the lowest is in Medway which is £1,834 – a difference of £162.

***Band D Council tax rates and taxbase 2025/26***

| Council | 25/26 Band D Charge | 25/26 Combined Band D Charge | 25/26 Taxbase (net band D equivalent dwellings) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kent CC | £1,691.19 | - | (587,921.91) |
| Medway UA | £1,834.27 | - | 92,100.20 |
| Ashford | £193,58 | £1,884.77 | 49,332.00 |
| Canterbury | £247.05 | £1,938.24 | 55,053.98 |
| Dartford | £188.64 | £1,879.83 | 41,702.34 |
| Dover | £220.77 | £1,911.96 | 42,119.72 |
| Folkestone & Hythe | £304.81 | £1,996.00 | 41,413.64 |
| Gravesham | £237.96 | £1,929.15 | 35,442.89 |
| Maidstone | £301.68 | £1,992.87 | 68,085.50 |
| Sevenoaks | £251.01 | £1,942.20 | 53,008.33 |
| Swale | £206.64 | £1,897.83 | 50,518.20 |
| Thanet | £271.05 | £1,962.24 | 48,260.89 |
| Tonbridge & Malling | £245.30 | £1,936.49 | 53,849.82 |
| Tunbridge Wells | £211.20 | £1,902.39 | 49,134.60 |
| | | **Total** | **680,022.11** |

Source – MHCLG Council Tax Statistics (published annually)

In the single unitary model, the harmonised Band D tax rate at a weighted average level would be £1,919.86. This is lower than the weighted average Band D rates in most of the other unitary authorities in the multi-unitary models, where rates range from £1,865.37 to £1,947.49. At these rates, most households in a single unitary model would pay less council tax than if they were resident in one of the multi-unitary models. As explained above, the approach to harmonisation will be a decision for the new unitary authorities and these figures are for illustrative purposes. For the modelling set out below we have assumed that council tax would be harmonised in year 1.

***Weighted average Band D council tax rates, per proposed unitary authority***

| | 1a - Single unitary | 3a – three unitaries | 4b – four unitaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kent and Medway | £1,919.86 | - | - |
| North | - | £1,872.83 | £1,865.37 |
| East | - | £1,937.42 | £1,938.59 |
| Mid | - | - | £1,922.05 |
| West | - | £1,947.49 | £1,947.49 |

The table below forecasts the overall tax yields for new unitary authorities if harmonising at these levels in year 1, and for comparison also sets out the council tax yield per head of population. In the multi-unitary models, when harmonising at an average point, there is a disparity in the amount of council tax raised per resident between the West Kent unitary authority and the other authorities, with West Kent having greater revenue raising potential. This reflects the higher property values in the districts which would make up the West Kent unitary authority.

***Council tax yield if set at weighted average in year 1, per proposed unitary authority***

| | **1a - Single unitary** | | **3a – three unitaries** | | **4b – four unitaries** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total council tax yield | Council tax yield per head | Total council tax yield | Council tax yield per head | Total council tax yield | Council tax yield per head |
| Kent and Medway | £1,305.6 | £688 | - | - | - | - |
| North | - | - | £411.6m | £613 | £315.7m | £613 |
| East | - | - | £457.6m | £685 | £281.9m | £673 |
| Mid | - | - | - | - | £271.5m | £670 |
| West | - | - | £436.4m | £783 | £436.4m | £783 |

**Debt**

Following unitarisation, in any of the multi-unitary models KCC's debt would need to be apportioned to the new unitary authorities and the debt of the other 13 councils will be inherited by the successor authorities. As a share of the total debt in the 14 councils, KCC holds just under a third (31%) of the total debt of the 14 councils. How the KCC debt is apportioned and the servicing of debt will be decisions for the new unitary authorities. This would be a complicated and likely contentious process, particularly as KCC's debt would need to be distributed across the new authorities.

As the tables below demonstrate, the level of debt across Kent and Medway is unequal, with low levels of debt in Western areas and higher levels in Northern and Eastern areas. This means that the creation of multiple unitary authorities would likely result in two authorities inheriting a potentially unsustainable level of debt from the outset of their existence.

Whereas in a single unitary authority for Kent and Medway, all of the debt of the 14 predecessor councils would be inherited by the new unitary authority meaning there would be no area-based disparity in the amount of debt. Additionally, the ability to raise revenue from across the entire area would mean the single unitary authority would likely have greater capability to service the debts in comparison to some of councils in the multi-unitary models. The figures set out in the tables below are based on published information about total borrowing as of the end of the 2024/25 financial year.

***Council borrowing***

| | **Total borrowing (£000s)** | **Debt per head** |
|---|---|---|
| Kent CC | 732,563 | £455 |
| Medway UA | 612,129 | £2,134 |
| Ashford | 260,857 | £1,886 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Canterbury | 182,589 | £1,142 |
| Dartford | 26,888 | £223 |
| Dover | 102,378 | £863 |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 107,562 | £969 |
| Gravesham | 176,131 | £1,635 |
| Maidstone | 65,000 | £353 |
| Sevenoaks | 13,999 | £115 |
| Swale | 13,000 | £83 |
| Thanet | 37,138 | £264 |
| Tonbridge & Malling | 0 | £0 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 0 | £0 |
| **Total** | **2,330,234** | **£1,228** |

Source – MHCLG Borrowing and investments live table (published quarterly)

The table below shows the levels of debt that the new unitary authorities would inherit if KCC's debt was apportioned based on population share across the 12 districts the debt of the other 13 authorities allocated to successor areas. Please note, this is for illustrative purposes only. The process for apportioning KCC's debt would be negotiated and decided upon by the new unitary authorities.

***Inherited debt based on population share, per proposed unitary authority***

| | **1a - Single unitary** | | **3a – three unitaries** | | **4b – four unitaries** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total inherited (£000s) | Debt per head | Total inherited (£000s) | Debt per head | Total inherited (£000s) | Debt per head |
| Kent and Medway | 2,330,234 | £1,228 | - | - | - | - |
| North | - | - | 1,002,994 | £1,494 | 919,072 | £1,784 |
| East | - | - | 994,534 | £1,488 | 512,710 | £1,224 |
| Mid | - | - | - | - | 565,746 | £1,396 |
| West | - | - | 332,706 | £597 | 332,706 | £597 |

**Exceptional financial support**

In the financial year 2025/26 Medway Council has been granted a capitalisation direction of £18.5m under the Government's Exceptional Financial Support.

Through LGR an agreement would need to be found to manage responsibility for servicing the debt and taking action to put the whole area on a firmer financial footing. This will require a proportion of total revenue and in the context of reorganisation and disaggregation of county wide services, the relative scale of the challenge becomes greater. A large single unitary authority will be in a better position to absorb the debt and will avoid the complexities and costs of disaggregation, ensuring that the council is financially resilient.

**Reserves**

It is likely that reserves will be utilised (at least partly) to fund the transition costs of reorganisation. As with debt, in a multi-unitary scenario KCC's reserves would need to be apportioned to the new unitary authorities and the debt from the other 13 councils would be

inherited by the successor authorities. The 2024/25 reserves for each of the 14 councils is set out in the table below.

***Council reserves***

| | Net Revenue Reserves (excl. schools and DSG) (£000s) | Net Revenue Reserves (excl. schools and DSG) per head |
|---|---|---|
| Kent CC | 334,176 | £208 |
| Medway UA | 37,519 | £131 |
| Ashford | 36,516 | £264 |
| Canterbury | 35,714 | £223 |
| Dartford | 81,341 | £674 |
| Dover | 45,990 | £388 |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 20,555 | £185 |
| Gravesham | 19,324 | £179 |
| Maidstone | 45,428 | £247 |
| Sevenoaks | 25,887 | £213 |
| Swale | 20,313 | £130 |
| Thanet | 10,204 | £73 |
| Tonbridge & Malling | 39,374 | £291 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 20,880 | £178 |
| **Total** | **773,221** | **£408** |

Source – Provisional 2024-25 Revenue Outturn (RO – published annually)

The table below shows the amount of reserves that the new unitary authorities would inherit if KCC's reserves were apportioned based on population share. Please note, this is for illustrative purposes only. The process for apportioning KCC's reserves would be negotiated and decided upon by the new unitary authorities.

***Inherited reserves based on population share, per proposed unitary authority***

| | 1a - Single unitary | | 3a – three unitaries | | 4b – four unitaries | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total inherited (£000s) | Reserves per head | Total inherited (£000s) | Reserves per head | Total inherited (£000s) | Reserves per head |
| Kent and Medway | 773,221 | £408 | - | - | - | - |
| North | - | - | 238,257 | £355 | 185,591 | £360 |
| East | - | - | 287,661 | £430 | 178,857 | £427 |
| Mid | - | - | - | - | 161,469 | £399 |
| West | - | - | 247,304 | £443 | 247,304 | £443 |

On this basis, in the multi-unitary options, Western areas would inherit higher levels of reserves per head of population than other areas. When considering this alongside significantly lower inherited debt, a West Kent unitary authority would likely be in a stronger position to finance reorganisation and be more financially resilient compared to other parts of the county.

**Assets**

As well as through council tax and reserves, another way in which new unitary authorities could choose to service debt is through income generated from assets. The tables below set out the value of the cash investments held by the 14 councils in Kent and Medway as of the

end of 2024/25, and the amount that new unitary authorities would inherit in the different scenarios, if investments were apportioned based on population share. Please note, this is for illustrative purposes only. How these investments are apportioned will be for the new unitary authorities to decide. Also note that physical assets have not been included in this analysis.

***Value and type of investments held by councils in Kent and Medway (£000s)***

| | **Total value** | Banks | Public corp-orations | Debt Manag-ement Account | Money Markets | External Funds | Other | Local Authority Loans |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kent CC | **481,566** | 11,71 | 0 | 27,890 | 187,76 | 126,74 | 127,44 | 0 |
| Medway UA | **53,734** | 14,14 | 0 | 0 | 39,591 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ashford | **36,398** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17,398 | 19,000 | 0 | 0 |
| Canterbury | **12,624** | 267 | 0 | 0 | 12,357 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Dartford | **183,169** | 614 | 0 | 0 | 56,059 | 112,42 | 14,069 | 0 |
| Dover | **57,087** | 111 | 0 | 0 | 7,885 | 49,091 | 0 | 0 |
| Folkestone & Hythe | **18,590** | 180 | 0 | 0 | 18,410 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gravesham | **28,048** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3,927 | 14,121 | 0 | 10,000 |
| Maidstone | **33,985** | 11,71 | 0 | 0 | 187,76 | 126,74 | 127,44 | 0 |
| Sevenoaks | **53,734** | 604 | 6,334 | 0 | 5,700 | 5,164 | 6,384 | 0 |
| Swale | **11,032** | 122 | 0 | 0 | 10,910 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Thanet | **35,392** | 2,386 | 0 | 0 | 31,006 | 2,000 | 0 | 0 |
| Tonbridge & Malling | **53,965** | 6,050 | 0 | 0 | 16,524 | 4,250 | 27,141 | 0 |
| Tunbridge Wells | **47,000** | 25,00 | 0 | 7,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15,000 |
| **Total** | **1,070,442** | 61,365 | 6,334 | 34,890 | 416,346 | 332,802 | 168,705 | 50,000 |

Source – MHCLG Borrowing and investments live table (published quarterly)

KCC own close to half of the total value of investments held by the 14 councils (45%) in Kent and Medway. This is a higher ratio than the amount of debt that KCC holds (31%), so how this is apportioned in a multi-unitary model will be even more significant than how debt is apportioned in such a scenario. As with the apportioning of debt, this could be a complicated and contentious process which would be avoided in the single unitary model.

It is notable that the value of Dartford's investments is significantly higher than other district councils in Kent and Medway. This has an impact on the value of investments which would be inherited by the new unitary authorities in the multi-unitary models. In option 3a, it evens out the value of investments between the unitary authorities as there is little disparity, but in option 4b the impact is that the North Kent unitary authority would inherit a notably larger share of the value of investments, and the Mid Kent unitary authority would have a relatively low share of the value of investments.

***Inherited value of investments based on population share, per proposed unitary authority***

| | 1a - Single unitary | | 3a – three unitaries | | 4b – four unitaries | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Value of investments (£000s) | Value per head | Value of investments (£000s) | Value per head | Value of investments (£000s) | Value per head |
| Kent and Medway | 1,070,442 | £564 | - | - | - | - |
| North | - | - | 390,921 | £582 | 333,268 | £647 |
| East | - | - | 359,939 | £539 | 230,401 | £550 |
| Mid | - | - | - | - | 187,192 | £462 |
| West | - | - | 319,582 | £573 | 319,582 | £573 |

**Net revenue**

The table below sets out net revenue figures compiled by KPMG as part of the shared evidence for 2025/26 for the 14 councils in Kent and Medway. KCC's net revenue of £1.7bn is 73% of the combined total of the 14 councils. This clearly demonstrates the size of KCC, both in absolute terms, and when compared to the other 13 councils. It also indicates that, to a large extent, the capacity and capability required to operate at the scale of a single unitary authority for the entire area, already exists within KCC.

These net revenue figures also show that disparities in spending power per head exist between areas. In particular, between Medway, where there is lower spending power per head of population, and the districts within Kent – net revenue per head in Medway is £1,185, compared to a combined figure of between £1,202 in Canterbury and £1,295 in Dartford.

***Net revenue***

| | Net Revenue (£000s) | Net Revenue per head | Net revenue per head – combined |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kent CC | 1,698,857 | £1,055 | - |
| Medway UA | 339,910 | £1,185 | - |
| Ashford | 26,710 | £193 | £1,248 |
| Canterbury | 23,580 | £147 | £1,202 |
| Dartford | 29,009 | £240 | £1,295 |
| Dover | 28,274 | £238 | £1,293 |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 22,886 | £206 | £1,261 |
| Gravesham | 17,943 | £167 | £1,222 |
| Maidstone | 28,323 | £154 | £1,209 |
| Sevenoaks | 21,978 | £181 | £1,236 |
| Swale | 30,335 | £195 | £1,250 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Thanet | 21,979 | £157 | £1,212 |
| Tonbridge & Malling | 22,521 | £167 | £1,222 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 17,909 | £153 | £1,208 |
| **Total** | **2,330,214** | | **£1,228** |

The table below sets out the inherited net revenue for the unitary authorities in the different proposed options, based on apportioning KCC's revenue by share of population. There is relatively little disparity between the unitary councils in any of the options. This is because KCC's share of net revenue is so large that it evens out any disparities when distributed. Within a single unitary authority, there would be no disparity at all, and the relatively strong spending power that would be inherited by KCC would compensate for the lower spending power inherited from Medway.

***Net revenue based on population share, per proposed unitary authority***

| | **1a - Single unitary** | | **3a – three unitaries** | | **4b – four unitaries** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Net revenue (£000s) | Net revenue per head | Net revenue (£000s) | Net revenue per head | Net revenue (£000s) | Net revenue per head |
| Kent and Medway | 2,330,214 | £1,228 | - | - | - | - |
| North | - | - | 822,674 | £1,226 | 627,868 | £1,219 |
| East | - | - | 828,447 | £1,240 | 515,856 | £1,231 |
| Mid | - | - | - | - | 627,828 | £1,252 |
| West | - | - | 679,093 | £1,218 | 679,093 | £1,218 |

**Disaggregation and demand on services**

KCC commissioned Newton to conduct an analysis to forecast the costs of disaggregating people-based services, specifically for - Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and services for children with SEND. Their approach was based on a hybrid model including both disproportionately inherited costs on day one (using a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios rather than detailed financial analysis) as well as additional future costs. This work was conducted in May 2025, using up to date data provided by KCC. It is separate to the work carried out by KPMG for the shared evidence base.

The results of this analysis clearly point to the single unitary option being the most advantageous for people-based services, from a cost perspective. Of all the scenarios modelled, the single unitary was the only one in which there would not be a significant cost of disaggregating these services, in fact, it was found to have a cost saving of £16.2m in the first year against the baseline spend in 2025. **Whereas in option 3a there would be an additional cost of £14.9m in the first year, and in option 4b there would be an additional cost of £20.8m. In the single unitary model, this equates to a saving on these services of £31m compared to the three unitary model and £37m compared to the four unitary model.**

***Change in spend on people-based services from baseline in 2025***

| | 1a - Single unitary | 3a – three unitaries | 4b – four unitaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Spend in year 1 | £1.48bn | £1.51bn | £1.52bn |
| Change from baseline | -£16.17m | +£14.87m | +£20.83m |

As well as resulting in lower costs overall, the single unitary has the advantage of being able to spread the costs and manage demand across the entire Kent and Medway area. Demand for people-based services in Kent and Medway is unevenly distributed across the area, with particularly high demand in Eastern and Northern areas. As set out in the tables below, there are higher costs per resident for people-based services in the East, Mid and North unitary authorities compared to the West unitary authority. This would potentially put these new unitary authorities under unsustainable pressure to meet the costs of these services, particularly as they also have lower revenue raising potential and higher debts than a West unitary authority would have.

For comparability, the results have been shown as an amount per head of population.

***Cost per resident for people-based services, per proposed unitary authority***

| | 1a - Single unitary | 3a – three unitaries | 4b – four unitaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kent and Medway | £759 | - | - |
| North | - | £729 | £730 |
| East | - | £885 | £894 |
| Mid | - | - | £829 |
| West | - | £693 | £693 |

***Cost per resident for Adult Social Care, per proposed unitary authority***

| | 1a - Single unitary | 3a – three unitaries | 4b – four unitaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kent and Medway | £419 | - | - |
| North | - | £353 | £356 |
| East | - | £533 | £530 |
| Mid | - | - | £472 |
| West | - | £401 | £401 |

***Cost per resident for Children's Social Care, per proposed unitary authority***

| | 1a - Single unitary | 3a – three unitaries | 4b – four unitaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kent and Medway | £118 | - | - |
| North | - | £136 | £138 |
| East | - | £131 | £137 |
| Mid | - | - | £129 |
| West | - | £91 | £91 |

***Cost per resident for SEND, per proposed unitary authority***

| | 1a - Single unitary | 3a – three unitaries | 4b – four unitaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kent and Medway | £222 | - | - |
| North | - | £241 | £236 |
| East | - | £220 | £227 |
| Mid | - | - | £227 |
| West | - | £200 | £200 |

Additionally, KCC Finance Officers conducted internal analysis of the 'legacy' costs for Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care which would be inherited by the proposed new unitary authorities from KCC and Medway. The analysis was based on allocating KCC's forecast/actual net spend for 2024/25 according to the geographical area where costs are incurred with the result percentages applied to relevant spending identified for social care in Kent's Revenue Outturn (RO) 2024/25, and the same costs included in Medway's Revenue Outturn return have also been added in. This ensures consistency across Kent and Medway. This is not a precise measure of Ordinary Residence as would apply to Adult Social Care but does give a good indication of where costs would be incurred.

The results showed the same pattern as Newton's analysis with higher spend in Northern and Eastern areas for these services, compared to the West. There are two main reasons which explain the uneven distribution of costs for people-based services. Firstly, there is a high cost per resident of Adult Social Care in Folkestone & Hythe and in Dover districts due to the high proportion of the County's care placements for vulnerable adults in these districts. And secondly, because the costs for Children's Social Services correlate with levels of deprivation, with particularly high costs per resident in Thanet, Swale, and Folkestone & Hythe districts.

***Legacy costs per resident for Adult Social Care, per proposed unitary authority***

| | 1a - Single unitary | 3a – three unitaries | 4b – four unitaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kent and Medway | £430 | - | - |
| North | - | £349 | £343 |
| East | - | £539 | £523 |
| Mid | - | - | £491 |
| West | - | £395 | £395 |

***Legacy costs per resident for Children's Social Care, per proposed unitary authority***

| | 1a - Single unitary | 3a – three unitaries | 4b – four unitaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kent and Medway | £181 | - | - |
| North | - | £230 | £229 |
| East | - | £197 | £198 |
| Mid | - | - | £210 |
| West | - | £102 | £102 |

**Fair Funding review 2.0**

The points above clearly indicate financial disparities in all the proposed multi-unitary models. A West Kent unitary authority would inherit a more sustainable level of debt to

reserves, higher revenue raising potential, and lower costs per resident for people-based services than the other unitary authorities. While new unitary authorities which cover other parts of the county will likely face significant spending pressures to deliver statutory services.

Current Government policy is to review and update the formula to determine funding allocations for local authorities. One of the aims is for funding to more closely match levels of relative needs and resources taking account of differential costs of delivering services and the revenue raising abilities of local authorities. This should result in areas with high levels of need and limited spending power receiving more funding.

Currently, the full impacts of the Fair Funding Review 2.0 are unknown, but it is unlikely that changes in funding levels that occur will fully mitigate financial disparities between new unitary authorities that would be created in a multi-unitary model.

DRAFT

## 7. Assessment against government criteria

KCC's preferred option of a single unitary is a good fit for the criteria on which Government will assess LGR proposals, as set out below.

*Note: Relevant findings of KCC's public and stakeholder engagement will be added to this table in the final Strategic Business Case.*

| Criterion | Arguments for a single unitary in Kent and Medway | Arguments against multiple unitaries in Kent and Medway |
|---|---|---|
| **Criterion A: A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.** | ✓ A single unitary would be the most effective way to ensure that the taxbase is appropriate for the area and there is no undue advantage for one part of the county over another.<br>✓ Would keep Kent and Medway together as a single, functional economic area.<br>✓ Demand pressures, income and spend can be spread across the county rather than being concentrated in individual smaller unitaries, avoiding unmanageable demand in specific localities.<br>✓ A single unitary would maximise the available area over which to manage housing demand, helping to overcome spatial constraints and removing authority boundaries that can hamper housing delivery. | ✘ Internal KCC analysis shows that, at the average rate of harmonisation, there would be disparities in tax yield per head of population, with West Kent able to raise more council tax due to higher property values. This could further entrench existing socio-economic disparities between the West and other areas.<br>✘ West Kent would inherit markedly lower legacy costs for Adult's and Children's Social Care compared to other areas of the county. This would disadvantage North and East Kent.<br>✘ The overall tax yield between different authorities varies considerably in some of the four unitary options.<br>✘ Modelling of multiple unitary options suggests that there will be significant disparities between unitaries in the cost of social care and SEND, which is exacerbated in some options by the location of major adult's residential social care providers and concentrations of deprivation in proposed unitaries.<br>✘ The multi-unitary options would likely face more |

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| | | challenges in housing delivery compared to other options due to the introduction of multiple local authority boundaries. |
| **Criterion B: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.** | ✓ A single unitary is the most financially viable option. It delivers the highest net recurring benefit (£69m), the lowest transition costs (£99m), and has the shortest payback period at just over three years. Operating as a single unitary would generate efficiency savings, financial resilience and would deliver better value for money for the Kent taxpayer.<br>✓ There would be no disaggregation costs for critical countywide services such as social care and SEND, avoiding millions of pounds of additional ongoing cost each year compare. There are also savings from aggregating these services across Kent and Medway – saving an estimated £16.2m per year to provide these services (CCN/Newton people-based services report).<br>✓ The local Area Assemblies will enable a balance of efficiencies against the need for local responsiveness for place-based services which make sense to be delivered locally.<br>✓ A single unitary is best placed to deliver strategic transformation through unified governance and economies of scale. It would be able to support large-scale invest-to-save projects and would have the capacity to implement | ✘ The creation of multiple unitaries leads to higher unitarisation costs, which would have a likely impact on council tax and/or service provision.<br>✘ Multiple unitaries score relatively poorly when considering efficiency and value for money, with lower net recurring benefits, high transition costs and payback periods of between over 5 and over 14 years (or potentially never).<br>✘ Multiple unitaries have high disaggregation costs – between £20 million to £68 million per year.<br>✘ Multiple unitaries results in uneven debt distribution, with West Kent inheriting significantly lower levels of debt compared to North and East Kent.<br>✘ Opportunities for transformation would be significantly limited with multiple unitaries, especially those that would create smaller authorities. The smaller scale of each authority would reduce financial resilience and the ability to absorb upfront costs associated with invest-to-save projects. It would also be harder to deliver consistent transformation across the county as |

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| | strategic, countywide transformation initiatives, whilst Area Assemblies would be able to facilitate more localised transformation programmes that are tailored to the individual needs of communities.<br>✓ It offers the most fair and manageable solution to managing the county's debt as all debt and reserves would be evenly distributed. | different unitaries would have varying levels of service demand and financial capacity.<br>✘ High disaggregation and transition costs would constrain limited resources for small unitaries, whilst the fragmentation of services would increase the risk of duplication and inefficiencies. |
| **Criterion C: Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services to citizens.** | ✓ Avoids the risks and costs associated with disaggregating critical, countywide services such as social care, SEND and safeguarding. Modelling shows that the probability of an authority achieving a good or outstanding Ofsted rating for children's services reduces as the size of the authority shrinks. Equally, for adult social care, CQC quality reporting data indicates an increased likelihood of a good CQC rating for larger local authorities.<br>✓ Provides the necessary scale and capacity to manage Kent's nationally-significant border issues while meeting Kent and Medway needs.<br>✓ This option creates fully balanced service demand levels for both adult and children's social care through continued countywide management.<br>✓ A single unitary would benefit from increased purchasing power, greater capacity and more market influence, allowing it to shape more resilient and responsive | ✘ Multiple unitaries may have implications for service delivery if they cut across partner boundaries. It would also therefore make public service reform more difficult and complex as there would not be co-terminosity with partners.<br>✘ The impact of disaggregation on critical services such as social care, safeguarding and SEND would likely be significant. Disaggregation would lead to the fragmentation of well-established and performing services, with less capacity for central functions like quality assurance, whilst also leading to the duplication of systems and infrastructure.<br>✘ With reduced buying power and limited market shaping ability, it is likely that smaller authorities would struggle to absorb cost surges or withstand market volatility, whilst a lack of scale would lead to increased service delivery costs. This would make it particularly |

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| | markets.<br>✓ With increased resources and funding, a single unitary would be able to invest more heavily in specialist roles, targeted training and advanced technologies, enabling the development of expertise across key service areas.<br>✓ A single unitary would have the necessary funding, expertise, infrastructure and data to deliver successful prevention initiatives, whilst also having the necessary capacity and strategic oversight to be able to develop strategies linked to prevention.<br>✓ A single unitary, supported by three Area Assemblies, would be able to deliver high-quality services by balancing strategic capacity with local responsiveness. The single unitary would have the necessary financial capacity to be able to deliver sustainable social care services whilst the Area Assemblies would be able to focus on the delivery of place-based services for local residents.<br>✓ The geography of the Area Assemblies aligns well with the service delivery footprints of partner agencies, therefore providing opportunities for public service reform. For example, community safety partnerships could work in partnership with the police to tackle antisocial behaviour and crime and disorder. Area Assemblies are well aligned to work with partners to address the wider determinants of | challenging to deliver sustainable social care services. Scope to invest beyond this would therefore be limited, e.g. in prevention or wider visible services as these authorities would likely be all consumed by high-cost critical people services over which they would have limited control. It would also add a level of unnecessary competition.<br>✗ There would also be a diluting of expertise, significantly increased cost through the duplication of systems, risks associated with data transfer, disparity in service offer leading to a feeling of 'postcode lottery' for residents.<br>✗ Multiple unitaries would risk disrupting the established countywide arrangements for managing border challenges, splitting the necessary infrastructure across unitaries and concentrating unsustainable pressures in the East Kent area. |

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| | health.<br>✓ This option would ensure that Kent and Medway retains a strong, unified voice when working with partners in other public sector services (e.g. the NHS and the Police) and with Government, particularly on Kent-based issues which impact critical services – such as issues relating to the border with the EU. | |
| **Criterion D: Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.** | ✓ The single unitary scores highest for efficiency and value for money, which is likely to prove popular with residents. Other options are more costly and these costs would likely be borne by the Kent taxpayer.<br>✓ Having a single unitary would ensure there would be no disparities in council tax levels across the county, avoiding issues of potential unfairness. The introduction of Area Assemblies focused on place-based priorities also means residents would be able to see more easily where their council tax is being spent for those services.<br>✓ Operating as a single unitary would ensure that the Kent and Medway county identity is maintained whilst the establishment of three Area Assemblies (North, East and West) is reflective of local identity and the way people live (i.e. it is consistent with travel to work, education and hospital flows).<br>✓ Equally, the geography of the Area Assemblies align well with the existing service delivery footprints of partner agencies, | ✘ The increased disaggregation and transition costs associated with the creation of multiple unitaries would impact financial viability and value for money. These increased costs may be passed on to residents, which is unlikely to be welcomed.<br>✘ There would be discrepancies in council tax charges, which some residents might consider to be unfair.<br>✘ The creation of multiple unitaries would lead to service fragmentation and there would be less capacity for the strategic planning of services - e.g. coordinated infrastructure and transport links (services which we know are important to residents).<br>✘ The introduction of multiple unitaries might mean residents are charged to use services/assets across local authority boundaries, which is again unlikely to be welcomed by residents.<br>✘ Similarly, partnership working would also be more complex, |

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| | allowing partners to build on established relationships and ways of working to accelerate tailored, community-based integration and reform.<br>✓ Area Assemblies and the enhanced community engagement approach set out can counter any perception of remoteness and provide local decision making on visible services. | with partners having to work with councils across their existing service delivery boundaries. |
| **Criterion E: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.** | ✓ A single unitary would provide the strategic capacity for the devolution of responsibilities and funding that Government is seeking to embed.<br>✓ Kent and Medway is already operating at the appropriate scale and has proven experience to deliver the functions and powers included in the Devolution Framework.<br>✓ Overlaying a mayor across a single unitary would avoid complex and costly aggregation procedures as most of the new MSA functions (e.g. transport and planning) would already operate at a strategic/countywide level as part of the single unitary.<br>✓ The single unitary would have the capacity and collective voice to advocate on behalf of the whole Kent and Medway area and to lobby Government on important regional issues. | ✘ Adding an additional layer of governance through a Mayoral Combined Authority for Kent and Medway will add cost and delivery complexity.<br>✘ A Mayor for Kent and Medway could spend a disproportionate amount of time and resource attempting to facilitate the management of border pressures on the East Kent unitary with government.<br>✘ Multiple unitaries may be more focused on local priorities, rather than contributing to the delivery of strategic ambitions as part of devolution. They may not also have the necessary financial resilience and organisational capacity to deliver on MSA priorities.<br>✘ The creation of multiple unitaries would inevitably lead to the disaggregation of many countywide services, including transport and strategic planning. These types of strategic functions would naturally sit at Mayoral Strategic Level, which means the services would have to |

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| | | be aggregated back upwards following potential future devolution. This not only seems illogical but would also be both costly and complex. |
| **Criterion F: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment** | ✓ The single unitary would have the capacity and resources to create an enhanced model of community engagement and be able to operate closer to communities and support place-based decision making through the Area Assemblies for those services where this makes sense. | ✘ Whilst smaller unitaries would operate closer to communities, it is likely that they would lack the necessary resource capacity to run effective community engagement and to address the local issues that are raised through these mechanisms. |

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# 8. The geographic and spatial reality of Kent and Medway

In coming to a decision on the best option for LGR in Kent and Medway, the reality of the county's geography and position in the country cannot be overlooked. LGR risks dismantling decades of well-established and effective countywide service delivery and response arrangements, which would bring significant costs and risks to Kent and Medway and ripple out across the country. In coming to its preferred option, KCC's administration has developed the following rationale which sets out why it believes that a single unitary is the most viable option in the context in which Kent and Medway operates.




## Kent's unique geography creates nationally-significant challenges

### Gateway to Europe

Kent's geographical location places it at the forefront of the UK's interface with continental Europe. The county serves as the primary entry corridor for both passenger and freight traffic. In 2024, the Port of Dover and Channel Tunnel handled over 11 million passenger crossings and 3.5 million freight vehicles, and these volumes are increasing every year. The Channel Tunnel alone handles a quarter of UK-continental trade, the Port of Dover is the UK's busiest international ferry port and a quarter of all food imports from the EU pass through the Short Straits crossings. This makes our highways network an integral part of the nation's transport system and we manage some of the busiest roads in the country. When there is disruption or higher volume at the borders, either due to unexpected events or regular peaks such as school holidays, effective traffic management is essential to avoid parts of the county coming to a standstill, which has a cost to the Kent and Medway economy and impacts day-to-day life for our residents.

Our position also brings the international humanitarian crisis of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children (UAS children) to Kent's shores through small boat crossings and the border points. As the High Court Judgement in 2023 confirmed, Kent County Council is under statutory duty to accommodate all UAS children who arrive in the area until they are appropriately assessed and transfer arrangements made. In 2024/25, KCC accommodated 2685 UAS children as Looked after Children, and over 10,000 in total since 2016. Children arrive spontaneously and often in large numbers – on a single day in July 2025, 70 UAS children arrived into Kent. Due to delays in the National Transfer Scheme and also in processing asylum claims, Kent is too frequently shouldering the burden of supporting UAS children and care leavers for too long with insufficient funding.

The impact on public services and the wider economy and community of Kent and Medway of these unique pressures is substantial. However, the impacts do not stop at the Kent and Medway border - what happens in Kent has a direct impact on the rest of the country. If border pressures are managed well, passenger and freight journeys flow effectively, securing critical UK supply chains, enabling international trade and underpinning the country's economy. If they are not managed well, wider transport networks quickly become congested, the economy suffers and risks to border resilience and safeguarding of vulnerable people are heightened. People across the country notice what happens at Kent's borders and this impacts perceptions of national security and prosperity.

In Kent and Medway's feedback letter to the Interim Plan submissions for LGR in March 2025, MHCLG has acknowledged the unique considerations for LGR in the area due to Kent's border position. This has been a central factor in determining KCC's position on LGR.

**Disparities in deprivation**

Kent and Medway's unique position between London and the coast has shaped the significant diversity of places within the county, from urban centres in the North neighbouring London, more affluent commuter towns and rural areas in the West and coastal communities in the East.

This diversity drives one of the most significant and pervasive disparities seen within the county - the wide variation in levels of deprivation. Of the local areas (Local Super Output Areas) in Kent that are in the top 10% most deprived in the country according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, 53% of them are found in Thanet and Swale. Conversely, there are very few of these most deprived neighbourhoods in West Kent (none in some Districts).

Higher levels of deprivation result in greater demand for services, limit funds that councils are able to raise through council tax and can create other challenges in supporting local communities. In Kent, financial modelling shows a distinct East/West split, with the West of the county experiencing lower service demand, higher council tax income and lower debt levels. KCC's internal modelling of the impacts of separating countywide services into multiple unitaries has highlighted the areas where spend on services is concentrated, which is primarily in the East and to a lesser extent in the North of the county. In adult social care, spend is significantly higher in Folkestone & Hythe and Dover, due to the location of major providers of residential care for adults in those areas. In children's social care, spend is greatest in the areas of greatest deprivation, particularly Thanet and Swale. Splitting the county through the process of LGR risks embedding disparities between more and less deprived areas, which will be most pronounced in the difference between East and West Kent.

**Peninsular county**

As a peninsular surrounded on multiple sides by 350 miles of coastline, Kent faces economic and social challenges. This impacts on the effective provision of public services in the area - Kent can only look to markets to the West for the provision of services, limiting options for procurement on the most competitive terms. It is also one of the causes of persistent and systemic recruitment and retention challenges in the county, particularly in coastal areas. There are thousands of vacancies in the adult social care sector alone across Kent and

Medway. The area's proximity to London means that it is difficult to compete with the attractive salaries offered just a short distance into the capital. It is therefore important that Kent and Medway has sufficient capacity and capability within its own borders, using its scale to shape markets and develop the skilled workforce our services rely on.

## These challenges have been managed by operating at scale

Across all of the challenges that Kent and Medway's geography brings, the county's scale has allowed pressures to be managed and local and national risks to be largely mitigated. As the largest county council in the country, our countywide services provide capacity and flexibility so they can balance disparities and unique concentrations of demand across our large geography. This provides financial resilience and supports the provision of high-quality service provision, as resources can be targeted to meet needs in different geographical areas. For example, KCC plays a strategic role in the management and allocation of school places and the associated infrastructure which requires careful coordination and planning across all stages of education. Capital funding from the DFE is currently allocated by KCC based on highest need rather than geographic location across the county. Kent has a large and diverse family of schools and established infrastructure in place to support the 300 plus maintained schools for which it is responsible, a high proportion of which are small primary schools serving small rural communities. These schools currently benefit from access to KCC's aggregated buying powers and specialist expertise to ensure the safety of children across the county.

As a large county council, we have been able to invest capacity in corporate functions that support our services to manage demand, such as infrastructure, analytics and transformation. We also benefit from reduced employer overheads through centralised functions such as payroll and Occupational Health.

Kent's scale and its critical mass of capability and capacity is the reason it has been an effective and reliable partner to Government in managing the national border issues that fall to our area, as the following case studies show.

**Case study: Strategic Resilience Team**

KCC Highways & Transportation has set up a Strategic Resilience Team (SRT) to manage the impacts of changes at the UK-French border. This has included EU Exit leading to additional checks for freight, border closures due to COVID-19, the introduction of the EU Entry Exit System (EES) and forthcoming European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) with the SRT's involvement primarily around the impact on Kent's road network (including the Strategic Road Network). The SRT also takes a lead role in the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF), coordinating the implementation of traffic management measures (Operation Brock) when there is planned/unplanned disruption at the portals.

KCC is the lead authority because of the strategic approach that can be taken - the SRT can make a strategic decision without bias to any one area of Kent, given the impacts are countywide but variable by area. Decisions on when to implement traffic management protocols are also based on demand data from the port operators. This data is shared with

KCC because it is a trusted partner and a single entity, meaning commercial sensitivity can be more confidently maintained.

Given the strategic and national importance of keeping trade flowing between the UK and Europe, this issue is best managed at a countywide level to ensure unbiased decisions can be made to minimise any disruption to trade whilst keeping Kent moving.

**Case study: Delivering national projects**

KCC has played a critical role in delivering major national projects, including the construction of the Sevington Inland Border Facility for the Department for Transport, Border Control Posts at Sevington and Whitfield for Defra, and the readiness of Manston Airport as a contingency lorry holding site in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

Kent County Council (KCC) has a long-standing track record of delivering multi-million-pound capital projects across transport, infrastructure, and resilience. Its scale, supply chain access, and established frameworks allow it to respond quickly to urgent national requirements. KCC's ability to act decisively and at scale has been key to delivering critical infrastructure on time. Strong relationships with partners such as National Highways and central government departments further enhance its ability to lead and coordinate complex, cross-agency delivery.

**Case study: Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children**

KCC operates a countywide network of Reception Centres that play a vital role in safeguarding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children arriving through national border points in Kent. These centres are part of the Reception and Safe Care Service (RaSCS), which provides immediate care and assessment before children are transferred under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).

KCC's scale enables it to manage this complex infrastructure effectively. Reception Centres are strategically located across the county, allowing for rapid response and flexible deployment of resources. The council's ability to coordinate across district boundaries ensures continuity of care and avoids fragmentation in service delivery.

Specialist teams—including social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, and Practice Development Officers—are embedded within this system to ensure each child's needs are properly assessed and met. These roles require advanced skills and are difficult to recruit and retain, particularly in high-demand areas like East Kent. KCC's countywide reach supports workforce stability and service resilience.

KCC's scale and infrastructure enable it to manage spontaneous, high-volume arrivals, and despite delays and funding gaps in the NTS, KCC has worked closely with the Home Office to develop a workable solution.

KCC's county-led delivery has ensured we can flexibly respond to national pressures effectively and continue to safeguard vulnerable children.

It is also an advantage under the current arrangements that all of the infrastructure that exists in the county to manage the movement of goods and people across the border (including Eurotunnel, Port of Dover, Sevington Inland Border Facility and Manston Arrivals and Processing Centre) and the Reception Centres for UAS children are within KCC's area, meaning that Government has a single point of contact in local government to work with on border issues. Some of the facilities are however spread across district boundaries, which could complicate the response if multiple unitaries are created.

Underpinning our effective response is the county's strong and well-established partnership arrangements at a Kent and Medway level. The Kent and Medway Resilience Forum allows for a coordinated response between key partners including Police and Fire & Rescue to implement traffic management measures when there is planned or unplanned disruption at the Channel Ports. Previous sections of this Strategic Business Case set out Kent and Medway's partnerships around the economy, housing and other areas. The challenges that face our county have forged stronger and closer working across the Kent and Medway area, which have capitalised on the coterminosity of the majority of public services on a Kent and Medway footprint. Through these partnerships and because of the scale of Kent and Medway as a place, we are able to ensure that the needs of the area are heard by government departments and our public sector partners.

## Disaggregation removes scale and creates unsustainable financial and service demand

The greatest risk of LGR for Kent and Medway is the loss of scale and capacity that splitting the county up will bring and the resulting financial and service demand pressures that would fall to individual unitary councils. The councils in Kent and Medway have a responsibility to ensure that any LGR proposal put forward works for the entire area and does not leave some parts of the county with unsustainable cost and demand pressures.

As the Financial Assessment has set out, modelling shows that the costs of disaggregation of key services in Kent are significant and would challenge the financial sustainability of the new unitaries from day one, with up to £68 million per year of estimated additional costs from disaggregation (option 5a). Separate modelling in the Financial Assessment by KCC and Newton shows that due to the disparities in demand and spend for social care and SEND services, there is also a risk of concentrating the highest cost areas into individual unitaries, posing significant risks to their financial sustainability that would not be mitigated by funding. This is more pronounced in some of the options being considered for Kent and Medway, but will be an unavoidable consequence of LGR for the East of the county in any option that creates multiple unitaries. Unequal levels of debt and reserves will also add to an unsustainable financial position for some areas of the county.

Along with the financial costs, there are significant risks to service delivery from disaggregating countywide services:

**Commissioning**

Splitting large countywide contracts for critical services such as domiciliary and residential care and waste disposal and for support functions such as IT systems into smaller contracts will weaken the ability for councils to benefit from economies of scale and bulk purchasing

power. Different requirements from different neighbouring authorities will make it more complex, and therefore more expensive, for the local market to provide the services that councils need. Central capacity to drive high standards in commissioning and contract management will be reduced, and the ability and influence of the councils to shape markets will be weakened. These disbenefits are greater in Kent and Medway where our market options are limited by our peninsula geography. Disaggregation would also dismantle the joint commissioning arrangements that KCC and Medway Council have established with NHS Kent and Medway in areas such as hospital discharge and children's mental health, create a more complex landscape for future joint arrangements and put unitaries in a less favourable position to agree shared funding arrangements.

**Service quality and consistency**

Disaggregation would remove the countywide support functions and arrangements that maintain high service quality. Performance, quality assurance, management information, technology and transformation functions would need to be duplicated across the unitaries, reducing their capacity to drive high standards. This is on top of the duplication of the back-office functions that keep our services running – finance, HR, IT, property and many more. Disaggregation would also introduce disparities in the service offer and processes for referral, assessment and provision of services across the county.

**Case study: One Front Door for children's services referrals**

KCC's children's services is proud to be rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. A key component is Kent's single countywide Front Door, which provides timely triage of referrals to children's services, consistent decision making and appropriate response to child protection enquiries. In addition, the Out of Hours service provides a robust response to urgent safeguarding enquires for both children and adults across Kent and Medway.

Putting in place a countywide approach has been a key component of our children's services journey from Ofsted Improvement Notice to Outstanding, ensuring that there is no wrong door for referrals and thresholds are applied consistently across the county. Due to its scale, the Front Door benefits from stable staffing, strong management oversight, and a robust learning culture. Innovations such as the "no name consultation" offer for professionals and a new telephony system have improved accessibility and responsiveness for professionals and the public. Countywide delivery also supports strategic partnerships such as with Kent Police, health providers, and education ensuring shared training, improved referral quality, and coordinated safeguarding responses.

The Front Door and Out of Hours services have demonstrated measurable improvements in referral quality, timeliness of decision-making, and multi-agency engagement.

**Case study: Commissioning Speech, Language and Communication Needs services**

KCC has transformed its approach to commissioning therapy services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), replacing fragmented, locally-driven arrangements with a strategic, county-wide model.

Historically, therapy services, particularly for speech, language and communication needs, were accessed through three different NHS providers, which resulted in unequal access and a 'postcode lottery' for families.

Following a comprehensive commissioning review in 2022 which identified geographical gaps and unclear accountability, KCC and the NHS adopted the Balanced System® framework and aligned their commissioning strategies. From October 2025, a county-wide offer is in place: Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy are now delivered directly by KCC, while Speech and Language Therapy is provided by a single NHS provider across the whole of Kent and Medway.

This unified model replaces fragmented arrangements with a consistent, equitable service offer, ensuring that all eligible children, regardless of location, have access to high-quality therapy provision. It eliminates duplication, strengthens governance, and improves accountability. By commissioning at scale, KCC has created a coherent and inclusive framework that supports better outcomes, delivers value for money, and improved experience for Kent families.

**Safeguarding**

Multiagency safeguarding arrangements work on a countywide basis and new arrangements would need to be made with individual unitaries. This will cause disruption to referral processes, data sharing and shared learning from case reviews. Ofsted has praised the countywide response that allows children at risk of harm to receive tailored outreach and responsive support. Arrangements in adult social care around Deprivation of Liberties and the Mental Capacity Act will need to be sustained to ensure the safe and legal care of very vulnerable people.

**Case study: Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board**

The Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board brings together four strategic partners and over 30 relevant organisations. It plays a vital role in coordinating efforts to prevent abuse and neglect, raise awareness, and promote individual wellbeing. Its unified structure across Kent and Medway enables consistent safeguarding practice and shared accountability, while still allowing for localised planning and responsiveness. Recent examples include the development of a countywide Multi-Agency Risk Management Framework and a shared threshold tool for safeguarding concerns. Countywide delivery helps ensure that no individual is missed or underserved due to fragmented services, differing local boundaries, or unclear lines of accountability.

**Resilience**

The scale of countywide services provides inherent resilience to withstand shocks such as emergencies or market failure, minimising impact on people who rely on our services. This enhanced resilience also allows services to cope with peaks in demand, flexing and

reprioritising as needed. Without this capacity, smaller unitaries could be overwhelmed – for example it might only take a small number of children with very complex support needs to provide real threat to a smaller unitary's budget.

**Workforce**

In an already challenging environment in which to recruit and retain the staff with the skills and experience needed to deliver our services, disaggregation would introduce competition between the unitaries as employers. This is likely to have most impact in the East of Kent where workforce shortages in key roles such as social workers, carers and Occupational Therapists are already a challenge, and where there is greatest need. Disaggregation will reduce the capacity and influence of councils to work with education and skills providers to grow the talent that is needed, and will make it harder to offer attractive career pathways to retain staff. Workforce disaggregation will mean that leadership and specialist roles across countywide services need to be duplicated, which may not be possible from the existing countywide pool of staff.

**Disaggregation risks undermine care for the vulnerable - County Councils Network**

Our analysis of disaggregation impacts is in line with the report by the County Councils Network (CCN) and Newton in October 2025 on people-based services. It warns that breaking up county councils into smaller unitary authorities could severely damage the quality and sustainability of people-based services, particularly social care. The proposed reorganisation risks a "triple whammy" of worse services, higher costs, and staffing shortages, with modelling showing that councils serving populations below 500,000 could face up to £270 million in additional annual care costs and require up to 1,100 new senior roles, which may be impossible to fill. Smaller councils are also more likely to experience extreme concentrations of care demand, threatening financial viability and service quality. The report urges government to avoid fragmentation - *"Put simply, reorganisation plans could make or break care services unless the government gets these reforms right."* – Cllr Matthew Hicks, Chair of the County Councils Network.

Along with inheriting disproportionate demand and financial pressures due to Kent's disparities, a unitary council covering the East Kent area would bear the burdens of Kent's border pressures. It would inherit the statutory responsibility for accommodating all UAS children and for traffic management in response to border changes, as well as pressure on other services such as Trading Standards for port testing. It is not feasible for a unitary council of the scale suggested by Government through LGR to manage this alone and they would very likely lack the financial resilience and specialist expertise to cope with the demand and cost pressures. Especially given the delays and underfunding of the current arrangements for UAS children and Care Leavers who were UAS children, a smaller authority would have insufficient resource to manage the demand. Even at KCC's scale, experience and capability of managing the incoming UAS children demand, the safe level has previously been breached. It is also impractical for small unitaries to manage traffic issues related to the border in isolation. Moreover, what is needed going forward is a permanent workable solution to the issues that the border brings. Disaggregation risks not only disrupting the carefully managed solutions that mitigate the worst of the impacts now, but also setting Kent and Medway back in working with Government on a proper long-term

solution that reduces the detriments to our area's economy and quality of life, and the wider risks to the country.

### The impacts of disaggregation cannot be effectively mitigated

Once the strength and scale of countywide services and arrangements has been split up, there is no readily available method to effectively mitigate the disbenefits and risks of this.

Firstly, as Kent and Medway was not included on the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and there is no current timeline in place for future rounds of devolution, Kent and Medway cannot be confident that a Strategic Authority will be in place in the short or medium-term. This means that the area must plan on the basis that LGR will happen in Kent and Medway with no concurrent development of a strategic cross-county vehicle. As set out, it is not viable to manage Kent's unique challenges without strategic, county-level oversight and coordination, and this would have local and national risks.

Secondly, it is the position of KCC, informed by service experts across the council and learning from other areas, that disaggregation cannot be mitigated by shared service arrangements. In theory, these structures could allow the management of key services such as social care to be retained at a county level and mitigate the costs and impacts of splitting service provision into separate unitaries. In practice, there are no successful examples of such shared services arrangements and they are often associated with increased cost and loss of control and accountability for the constituent authorities and reduced quality of service for residents. While this would be a challenge in any area, given the disproportionate demand and cost pressures that the East of the county would face through disaggregation, it seems highly unlikely that any voluntary shared arrangement would be robust enough to keep all the unitaries involved over the long-term, if such an arrangement could even be agreed in the first place. The energy and resource needed to establish and manage shared services arrangements within the county is a distraction to the opposing national policy direction for shared working over a larger regional footprint, including Regional Adoption Agencies and the consolidation of Integrated Care Boards.

### There are opportunities for efficiencies and scope for enhanced service delivery through single tier structure

KCC's administration is of the view that LGR is a distraction that has been forced upon local authorities when they need to be focusing on delivering for their residents. However, given that it is Government's policy to pursue LGR, it is in the best interests of Kent residents that we ensure the process delivers the maximum benefits for our area. As the Financial Assessment has shown, there are clear opportunities for financial efficiencies through consolidating Kent and Medway's 14 authorities into a single unitary. Given the existential financial threats to local government and particularly to some of Kent and Medway's councils, this opportunity cannot be allowed to pass by. Unrestricted from the burdensome ongoing costs of disaggregating major services and with the lowest possible transition costs, the Kent unitary would be able to quickly reinvest maximum savings into services so the people of Kent and Medway see the benefits as soon as possible.

Creating a single tier can provide a more coordinated, streamlined and accountable local government. It opens opportunities to drive up service quality and restore faith that councils

are providing good value for money and delivering for their residents. It can enhance the ability of councils to act as place-shapers and local leaders, creating stronger communities and better quality of life. The primary end goal of LGR is to facilitate Public Service Reform, finding new ways to meet the needs of our residents and communities, integrating support around real life and taking a preventative approach because it is better for people and a more efficient way to manage public resources. A single unitary would maximise the scale, capacity and capability to accelerate this, using the opportunity to tackle some of the long-standing challenges that Kent and Medway is facing and creating a stronger and more prosperous county. Section 11 ‘Better outcomes for people and place’ sets out the priorities that a single council for Kent and Medway could get started on reforming straight away, working with partners and communities.

## A single Kent and Medway council is the most viable financial and strategic option

Having considered all of the evidence, both internally, jointly with our partners and considering the national context in which we operate, KCC is clear that the most viable option for LGR in Kent and Medway is through a single unitary – the Kent Council. We are a unique place, and we need a unique solution. The rest of this Strategic Business Case will set out not only how this option would avoid the alarming risks and costs of splitting our county, but would be a positive force for change, seizing this once in a generation opportunity to create local government in Kent and Medway that works now and into the future.

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# PART THREE – THE NEW KENT COUNCIL

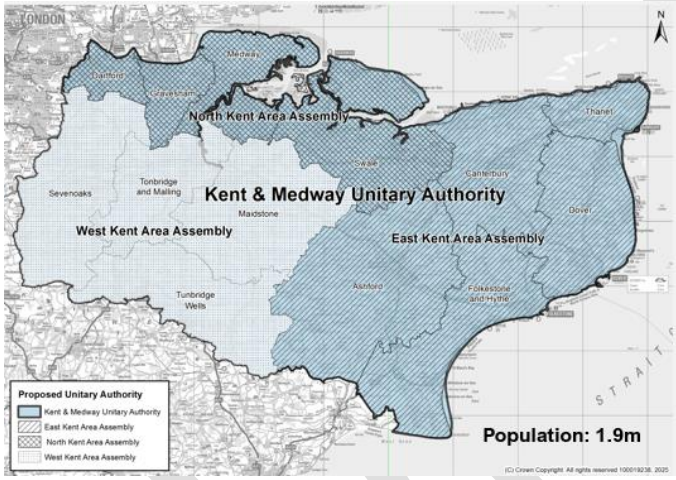
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## 9. Effective and efficient governance and engagement

**This proposal is for a single unitary authority covering the Kent and Medway area – the Kent Council.** The proposed model replaces the current two-tier structure in Kent and the current unitary in Medway.

The reasons why KCC considers this to be the most viable option for LGR in Kent and Medway have been made clear. However, in considering and developing the option, we fully recognise the potential risks of a large unitary authority being too remote and not responsive enough to meet the diverse needs of Kent and Medway's communities or ensure that people feel represented and heard. We have therefore designed the model for the Kent Council to acknowledge and mitigate these risks, thinking beyond traditional ways of working in local government where this will allow the Kent Council to best serve its residents.

The Kent Council will include three Area Assemblies covering North, East and West Kent and comprised of the unitary councillors for those areas. They will be empowered to make decisions on community services in a way that suits the needs and circumstances of the local area.




Aims to combine the strengths of the 3UA and 1UA option under a single model:

- A single unitary for Kent and Medway would set the council's budget and strategy including for spatial development and would be responsible for decision-making and delivery of people-based services – e.g. Social Care and SEND.
- Three 'Area Assemblies' would sit underneath the single unitary – these would be responsible for decision-making and delivery of place-based services.

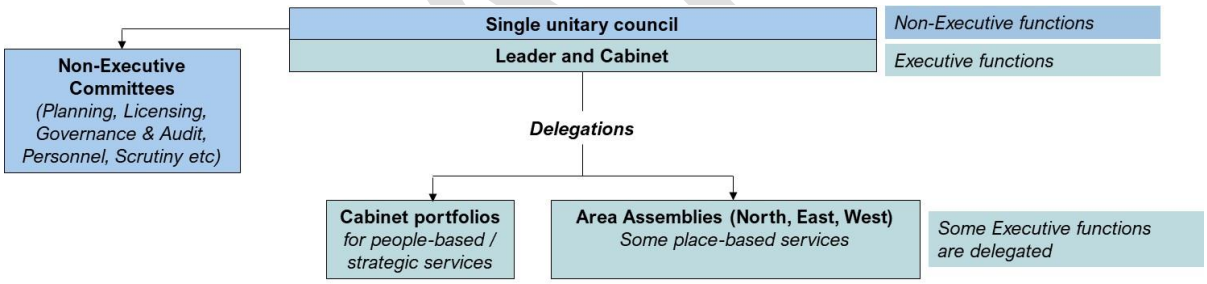
This section of the Strategic Business Case sets out how the Kent Council would work and later sections set out the outcomes it would deliver.

### Effective governance, representation and engagement

Our starting point in designing the Kent unitary model has been to look at the functions of the council. The responsibilities of Local Government are separated into Non-Executive and Executive functions, both of which have differing arrangements for delegations. The Kent Council model will maintain the distinction between the two.

| Non-Executive | Executive |
|---|---|
| • **'Non-Executive' functions are powers and duties that are the responsibility of the Full Council**. The power to exercise these is either *reserved* to Full Council or delegated by them to committees or officers.<br>• For example, *reserved powers* include:<br>  ○ Agreeing county strategy, Policy Framework and budget<br>  ○ Oversight of delegations that are statutory including Town and Country Planning and development, highways<br>  ○ Regulatory, and statutory, functions including planning, licensing, transport appeals, standards, personnel, governance and audit and pensions | • **The Leader is responsible for the exercise of all Executive functions.** The Leader may arrange for these functions to be *discharged* by Cabinet Members, through their Cabinet Portfolios, or Senior officers. Executive decisions are taken in accordance with, and to implement, the Budget and Policy Framework.<br>• Under the Local Government Act 2000 a Council Leader, may also *delegate* Executive council functions to:<br>  ○ A committee of the Executive<br>  ○ An Area Committee<br>• The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 also specifies which functions are and are not the responsibility of the Executive. |

The proposed governance for the Kent Council is summarised in the following diagram.




**A single unitary council to maximise economies and minimise disruption**

The single unitary council for Kent and Medway (the Full Council) would be the Non-Executive, strategic level decision-making body, which would set the overall county strategy and budget. The Full Council would also oversee several statutory Non-Executive committees.

The Leader and Cabinet would take executive decisions and be responsible for critical *people-based* and strategic services, to maximise economies of scale and minimise disruption for residents and critical services and functions. Cabinet Portfolios would be set for these countywide service areas.

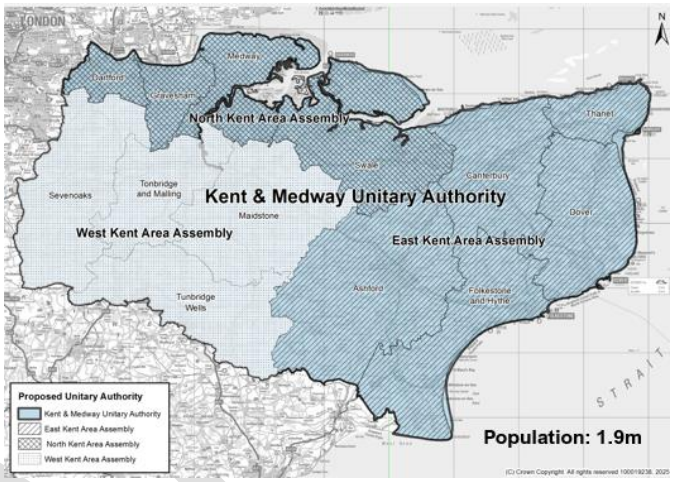
**County scale, local delivery**

While the new council would operate at a countywide scale to ensure strategic oversight, resilience, and efficiency, local responsiveness would remain central to service delivery. Building on Kent County Council's proven model, the new council would continue to tailor services to local needs through area-based teams and embedded staff, enabling flexible, place-based delivery supported by countywide infrastructure. This approach reflects existing

practice in services such as district-based children's social work teams, adult social care community and neighbourhood teams and SEND provision, which are already delivered at a place-based level to reflect the needs of different communities. Operational delivery would, by default, follow the North, East, and West groupings of the Area Assemblies, ensuring alignment and simplicity while maintaining locally grounded service provision across Kent and Medway.

**Locally responsive Area Assemblies**

Area Assemblies would be local-level, Executive decision-making bodies. They would be committees of the unitary council that sit at area level – divided into North, East and West.




- North: Dartford, Gravesham, Medway & Swale, with a population of 663,111.
- East: Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe and Thanet, with a population of 661,559.
- West: Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks, with a population of 551,223.

Membership of the Area Assemblies would be the councillors of the Kent Council whose divisions are in the geographical areas that the Area Assemblies cover. Area Assembly Chairs would be selected by the Full Council.

The Kent Council would have flexibility in how it arranges the Area Assemblies**,** and over time, the initial boundaries could change incrementally to reflect community/population changes. For example, through large-scale housing development.

Area Assemblies would have delegated responsibility from the Kent Council Leader for some *place-based* Executive functions.

The services delegated to Area Assemblies could operate as Community Services Directorates with individual Community Services Strategies. Having a place-based approach would allow flexibility about how services are provided in different parts of Kent and Medway, so they can best meet the needs and views of local communities.

The Assemblies would be decision-making bodies, able to take Key Decisions, and would be responsible for delegated budget/s, strategy development and oversight of services delegated to them. Key Decisions would be discharged/signed by the Chair of the respective Area Assembly. In cases of no agreement, the ultimate decision would be taken by the Council Leader.

The new constitution of the Kent Council would set out the arrangements for Area Assemblies and include protections to provide long-term stability for the model.

The Area Assemblies would be rooted in the local areas that they serve. Their proposed geographical boundaries are therefore based on KCC's assessment of local identities and how people live their lives. This information is provided in detail in the Democracy and Local Identity assessment that KCC conducted to support its initial options appraisal (Appendix X). A North / East / West split was found to be the best way to bring together the existing building blocks of the districts in natural groupings. North Kent is characterised by the Thames Estuary, proximity to London, greater religious and ethnic diversity and strong maritime and cultural heritage. There are close connections between Medway and Swale. West Kent has affluent commuter towns and rural villages, with an entrepreneurial service-based economy and strength in agriculture. East Kent is home to Kent's coastal communities, with key sectors including creativity, life sciences, logistics. There are clear connections and shared identity across the main towns in the East Kent area. Analysis of travel to work, school and hospitals follows the same North / West / East patterns.

The Area Assemblies also mirror existing service delivery footprints, with most countywide council services currently delivered across East, North and West Kent. Importantly, the boundaries align well with the service delivery arrangements for key partners including the NHS Health and Care Partnerships (reflecting the close working between the Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley HCP and the Medway and Swale HCP in the North), and the three Kent Police Command Units. While economies of scale, resilience and capacity for transformation are better served by keeping statutory people-based services at the countywide level, practical opportunities for integration and prevention also exist at operational level, aligning services in localities and neighbourhoods. Many of the foundations of wellbeing and prosperity, such as the wider determinants of health and community safety and cohesion, can be more easily and quickly influenced at that level, bringing opportunities to prevent the escalation of needs and improving quality of life. By aligning the Area Assemblies with our key partners' operational teams, Area Assemblies will be empowered to work with partners to design and deliver local transformation projects to support wider Public Service Reform.

**Case Study: Local responsiveness - Community Wardens**

The Community Warden service was established over 20 years ago, working with partners such as Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue to address local crime and disorder. This service provides a locally responsive support within our communities in recognition that the geography of Kent is vast and local intelligence and presence is important to communities.

The wardens' trusted, community-based presence is highly valued not just by the public but also by partner agencies who rely on wardens' local knowledge and relationships, especially when engaging with residents who may be reluctant to speak with police or social services. This local trust had led to the expansion of their role to support KCC's responsibilities under the Care Act 2014, particularly in promoting wellbeing and preventing care needs

Public consultation has shown strong support for maintaining a community-based model with wardens across Kent's communities. This ensures local knowledge, strong links with

Community Safety Units (CSUs) and community groups, and the ability to respond quickly in crises. Wardens receive core training which also enables them to flexibly support county-wide needs during crises such as extreme weather, flooding, and emergencies like water outages.

Operating across a large scale geography allows for cross-boundary working and sharing of best practice; during the pandemic, wardens played a vital role in identifying local needs early, supporting isolated residents, and coordinating with Community Hubs, charities, and councils to deliver food, medicine, and hardship support. Their knowledge allowed parish councils and community groups to be supported at the neighbourhood level, whilst warden teams coordinated with district councils, and the service was supported and directed centrally from the County Council.

More recently, Parish Councils have begun sponsoring wardens to secure their presence locally. This model allows the service to grow despite financial pressures, with Parishes preferring the benefits of a centrally managed, well-trained and well-connected team that can effectively engage both locally and with wider services.

The Wardens service is an example of the County Council already operating at scale and at the local level, through established local networks, recognising the importance of having trusted advocates within our communities and the invaluable knowledge they can provide to our services and partners.

**A streamlined and effective committee structure**

The Kent Council would have statutory committees for non-executive functions. The current County Council has 11 statutory committees. In summary, these are:

1. Governance and Audit
2. Pension Fund
3. Personnel
4. Planning Applications
5. Regulation
6. Standards
7. Scrutiny
8. Health Overview and Scrutiny (HOSC)
9. Selection and Member Services
10. Electoral and Boundary Review
11. Kent Flood Risk and Water Management

The Kent Council would also include the addition of a Licensing Committee. Licencing is a significant statutory responsibility of District/Borough Councils.

The Kent Council could also choose to merge some statutory committees' functions. For example, the authority could operate a single Planning and Regulation Committee as some councils already do. However, this would be limited as certain committees (Scrutiny Committee, HOSC, Governance & Audit, Electoral & Boundary Review, Personnel, Selection and Member Services, Pension Fund, or Standards) are not enabled to merge.
The Council may also choose to arrange their committees so they are aligned with Area Assemblies' geographies. For example, area-based Planning Committees.

As well as the obvious and significant overall reduction in committees from moving from 14 councils to one, the Kent Council model offers an opportunity to reduce the number of non-statutory committees, such as the County Council's Cabinet Committees for specific service

areas, that exist under current arrangements. This would help streamline governance and support councillors to focus on critical issues and their role as community champions. A Budget and Performance committee would be retained by the Executive, to ensure capacity for oversight and decision-making on these key issues.

To facilitate the Area Assemblies' role in supporting locality and neighbourhood-based Public Service Reform existing committees such as Health and Wellbeing Board, Kent and Medway NHS Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Police and Crime Panel and Community Safety Partnership could be delegated to Area Assemblies to empower them to work with partners.

**How responsibilities for services and functions could be arranged**

The table below presents a very high-level, non-exhaustive, indicative split for the services and functions that would sit at a countywide level and those that would be delegated to the Area Assemblies.

| **Countywide**<br>*People-based* & Strategic services / functions | **Area Assemblies**<br>Some *Place-based* services / functions |
|---|---|
| **Corporate services and council strategy**<br>• County Strategy (Strategic Statement), Policy Framework and budget Advocating for Kent<br>• Governance (Democratic services etc.)<br>• Standards; Personnel; Governance & Audit; Pensions<br>• Corporate support services and infrastructure | **Delegated budget/s and strategy development** |
| **Revenue and Benefits**<br>• Council Tax benefit and collection<br>• Housing Benefit administration<br>• Property searches and Land charges<br>• Car parks<br>• Business Rates collection (National non-domestic rate) | |
| **Strategic planning** (Housing / Infrastructure Strategy)<br>• Building development (Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)); Local Plan; Local Development Framework (LDF))<br>• Housing delivery<br>• Minerals<br>• Planning applications<br>• Heritage (Conservation/listed buildings) | **Housing support**<br>• Housing options service (assessing local housing needs, advice and assistance)<br>• Building control |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Social Care** (Adult's & Children's) and **Safeguarding** | |
| **Transport strategy**<br>• Highways and transport (traffic management) planning and operations<br>• Home to school transport and appeals; concessionary travel and public & community transport<br>• Cycle routes<br>• Road safety<br>• Street lighting & furniture | **Highways maintenance**<br>• Potholes etc. |
| **Economic Development strategy**<br>• Growth Plan<br>• Skills | **Place-based Economic Development**<br>• Local economy support and development<br>• Tourism<br>• Supported Employment |
| **Education / Children**<br>• Schools including infrastructure and school improvement<br>• Early years and childcare<br>• SEND strategy and specialist support | **Education / Children**<br>• Family Hubs |
| **Regulatory services & Licensing**<br>• Trading standards & consumer protection<br>• Taxis<br>• Alcohol<br>• Public entertainment<br>• Gambling | **Community services**<br>• Museums and Arts/Culture<br>• Leisure<br>• Markets<br>• Libraries and Registration<br>• Youth service<br>• Village halls / community facilities |
| **Environment**<br>• Maintenance of public rights of way<br>• Coastal protection and watercourses (drainage) | **Environment**<br>• Country parks and countryside management<br>• Protecting and enhancing the environment<br>• Grounds maintenance (parks and open spaces)<br>• Cemeteries and crematoria<br>• Street naming |
| **Waste management**<br>• Waste recycling & collection/disposal | **Environmental Health**<br>• Pollution control and air quality<br>• Private sector housing standards<br>• Food hygiene and health & safety<br>• Street-scene (graffiti, litter etc.)<br>• Street cleaning and fly-tipping |
| **Public Health strategy** (via Director of Public Health) | **Public Health delivery** |
| **Public protection** | **Public protection** |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Emergency planning and county resilience | • Community safety, including Community Wardens |
| **Elections and electoral registration** | |
| **Archives** | |

## Councillor numbers and support

Currently in Kent and Medway, there are a total of 658 Councillors covering Kent County Council (81), Medway Unitary Authority (59), and 12 district councils (518). Based on a population of c.1.88 million in Kent and Medway this currently provides one Councillor per 2,851 people. Based on an electorate of c. 1.35 million in Kent and Medway, there is one Councillor per 2,050 electors. For additional context:

- The highest population/electorate per councillor is Kent County Council which has 20,234 people and 14,266 electors per councillor (population 1,639,000, electorate 1,155,544)
- Medway Council has 4,792 people and 3,493 electors per Councillor (population 282,702, electorate 206,075)
- The lowest is in Sevenoaks where there are 2,018 people and 1,505 electors per Councillor
- The average population per Councillor across England is higher than the Kent and Medway average at 3,360.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has advised a minimum of 30 Councillors and a maximum of 100 Councillors for new unitary authorities, and that any exceptions to this need a strong justification.

**A workable and representative approach**

In determining the most appropriate size for the Kent Council, it has been important to strike the right balance between ensuring effective democratic representation for the people of Kent and Medway, and ensuring that the council has a workable number of councillors to support the efficient discharge of the council's functions.

As the Kent Council will represent a large number of people, our starting point has been to look at current unitary councils with higher ratios of people to councillors. Birmingham Council has the highest, with 11,420 people per councillor. Applying this ratio to the Kent and Medway population, this would mean 165 councillors for the Kent unitary. This is within the same range as the initial number of councillors for the Buckinghamshire unitary when it first formed (147).

However, 165 councillors could fail to strike the right balance of being a workable number for a single council. Taking the mid-point between KCC's current ratio of 20,234 people to per councillor and the Birmingham figure provides a ratio of 15,874. For the Kent and Medway population, this would give 118 councillors.

| |
|---|
| 118 councillors<br>15,874 people per councillor (Kent & Medway population of 1,875,893)<br>11,430 electors per councillor (Kent & Medway electorate of 1,348,857) |

118 councillors is a workable number for a large unitary, similar to the number of councillors in Somerset (110), for example.

From a starting point of 658 councillors currently in Kent and Medway, this is clearly a significant reduction. However, there are a number of reasons why this is a viable, workable number for the Kent Council.

At 11,430 electors per councillor, this is a reduction in the ratio of elector to councillor compared with KCC's current position of 14,266. This reduction will allow capacity for councillors to cover the services and functions provided by a unitary council, which are currently separated between the two-tiers. KCC used to have 99 councillors across Kent and Medway before Medway became a unitary authority in 1998, therefore a precedent has been set for a higher number of councillors in the county area.

It also represents a more realistic and modern view of the way in which people interact with their elected representatives and the communication and technology available that means large councillor to electorate ratios are outdated, unnecessary and inefficient.

Within the rationalised committee structure and streamlined governance processes proposed, 118 councillors is sufficient to ensure that the council's business can be discharged. Each councillor would sit on no more than three to four committees. This would include sitting on the Kent Council, their respective Area Assembly (a councillor will only sit on one Area Assembly) and either one or two other council committees.

The extent of responsibilities and constituency sizes for councillors of the single unitary council would be reflected in a proposed enhanced Basic Member Allowance of £23,000 per annum. This has been provisionally calculated by combining KCC's current allowance with the mean Basic Member Allowance across Kent's District and Borough Councils.

The total cost of basic allowances for all 658 councillors currently in Kent and Medway was £5,176,303 in 2024/25. The proposed Basic Member Allowance for the Kent Council at the enhanced rate of £23,000 would be £2,714,000. This would provide a considerable saving of nearly £2.5 million per year. Calculations are shown in Appendix X.

One of Government's aims of Local Government Reorganisation is to improve outcomes through fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents. The proposed number of councillors for the Kent Council strikes the right balance to deliver this aim. In order to support and empower them in their role, support arrangements have been built in to the Kent Council model.

**Supporting and empowering councillors**

Councillors in the Kent Council would be empowered and supported to have a meaningful role in the functioning of local government democracy. They will represent their local residents, act as leaders in their communities, and set and oversee policy for the running of

council services. As a streamlined and efficient council, the Kent Unitary would put in place the following arrangements to ensure that councillors can fulfil their role and serve their communities:

An enhanced single contact point for residents – adopting a 'tell us once' approach, a mechanism will be created that provides a simple and single route for residents to contact the council when they have a query, complaint or need to access a service – this portal would take full advantage of digital and AI technology and use appropriate channels so that such queries and issues can be processed and directed to the relevant service rather than increasing Member caseloads with what should be straightforward transactions.

Member support unit – this team will apply a triage approach to all enquiries received by councillors to ensure that they are directed to the right service, thereby reducing the time taken to address the matter directly by the service in question and only involving the councillor where this is needed, providing them with manageable caseloads.

An enhanced Community Engagement team – this will provide a bedrock of support for how the council, through its services and councillors, will comprehensively engage Kent and Medway's residents and their communities, and set out in the Community Engagement section.

## Stronger community engagement and empowered communities

LGR presents an opportunity to enhance how local government in Kent and Medway engages with residents by shifting from traditional 'top-down' models to more place-based and participatory approaches. However, in order to achieve this, community engagement must become an integral part of the culture for the Kent Council.

The focus though, will be on creating the conditions for meaningful engagement throughout the activity the unitary undertakes, not creating expensive and bureaucratic structures for community engagement. The Kent Council will not create unnecessary forums and layers of governance, but instead use existing forums and governance such as Town and Parish Councils, strengthening their role in community engagement and intelligence gathering and ensuring that strategic and meaningful engagement is embedded as an approach in how the council operates. By adopting this streamlined model, the authority will avoid the cost and complexity of a vast neighbourhood area board structure, which would not be feasible for a large unitary authority, instead delivering targeted engagement while maintaining strong local connections.

**Enhancing our community engagement**

The Kent Council would introduce a Strategic Engagement Framework setting out clear principles that define how the authority engages with communities and partners. It would provide a consistent set of expectations for residents and stakeholders, whilst also equipping staff with a practical toolkit of engagement methods to support inclusive, effective, and responsive practice.

Community engagement will be a core strategic function embedded in the authority's decision-making processes. From the earliest stages, the Kent Council will actively involve

the communities it serves, ensuring their voices shape the policies, services, and outcomes that affect their lives

**Principles for Community Engagement**

*The principles presented are illustrative and intended as a starting point for discussion. The final Framework would be developed by the Kent Council collaboratively with residents and partner organisations, ensuring it reflects their shared values and a joint commitment to meaningful engagement.*

Co-design and Early Involvement

- Engaging communities from the beginning when shaping the vision, priorities and service models of the new authority
- Using the toolkit of engagement methods, such as citizen's assemblies, formal consultation and Leader's Question Time to ensure diverse voices are heard
- Co-producing proposals with residents and partners so their voices are heard.

Inclusive and Accessible Engagement

- Community engagement must reach all residents of Kent, including those from under-represented and seldom-heard groups
- Staff must consider multiple forms of engagement techniques and channels to ensure all residents are empowered to participate in feedback and service design, considering issues such as digital exclusion or language barriers
- Balancing digital engagement methods with in-person consultation and co-design.

Productive Partnerships

- Collaborate with partners including the Town and Parish Councils and the Voluntary and Community Sector to build on their knowledge and expertise of the local communities
- Develop and build stronger community networks with those organisations to embed collaboration into service design and delivery.

Place-Based Engagement

- Consider the specific needs of the communities and neighbourhoods in the county to ensure that local initiatives are reflective of the communities they will serve
- Engage with residents through the channels they already know and trust, such as town and parish councils, local associations, and partnerships, rather than introducing new, unfamiliar or duplicative structures for communication.

Transparent and Open Communication

- Build strong mechanisms for feedback to demonstrate to partners and residents how their views have helped to shape council decision making
- Communication will be clear and consistent across the authority.

Learning and Development

- Staff will be supported and trained to understand the importance and benefits of engagement and how it can support their work and relationships with residents and partners

- Create a culture within the authority for staff to learn from each other and share insights within the Council and across partners on best practice to ensure continuous and effective engagement
- Provide information to residents on how they can be involved in their local communities and Council decision making.

**Town and Parish Councils**
Although Parish and Town Councils are independent institutions and not a substitute for meaningful community engagement by local authorities, they remain an integral part of many local communities. The Kent Council would be committed to working in partnership with Parish and Town councils to embed community engagement by building on their local knowledge, networks, and trusted relationships. Recognising the vital role that they play in providing hyper-local insight and community engagement, the Kent Council can build on the existing relationship with Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and increase support to it to support effective Parish and Town Councils. This would also recognise the rurality of Kent and how important local Town and Parish Councils are to reflecting the needs of very diverse communities across a large geography.

**Community Governance Reviews (CGR)**
Several of Kent's district and borough councils - Ashford, Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling, Thanet, and Tunbridge Wells - are currently conducting Community Governance Reviews and formal consultations in 2025 (partly in preparation for LGR) to determine the potential establishment of new Town or Parish councils, particularly in unparished areas such as Tonbridge, Margate, and Royal Tunbridge Wells.

It should not be assumed that communities will want a Town or Parish council. Canterbury City Council's 2024 review decided against forming a Whitstable Town Council due to lack of public support and concerns about extra costs and governance. Similarly, Medway's 2017-18 review found a Rochester Town Council unviable, as residents felt current community networks were sufficient, and feared increased bureaucracy, duplication, and higher taxes without clear benefits.

In areas of Kent that remain unparished or without town councils following unitarisation and the community governance reviews mentioned above, the Kent Council will work with residents and local community groups to determine how they wish to be represented and how they prefer to engage with public services.

**Productive Partnerships**
A core principle of the proposed Strategic Engagement Framework would be a pledge from the Kent Council to work in productive partnership.

The Kent Council would work to build meaningful and equal relationships with the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and other key stakeholders. This approach goes beyond tokenistic involvement: partners would be engaged as valued equals, with their expertise, insights, and experience directly shaping decisions and service delivery. The Kent Council would foster open dialogue, shared goals, and mutual accountability to ensure collaboration is genuine, impactful, and rooted in trust.

It is recognised that while the VCSE sector plays an essential role in engaging residents and delivering services, its capacity is often limited, and the sector itself is diverse and sometimes fragmented. Existing forums provide a strategic voice, but it is important to acknowledge and respond to this complexity.

Currently, the VCSE sector must navigate different partnership arrangements across Kent County Council, Medway Council, and the 12 district and borough councils. The creation of a single unitary authority offers a unique opportunity: VCSE organisations will have one strategic partner at the local government level, enabling greater consistency and clarity. The addition of a dedicated Community Engagement Team and a robust, authority-wide Strategic Engagement Framework will also create new opportunities for localised engagement, ensuring that all communities and partners can contribute meaningfully to shaping services and outcomes.

**An enhanced Community Engagement Team**

This approach would be supported by the creation of an enhanced Community Engagement Team. This is important not just to ensure successful transition to the new structures with minimal disruption to residents, but to pave the way for a sustainable relationship between the unitary and its communities in order to ensure that residents do not feel disenfranchised by the changes to local government in their areas and are empowered to share their voice, influence decisions and help shape the future of their local services.

The new Community Engagement Team would play a pivotal role in helping residents navigate and connect with the emerging Kent Council. This team would serve as a direct and responsive link between communities and the new council, ensuring that local voices are heard, needs are understood, and services are shaped around people.

In addition to leading direct engagement efforts, the team would provide guidance and support to staff across the authority on using the newly developed Community Engagement Toolkit, a flexible resource offering a menu of engagement methods tailored to different audiences and service areas. This would empower services to choose the most effective and proportionate approach to engaging residents, partners, and stakeholders.

It is proposed that the team could consist of 27 Community Navigators and three Community Engagement Managers, aligned with the structure of the three new Area Assemblies, and will be directly accountable to the Kent Council. Their remit would cover the following key areas of focus:

- The community navigators would be embedded into communities so they can solve problems in local areas and help residents and local partners navigate council services and signpost to partners
- They would refer issues and feedback intelligence to services, including linking into the teams that would sit under the Area Assemblies to deliver place-based services
- They would need to reach and engage hard to reach, marginalised or under-represented residents and communities, ensuring that engagement is widespread and effective across the Kent and Medway area

- Through proactive outreach and a trusted local presence, the team would help remove barriers to participation and amplify voices that are often overlooked in traditional consultation and communication models.

**Community Engagement Toolkit**

By creating a complementary Community Engagement Toolkit, staff will be empowered to translate the high-level principles outlined in the Strategic Engagement Framework into meaningful and practical engagement with partners and residents. The toolkit will provide staff with clear guidance and adaptable community engagement approaches to ensure consistency across the organisation.

Participation levels can vary significantly between areas, leading to unequal influence and more vocal or resourced communities may dominate discussions, marginalising quieter or under-served groups; by utilising a variety of different engagement methods, both online and in-person, the Kent Council will be better placed to engage with a larger and more diverse cohort of Kent residents.

Traditional committee formats may not appeal to younger residents, digitally engaged communities, or those with accessibility needs; the engagement approach should include multiple methods of communication and engagement to avoid excluding voices that prefer alternative engagement methods such as online platforms or pop-up informal events. Some of the proposed community engagement methods are outlined below and provided in more detail in Appendix X. They have been shaped by learning from best practice in other areas of the country.



**Digital Engagement** – Utilising tools such as social media to share news and communications with Kent residents and organisations.

**Public Consultations** – Building on current practice used by Kent and Medway Councils, both informal and formal types of consultation should be utilised across a range of digital and non-digital channels.

**Accessible Online Committee Meetings** – Continuation of current practice, this allows the public to stay informed in Council business and decision making.

**Leader's Question Time** – Used with positive impact in other local authorities, this method would allow Kent residents to pose questions to the Leader of the Kent Council and have a timely voice on the issues that concern them the most.

**Participatory Budgeting** - A process where residents help decide how public funds are spent, giving communities a direct voice in local priorities and decision-making.

**Citizen Advisory Boards** - A collection of individuals selected to be representative of the wider population, meeting for the purpose of open discussion and focussed questioning to make an informed recommendation on a key topic before disbanding.

**Community Workshops and Focus Groups** – Building on current practice used across Kent and Medway, this method can foster dialogue, gather in-depth insights, and build trust through direct interaction with residents.

**Volunteer and Civic Projects** – Engage with residents whilst improving local communities together through civic action and volunteering days.

**Youth Engagement** – Continuation of the youth council model as well as learning from new research and methodologies.

**Cultural and Community Events** – Engage with residents in informal settings to celebrate shared values whilst having an opportunity to gain important views and insights.

## 10. Devolution

In submitting our proposal, we acknowledge that our preferred model LGR does not conform to the government's current devolution policy that, to receive devolved powers, a single unitary authority and Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) cannot be established on the same geographical footprint. However, the government has not published a timetable for further rounds of devolution for two-tier areas, which indicates their policy ambitions for the remainder of this Parliament are unclear. In the absence of a clear timeline, and having set out the reasons why it is imperative that a strategic authority is maintained given Kent and Medway's scale, unique challenges and strategic significance, our approach provides a practical way forward.

KCC would welcome the devolution of responsibilities and budgets to an appropriate body in Kent and Medway. Given the context in which we are working, the most appropriate body is the Kent Council that would be created through this LGR proposal. In this model, there would be no need to create a separate MSA, as the Kent Council would provide the strategic capacity necessary for devolution that Government is seeking to embed across the country.

The reality is that Kent and Medway is already operating at the appropriate spatial scale. Our geography, at 1.88 million, is in excess of the 1.5 million set by government for an MSA. We are also a single Functional Economic Area (FEA) with a unique, strategic position between the international gateways to the continent, the wider South East and London.

We already have a successful partnership structure and collaborate with key county-wide partners, including the NHS, Police, and business groups, which fragmenting Kent into multiple unitary authorities would negate.

Kent and Medway has consistently proved we deliver and at scale. There is nothing in the Devolution Framework that could not be delivered by the Kent Council working within the established partnerships in place. The following are examples of responsibilities in the Devolution Framework that are already being delivered in Kent and Medway:

- The Kent and Medway Economic Framework is a Local Growth Plan in all but name
- We are preparing to deliver a Spatial Development Strategy (SDSs)
- The Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce is leading on a Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)
- Kent County Council leads on developing and implementing local transport strategy via the Local Transport Plan
- Services like the Kent and Medway Growth Hub and the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) and Business Advisory Board (BAB) provide Business Support.

Kent and Medway has a well-established track record of convening partners across public services, business, and community sectors to create solutions to complex challenges and seize opportunities for the county. Acting as a strategic body - akin to a mayoral authority – and drawing on scale, infrastructure, and well-established relationships across public services, business, and community sectors, Kent and Medway are able to deliver strategic

outcomes for the county and wider region. Whether responding to economic shocks, coordinating complex service delivery, or unlocking investment, we have demonstrated our ability to lead with clarity, build consensus, and drive action.

**Case Study: Discovery Park, Sandwich – Convening Power in Action**

Kent County Council's convening power was exemplified in its response to Pfizer's 2011 decision to close its European research and development headquarters in Sandwich, which threatened 2,400 jobs and the loss of a nationally significant science and innovation site. Chaired by the Leader of KCC, a dedicated Task Force was swiftly convened, bringing together Government, local authorities, Pfizer, and investors. This collaborative effort led to the purchase of the site by Discovery Park Limited and the launch of the £35 million Expansion East Kent scheme, unlocking investment and job creation across the region. The site has since evolved into a thriving science park, home to over 180 businesses and more than 3500 employees from across the county and beyond, anchoring itself as a vital research and development hub between London and the continent.

KCC's convening role was again critical in 2023 when Pfizer announced its exit from remaining facilities at Discovery Park. A second Task Force, led by KCC, coordinated a rapid response involving central government, local partners and industry stakeholders. This resulted in Asymchem Laboratories acquiring the site and retaining key talent (69 former Pfizer staff, with a further 200 planned), while KCC supported the creation of two pharmaceutical start-ups through the Kent & Medway Business Fund.

This case study illustrates how KCC's strategic leadership and convening power enable it to respond to challenge and unlock new opportunities for Kent—bringing together the right people, at the right time, to secure successful outcomes for the county and beyond.

A priority for the Kent Council would be to seek a bespoke relationship with central Government. Central to this would be the Kent Council being granted a fully Integrated Settlement, along the lines of those currently available to Established Mayoral Combined Authorities.

In return, the Kent Council would work in partnership with Government to accelerate our work with wider partners to design and deliver the crucial Public Service Reform (PSR) ambitions, detailed in the local government White Paper. This would help us address our distinct geographical and socio-economic challenges, mitigate the challenges and maximise the potential our unique area has.

# 11. Better outcomes for people and place

## Public Service Reform

It will not be possible for all future challenges facing local government to be addressed or mitigated as a result of LGR. However, Public Service Reform (PSR) must remain an end goal, to review, reset, and fundamentally change the way in which our services are delivered to residents.

The Kent Council will deliver better services for our people and our places, with the scale and authority to deliver. Through one strategic vision across Kent and Medway, it will have a strong and unified voice to advocate for residents' needs. This will ensure Kent and Medway can continue to build on the strong relationships developed with government but provide the foundations for even greater engagement and influence on the things that matter most to residents. A Kent Council will be able to effectively lobby for the needs of our county with an even greater evidence base through an enhanced, single dataset, ensuring that policy, strategy and services are effective at meeting the real needs of our unique county.

We have assessed the scale of challenge and opportunity presented by LGR to identify those areas where the Kent Council could have the greatest impact. These fall across four main themes:

1. Ensuring the sustainability and responsiveness of our services by shaping and strengthening the markets that our services rely on,
2. Focusing on prevention rather than reactive services to improve outcomes for our residents,
3. Spatial planning and infrastructure delivered at the right scale to ensure communities grow in a sustainable way,
4. Delivering value for money and unlocking greater financial capacity for community based services which improve quality of life.

However, to deliver real PSR, these themes will of course be inter-connected. Essentially, the transformation of services will be centred around improving outcomes for both people and place, with equal importance, leading to the delivery of high quality and sustainable services across a significant public service area and building a better quality of life for Kent and Medway residents.

**The key levers to deliver transformation that the Kent Council will utilise include:**

1. Service design transformation (co-designing with stakeholders, including service users and frontline staff to understand needs, behaviours and experiences to reimagine and improve how services are designed, from awareness to delivery to feedback).
2. Service delivery transformation (multi-faceted approaches to improve efficiency, accessibility and user satisfaction).
3. Technology and digital transformation (including using new insights from the use of data and AI).
4. Business process transformation (mapping and re-engineering workflows, adopting new digital tools to streamline operations).

## Better outcomes for our places

**Economic strength and creating a platform for growth**

The Kent Council will support the Kent and Medway functional economic area that is already recognised by Government. A Kent Council creates clear strategic oversight and leadership of Kent as a place and to draw investment into the County, providing a strong voice to engage with government and deliver on the Government's ambitions for growth. It will also enable one strategic plan across Kent and Medway, with one voice advocating for the needs of Kent residents and ensuring that we create sustainable communities, with the infrastructure needed to support thriving local areas.

Existing economic strategies such as the Kent and Medway Economic Framework, the Get Kent and Medway Working Plan and the emerging Local Growth Plan exist at the Kent and Medway level recognising that impactful, strategic economic development work and the local economy, operates at that scale. Strategically important programmes such as the delivery of business support through the Kent and Medway Growth Hub and sector and cluster development activity require a critical mass of businesses to function optimally.
The Kent Council will preserve the long-established, successful partnerships that exist to support investment into the County, for example through the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, the area's Local Growth Board. The Kent and Medway economy is largely SME-based with very few large employers, the scale of one Kent Council strengthens the County's position to attract important investment and to ensure that any growth projects are underpinned by an important strategic understanding of the county's needs, and that one area does not have an unfair advantage.

Kent and Medway's local distinctiveness, creativity and natural environment all contribute to the vibrancy of its visitor economy. Kent and Medway has a large tourism sector, made up of 6,000 businesses, supporting over 70,000 jobs (11% of employment in the county) that generate £4 billion in gross value added. The outstanding coastline, landscapes and internationally significant heritage assets make an important economic contribution, to tourism, leisure and quality of life but are also Kent and Medway's globally recognised 'Garden of England' brand. This brand is also what draws people to live and work in the county, bringing much needed skills, expertise and entrepreneurship into the local economy.

The Kent Council also enables skills to be embedded in wider growth strategies so that housing and infrastructure are underpinned by clear plans to develop the local workforce. Delivering programmes such as Skills Bootcamps and Connect to Work at the whole county level provides opportunity to link the supply side of the labour market with the demand through the county-wide Local Skills Improvement Plan. Services to support skills and employment will continue to be offered at the Kent and Medway level to cater for travel to work patterns across the geography and to ensure that gaps highlighted in the Local Skills Improvement Plan can be filled by a wide pool of candidates from the wider area resulting in enhanced productivity for firms and career opportunities for residents.

The existing Business Advisory Boards will be able to continue to operate at scale to support the skills agenda, whilst the sub regional partnerships that already exist at the area level, East, West and North will be enhanced by the creation of three area assemblies. This will allow for more specialised, localised skills provision such as manufacturing in the North of

the county, to also be considered at the area level to reflect the differing local economies and to create local support for highstreets and small local firms such as retail businesses. Hyper-local tourism offerings can also be promoted at a smaller level for example around a particular town supported by a strong 'destination management' level structure across Kent and Medway which brings together the different specialisms of smaller areas into a coherent, county-wide visitor offer.

The strategic oversight of the Kent Council and the shared intelligence it will hold will greatly benefit the investment opportunities of the County as a whole and the economic health of Kent and Medway as a place.

**Strategic planning and infrastructure at the right scale to deliver**

The case for strategic planning is well-documented, particularly in grappling with the most significant issues facing the planning system. Whilst partnership arrangements have been in place to support a more coordinated approach and established tools such as the Countywide Accommodation Strategy (KCC ASC) and the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy, published by the Kent Housing Group have gone some way to alleviate issues presented by the fragmentation of responsibility, in a county that is growing as rapidly as Kent and Medway, a truly integrated approach is needed to meet the significant and complex infrastructure needs of the area

The Kent Council will greatly improve strategic infrastructure planning by providing a single, strategic point of leadership and decision-making, a single and consistent approach with developers and other partners, and a critical mass of capacity and expertise. It will also enable Government to deliver on its housing targets.

The table below shows that in the multi-unitary options, there will be at least one Unitary where the data suggests there will be significant challenges to deliver against housing targets. In contrast a single unitary spreads housing growth out across a larger geographical area and allows for the better delivery of housing targets in a way that is sustainable.
It should be noted that neither Option 4d or Option 5a could be modelled because they do not adhere to current district boundaries on which housing targets are set and monitored.

*The table shows the percentage of the new annual housing target that has been delivered on average over the last six years and the percentage of the four-year housing target that has been identified for development and has been included in the Housing Information Audit.*

**Table: Most Challenging Unitary Authority for housing growth delivery in Each Local Government Reorganisation Option**

| LGR Model | % of New Annual Target Delivered Annually (2017-2023) | % of 4 Year Housing Target Identified in Housing Information Audit |
|---|---|---|
| LGR Option 1a | Kent - 62% | Kent - 89% |
| LGR Option 3a | East Kent - 59% | West Kent - 78% |
| LGR Option 4b | East Kent- 52% | West Kent - 67% |
| Kent & Medway | Kent - 62% | Kent - 89% |

However, alongside the delivery of housing targets and importantly, the Kent Council will enable the preparation of a single, statutory strategic plan. When done well, housing and the necessary infrastructure it requires shapes how people feel about the place they live and ensures communities can grow in a sustainable way. The Kent Council will establish housing and economic growth requirements in response to local needs and provide choice and opportunity across a far broader geography when determining how those needs are met, taking into account the genuine planning constraints which exist in parts of Kent and Medway. Building on the success of the Kent and Medway Infrastructure Mapping Platform (IMP), the single unitary will have a robust evidence base and platform to build its strategic plan, which will be integrated with the ambitions of our Transport and Growth plans. This platform will enable officers in the Kent Council to identify infrastructure gaps and funding opportunities, whilst enabling early and collaborative discussions on spatial development plans across the geography.

The Kent Council will also enable simplified planning processes - such as Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) by consolidating authority, reducing negotiation complexity, and ensuring transparency and efficiency for developers and communities alike. It also allows for a county-wide infrastructure strategy that equitably distributes developer contributions across both high-growth and underinvested areas.

Furthermore the Kent Council will have a much stronger resource base, able to attract the skills and expertise to deliver high quality housing and infrastructure plans. The alignment of policies, decision making processes and monitoring frameworks will result in a more consistent approach to planning and will make it easier to undertake a greater level of community engagement through Parish and Town Councils, in the planning process. Shared data, information, use of digital technologies and consistent design principles across the new single authority will lead to better delivery of services and associated cost savings. With the full integration of services under one governance structure it will provide optimal authority and oversight to effectively plan and deliver infrastructure that facilitates and supports more innovative service delivery models. For example the co-location of functions such as housing, infrastructure and social care will mean that we can better ensure that people-based services can meet the housing needs of their service users in the future particularly around supported accommodation (of which there is currently a shortage) but also look for opportunities to provide much needed accommodation for children in need and to make better use of Disabled Facilities Grant, all of which will have a transformative impact on people's lives.

The Kent Council will enable a future planning and infrastructure approach that balances strategic oversight with local accountability, but importantly with the resources needed to deliver.

**Transforming our delivery: Planning at the right scale to support delivery: integrating spatial and social care accommodation sufficiency planning**

Councils with adult social services responsibilities, have a duty to ensure that adults with care and support needs have access to suitable accommodation, and that there is a diverse, sustainable and high-quality range of accommodation care and support options in their

areas. This requires councils to understand the current and future demand and supply for different cohorts of the population.

The Kent Council will bring together statutory duties related to housing, including spatial planning, the production of local plans, development management, strategic housing and land allocation. It will also manage access to social housing (including supported living) through waiting list management and Disabled Facility Grants (DFG) which are used to make home adaptations to support independence.

Moving to the Kent Council will facilitate strategic alignment of related functions, by improving coordination between housing need, land use and availability, infrastructure planning (such as ensuring accommodation is near transport hubs) and people-based service requirements including sufficiency of accommodation provision. The Kent Council will be able to explore housing options across a larger geographical area, ensuring provision is in the right place through intelligent planning. Resident engagement and co-production will be at the centre of this, facilitated through the area assemblies and enhanced community engagement approach, to ensure that all plans are informed by the needs of local communities.

This will lead to better access to housing, in the right place, with the right facilities available, maintaining independence, improving quality of life and reducing pressures on social care and health.

**Greater financial capacity for community based services to improve quality of life**

It is clear that there will be one off costs from transitioning to a new authority, whatever the model, whilst councils are also starting from a position of fiscal challenge. However, the Kent Council offers the greatest potential to drive efficiency savings by streamlining operations, reducing duplication and optimising resource allocation. Not only will this enhance service delivery, but it will ensure that taxpayer's money is utilised more effectively and can be spent on those community based services which have the greatest impact on residents quality of life.

With the increasing drain of people-based services on local government budgets, less resources are available to invest in universal services such as waste, highways maintenance and leisure or community services, the services that make our places communities. For the majority of residents across Kent and Medway who do not receive social care support, this is felt as an imbalance that contributes to a negative perception of quality of life and value for money from local councils. The Kent Council will bring together those place based services which are currently split across different tiers of government, increasing accountability and freeing up resources to be able to invest in services and spaces that make a difference to peoples lives' whether that is local parks, green spaces, roads, town centres or public rights of way. Through the three Area Assemblies and with a greater focus on community engagement, it will better facilitate services that reflect local nuances and respond to local needs, building communities that people are proud to live in.

The Kent Council will have the flexibility to scale up or devolve down service delivery to remove inefficiencies in systems that were not designed with the resident or business at the centre. For Kent and Medway, a single unitary will also enable the gains from the Fair

Funding review, to increase spend at front line delivery, as intended. Whilst the authority's greater financial resilience will not solve the issues around the financial sustainability of local government, it will create stronger foundations to manage risk.

**Transforming our delivery: Public perception of value for money through visible services**

LGR presents opportunities to improve delivery of environmental services such as graffiti removal, litter management and street cleaning, and consequently improve public perception of increased value for money for council services.

The Kent Council will consolidate all environmental service responsibility into a single council. It will provide an opportunity to merge disparate service standards and practices across former councils to offer consistent service levels and standardisation of response. Pooling resource (funding, staffing, vehicles, equipment) from 14 separate councils into one large single unitary authority offers opportunity for economies of scale for centralised procurement e.g. for cleaning equipment and vehicles etc. It offers the chance to re-tender or re-negotiate contracts, and to align contracts with a single council strategic vision and performance expectations.

Area assemblies offer the opportunity to inform local service delivery through improved feedback and engagement loops, reflecting community priorities, as well as present a more local targeted approach to campaigns to change poor environmental behaviours.
There is also an opportunity to consolidate reporting and data systems to better understand hotspots and trends, enabling targeted interventions, and more effective performance monitoring. For example, the Kent Council can use GIS mapping to identify litter-prone areas and schedule cleaning accordingly. Innovation and technology will be better utilised to improve efficiencies and responsiveness, e.g. using AI to detect graffiti via CCTV.
Moving to a single unitary option presents opportunity to further embed good environmental practices into wider council strategy and policy, for example, alignment with prevention and well-being goals.

This means residents will have one point of contact for reporting concerns, reducing confusion and improving satisfaction. The Kent Council will have oversight resulting in more strategic investment in environmental services. Locally, service delivery will be shaped via community engagement and area assemblies to ensure that residents' views are addressed. Improved environmental service delivery will mean cleaner streets and enhance day to day living in the County.

## Better outcomes for our people

**Sustainable service delivery**

Rising demand, funding pressures and unresponsive provider markets are creating unsustainable people-based services. The Kent Council will unlock economies of scale and support more strategic commissioning and enable 'invest to save' initiatives that deliver long-term value. Not only this but it will be coterminous with public sector partners, such as Kent Police, NHS Kent and Medway and will see an increase in partnership working enabling

more integrated and person-centred care, to address the underlying causes which lead to high cost service interventions, supported by community-level work with the Area Assemblies.

A single unitary will provide a simpler point of engagement for partners such as NHS and Police for supporting people who have overlapping needs and create the basis for more joined up planning and integrated pathways. Where currently existing joint service arrangements are in place with partners such as the NHS, a single unitary will not only support the continuation of these e.g. Section 75 arrangements and joint funded care packages but through strengthened partnerships provide more opportunities for integrated working.

The ability to better balance service demand and market capacity across a broader geography will help to equalise demand for adult and children's social care and housing support, reduce disparities in deprivation and age profiles, and optimise the use of care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) placements. This balance will enhance operational resilience and allow for more strategic resource allocation. Balanced demographics will also support long-term sustainability by enabling more predictable commissioning and reducing service pressure.

Given the ongoing pressures on workforce across the social care system, a single unitary will support workforce sustainability and planning and avoid duplication. It will be able to better manage the expected growth in demand for social care services, particularly in areas with higher predicted increases, and allows for both a broader financial base to withstand demand surges, and in terms of managing staffing resource. Scale is vital for specialist services and those that the local authority relies on, specialist providers and their specialist skills to deliver. The Kent Council maintains the coherence to influence the market and ensure that markets are stable and responsive to the populations needs, creating better services for residents. It will have an enhanced power to negotiate to drive up standards and drive down costs, more effectively tackling issues such as provider fee disparity within the market for the benefit of the taxpayer. Enhanced data sharing will also enable greater quality monitoring to ensure that issues such as provider failure are flagged early and are able to be dealt with swiftly to the benefit of those in receipt of services.

**A prevention first approach**

A crisis focused system and lack of a preventative model of service delivery within social care and health has led to a cycle of escalating issues and increased pressure on people-based services. This has curtailed the ability to strategically plan, invest in prevention, or pursue service integration. The Kent Council offers the opportunity to deliver significant public service reform, to refocus from crisis management toward prevention. By bringing together services such as housing, leisure, education and social care under a single unified structure, it simplifies integration with external partners and creates new opportunities. As a result, it will help to reduce the demand on crisis services, improve outcomes for individuals and families, and reduce the number of 'hand offs' as people get passed around different agencies increasing the risk of people slipping through the net, which often creates delays to support resulting in more costly interventions. For example an individual with housing and debt needs but who also requires mental health and social care support, will access this

support through one organisation without the need to tell a difficult and complex story multiple times, risking delays to their support.

The Kent Council removes a post code lottery of quality and access and instead offers the ability to deliver excellence across Kent and Medway, without differing levels of resource and capability. Importantly it will also maintain the partnerships which effectively deliver statutory services such as safeguarding, creating opportunities for greater collaboration, with an enhanced sharing of data to both deescalate and predict need in the most complex of cases.

The Kent Council will have greater capacity for support functions such as data collection and reporting, analytics, audits, quality assurance and practice development to provide strategic oversight and insight into where to target prevention resource, identify emerging trends and patterns, and forecasting and predicting need. There will be more scope for area-wide data sharing agreements with strategic partners to really understand and inform how to best address needs of residents and before they escalate. All of these functions will help in delivering the right prevention services to the right people in order to drive down longer-term demand into public services.

**Transforming our delivery: Public Services Prevention**

LGR can facilitate a 'prevention-first' approach for residents by further integrating council functions and by working more closely with key partners.

The Kent Council's enhanced community engagement mechanisms will help facilitate local engagement. A co-production approach to service design and service delivery will be underpinned by hard evidence; the Kent Council would hold all resident data across all council services. This would allow for more comprehensive and efficient information and data sharing within the authority and with partner agencies such as the NHS and Police. AI could be used to analyse the collated data to identify cohorts to further target resources and activities, such as falls prevention in older adults, obesity in primary school children, or youth anti-social behaviour.

For example, strengthened information sharing and coordination across health, social care and housing services could help people in addiction recovery to find appropriate accommodation and reduce their risk of becoming homeless.
This approach would lead to improved health and well-being outcomes, by helping to meet needs early on resulting in reduced escalation. In turn this would reduce demand on statutory functions, create a more sustainable and efficient system and deliver longer term cost avoidance.

**Person centred delivery**
A single unitary will of course remove duplication in the local government system but a single unitary is not simply about moving the boundaries, it is about designing services that work for the residents of Kent.

The Kent Council will maximise the opportunities for delivering services that are responsive to people's needs, which are intelligently designed and not dictated by structures. Where

local delivery matters to residents and will produce the best outcomes, the council will have the flexibility to join up services locally and take a holistic approach. Whilst the Kent Council will have scale to deliver standardised approaches where appropriate, it will also have the resources to deliver personalised services where they are essential- where individual needs are paramount.

With joined up services, a Kent Council will be able to establish multidisciplinary teams around individuals needs for services such as housing, public health, leisure and social care, which will enable a transformative approach for people with complex needs but also for the wider determinants of health within our county.

It will also enable greater partnership working, utilising the expertise and knowledge of partners who are embedded in, and understand their communities. For example, for key partners such as the Voluntary and Community Sector, a single Kent Council will be much easier to navigate without the arbitrary boundaries of local government, which charities often operate and deliver across. Through the three Area Assemblies and enhanced engagement approach there will be an opportunity for greater co design at the local level with smaller VCS organisations who can provide invaluable insights into service design and delivery, resulting in more responsive services.

The Kent Council will have a simple council structure, making it easier to navigate for our residents, with one website and one central source of information. Likewise, residents would have a single point of contact to their local Member to raise concerns and to suggest improvements to council services (e.g. local Highways improvement projects). In addition, opportunities to create a single case work management system across the new unitary authority, will also make it easier for officers to share information and create more person centric and holistic services.

The future services of the Kent Council will through the dual power of scale and personalised support better meet the individual needs of our people and our places.

# 12. Implementation planning

The successful delivery of Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway requires a structured, well-managed approach to both transition and transformation. Once the Government confirms the direction for Kent and Medway, implementation will be jointly planned and delivered in collaboration with partner Councils across the county and with MHCLG. This section outlines Kent County Council's proposed high-level plan, based on the preferred single-unitary model. The plan is structured around four key phases, underpinned by a robust programme management framework and a transparent governance structure designed to ensure accountability and clarity throughout the process.

The success of implementation will be the basis upon which public and partner perception of the Kent Council is built, therefore, it is crucial that activity undertaken across all phases supports the delivery of long-term organisational ambitions and ultimately the development of an effective, efficient and sustainable new authority that residents and stakeholders have confidence in.

## Implementation guiding principles

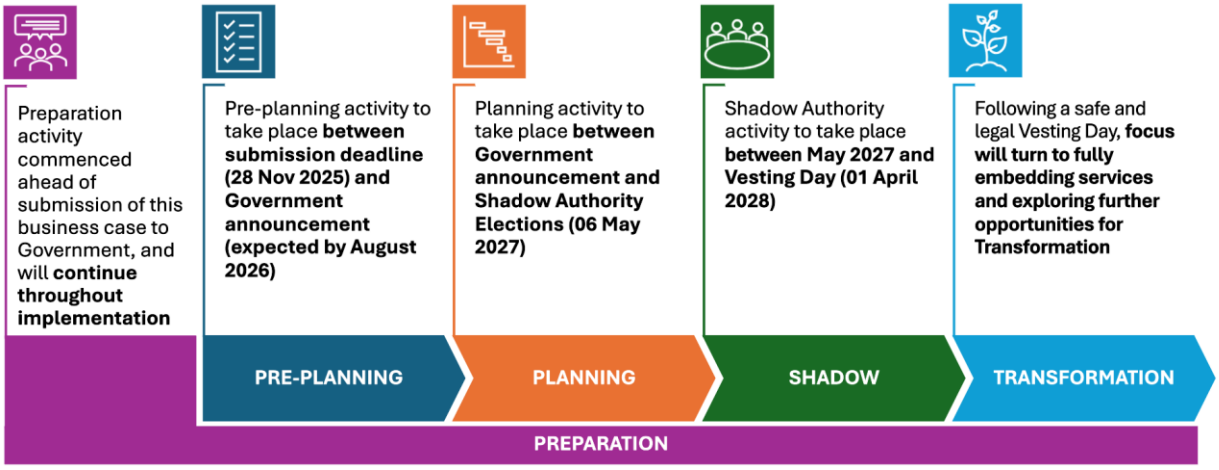
Principles will be developed to underpin our approach to implementing LGR in Kent and Medway. They will act as a framework for decision-making to ensure that transition is delivered consistently in a way that supports our residents, staff and communities.

KCC's proposed principles:

1. **Resident Focussed -** We will continue to put the needs of residents and communities first. Disruption to the delivery of essential services will be minimised and preservation and strengthening of local identity and local voice will be prioritised.
2. **Minimise Risk and Disruption -** KCC would seek to explore the option of continuing authority status to help reduce transitional risk and ensure disruption to our services and residents' lives is minimised.
3. **Resilient workforce -** We will support our staff to deliver high quality services to our residents throughout the process. Careful consideration will be given to succession planning and knowledge transfer to ensure we retain valuable experience and talent in our workforce as we transition to the new authority.
4. **Transparent -** Implementation will be open and transparent, with clear lines of governance, scrutiny, and decision-making in place.
5. **Value for Money -** Resources will be managed carefully, balancing short-term transition costs with long-term financial sustainability and efficiency.
6. **Future-focussed -** The transition will not simply "drag and drop" existing arrangements but will seek to draw on the strengths of predecessor councils and maximise opportunities for transformation, with a focus on efficiency, through innovation and improved ways of working to create a unified, cohesive and resilient organisation.
7. **Partnership and Collaboration -** We are committed to working collaboratively. Strong relationships with partners will be maintained and enhanced to deliver better outcomes together.

8. **Legality and Safety -** All actions and decisions will comply fully with statutory and regulatory requirements, ensuring the legal integrity of the new authority and the continued safety and protection of our residents, staff and communities.
9. **Continuous Improvement -** We will continue to learn from our own experience and the experience of others and use this knowledge to inform transition and ongoing improvement, ensuring the new council is able to adapt and evolve to meet future challenges.

## Four Phases of Implementation




**Preparation** *(Before and throughout implementation)*
If granted, KCC could act as the 'continuing authority', building on the foundations of the largest existing organisation will minimise transitional activity, time and cost and disruption to residents. KCC will continue to prepare, ensuring where possible systems and services are future proofed and in the best position possible to support efficient transition. Preparation activity will span all implementation phases, as impacted authorities continue to find service efficiencies and protect the financial resilience of the organisations so that the Kent Council is set up to succeed.

Preparation activity may include:

- Undertaking a review of data, systems, subscriptions, contracts, strategies and policies to ensure they are robust and fit for both current and future transitional purposes
- Review of corporate processes to ensure they are flexible to the needs of transition e.g. business planning, performance reporting and internal audit
- HR review, ensuring information is up to date and correct e.g. contracts, job titles and job specifications
- Engaging members, staff, trade unions, partners
- Engaging other local authorities who have been through LGR to understand lessons learned
- Documentation of Risks and Issues linked to LGR Implementation.

**Pre-Planning** *(Between business case submission and government decision*)
From the point of business case submission, a pre-planning phase will commence. Given the scale and complexity of LGR implementation it is important that time is used effectively while awaiting the announcement of Government's decision for Kent and Medway. The focus of this phase will be planning and building the foundations upon which the Implementation Programme will be delivered, and ensuring authorities' individual and collective readiness for transition.

Pre-Planning activity may include:

- Develop outline of Programme Implementation Plan
- Planning and resourcing of workstreams
- Governance planning and agreement (including mapping and agreement of decision making protocols)
- Setting up programme architecture
- Continuation of work to align and consolidate systems, contracts, assets and change activity
- Ongoing communications and engagement activity
- Ongoing liaison with government.

**Planning** *(Between government decision and Shadow election)*
Following announcement of Government's decision for Kent and Medway, the Planning phase will commence. This phase will focus on the development of a detailed Transition Implementation Plan and the mobilisation of programme architecture that will support its delivery, including joint-decision making arrangements.

Activity in this phase may include:

- Mapping county and complementary district functions to identify possible efficiencies and opportunities for aggregation
- Development and agreement of a detailed Transition Implementation Plan
- Mobilisation of Implementation Workstreams and development and agreement of workstream action plans
- Continuation of work to align and consolidate systems, contracts, assets and change activity
- Ongoing communications and engagement activity
- Ongoing liaison with government.

**Shadow Authority** *(Between Shadow Authority election day and Vesting Day)*
Shadow Elections aid a safe and legal transition by ensuring those who will be responsible for governing the new council are accountable for decisions on transition arrangements. Following Shadow Elections (6 May 2027), the focus will be on ensuring the Kent Council is ready to operate safely, legally and effectively on Vesting Day. Crucially in this phase, decisions will be made to ensure operational readiness from day one, which includes but is not limited to decision-making around senior leadership roles, operating models, service and staff transition, buildings, systems and data. Plans will be laid to assist decision-making that is beyond the Shadow authority's jurisdiction and will require enactment after the new unitary authority is fully operational.

Activity in this phase may include:

- Establishment of Shadow Executive arrangements
- Senior staff appointments
- Governance arrangements
- Financial arrangements
- Operating Model
- Budget setting for first year of new authority
- Service and staff transition planning
- Testing and user acceptance activity
- Community engagement governance
- Consolidation and rationalisation activity (assets, data and systems)
- Transformation - invest to save and PSR activity
- Ongoing communications and engagement activity
- Vision, identity and branding activity.

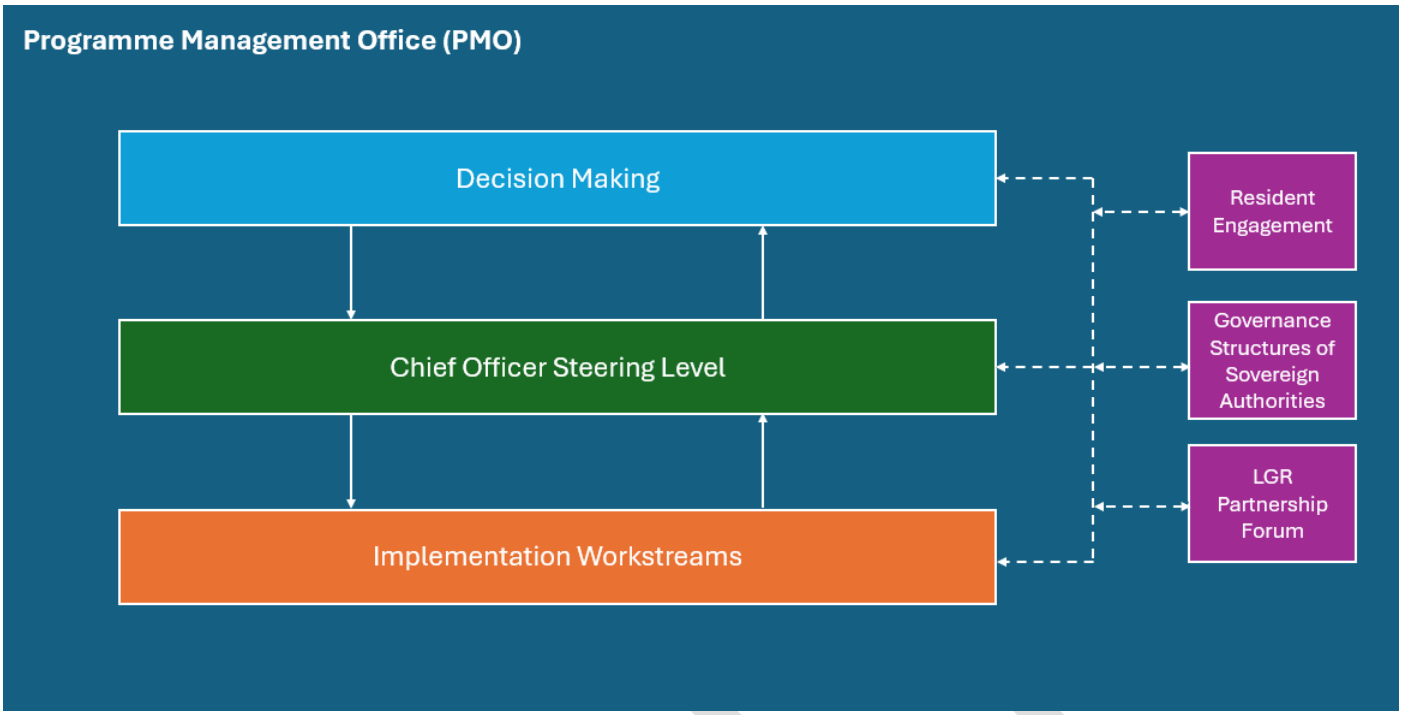
**Transformation** *(Beyond Vesting Day)*
As of Vesting Day (01 April 2028) the priority will continue to be assuring safe, legal and efficient delivery of services. Closure activity will take place in legacy authorities while work to fully integrate services and embed new operating models in the new unitary authority will continue. Opportunities for further transformation and innovation, focussing on efficiency and the delivery of high-quality services, will be pursued which may include the establishment of a transformation programme.

Activity in this phase may include:

- Safe and legal delivery of services
- Setting of corporate priorities and objectives
- Closedown of legacy councils, systems, platforms etc
- Evaluation and feedback activity
- Continued programme and change management capacity
- Continued transformation – including invest to save, PSR
- Workforce training, development and integration activity
- Branding, communication, and resident engagement campaigns.

## Programme governance

A proposed structure for implementation governance arrangements is set out below, a final structure will be developed and agreed jointly with partner Councils across Kent and further refined and aligned to meet specifications of the Structural Change Order (SCO) as required.




**Programme Management Office (PMO)**
This structure will be supported by a Programme Management Office (PMO), led by a Programme Manager. The role of the PMO will include:

- Leading on the design and development of a full Implementation Plan
- Coordinating the delivery of the Implementation Plan and facilitating progress reporting
- Providing support to all levels of the governance structure as required, which may include but is not limited to information sharing, monitoring, facilitation and drafting
- Developing and maintaining key programme documentation e.g. to manage risks, map dependencies and track resources and benefits
- Co-ordinating cross-cutting themes and issues across workstreams, including identification of opportunities for public service reform
- Engaging stakeholders, including other authorities to understand LGR implementation lessons learned.

**Decision Making Level**
An appropriate joint board will be created as the responsible decision-making vehicle for LGR Implementation for Kent and Medway. Membership of this Board will be established appropriately to meet the requirements necessary to grant decision making powers. Decision-making protocols for implementation will be mapped and agreed during the pre-planning phase of implementation. Sovereign authorities will still need to take key decisions through their own formal governance process, sufficient time and support for which will built into the programme delivery / implementation plan.

**Chief Officer Steering Level**
A Chief Officer Steering Group will be created to provide oversight to the activity undertaken by the PMO and Implementation Workstreams, and assurance and advice to the decision-making board. The role of the Steering Group would include:

- Reviewing the implementation programme plan and ensuring it is progressing in regard to the business case approved by MHCLG
- Signing off activity as appropriate (that does not require formal decision)
- Overseeing the delivery of workstream action plans and ensuring collaboration across workstreams is facilitated to address cross-cutting issues as required
- Responding to challenges and issues as they arise.

**Implementation Workstream Level**
The following workstreams will be established, the membership of which will be made up of representatives from across impacted authorities. Some workstreams may also have representatives from external partners where relevant. A lead will be allocated for each workstream, and they will feed information into and receive feedback from the Officer Steering Group as required. Each workstream will develop and deliver a detailed transition action plan, progress on which will be monitored through the workstream working groups and the LGR Steering Group.

The workstreams will be underpinned by a clear programme management approach, which will drive a consistent focus on timely delivery, risk management, stakeholder engagement and benefit realisation.

1. **Governance, Democratic Services and Legal**
2. **Finance**
3. **Human Resources and Organisational Development**
4. **Data and IT**
5. **Assets and Property**
6. **People Based Services**
7. **Place Based Services**
8. **Communications, Community Engagement and Partnerships**

**LGR Partnership Forum**
The purpose of the forum will be to ensure that there is significant and meaningful co-design and consultation with key stakeholders. Partners will be encouraged to advise on design and implementation of relevant areas of service delivery and assist with the engagement and wider understanding of the new arrangements in the community. Feedback from this group will be reported to all levels of the transition / implementation governance model as required. It is proposed that membership could include representation from (but is not limited to) the following sectors:

- Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC)
- Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Organisations (VCSE)
- Kent Community Foundation
- Kent Police
- NHS Kent and Medway
- Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
- Trade Union representation
- Education representation (including Further and Higher Education).

## 13. Conclusion

We believe that this business case sets out a strong and compelling argument to Government for a new Kent Council covering Kent and Medway. Whilst many areas may rightly claim their unique qualities and challenges, as we have shown Kent and Medway's unique challenges go beyond this county, impacting the country and therefore Government. Our scale, resources and expertise have kept these challenges largely managed and mitigated within the county and this must not be lost through the unnecessary fragmentation of structures and services.

The Kent Council would have an even greater platform upon which to mitigate risks, overcome future challenges but importantly reform our services so that the residents of Kent and Medway can have the best quality of life possible.

The Kent Council would deliver high quality and sustainable services, with not only the commitment to transform our service delivery but with the financial sustainability, resources and scale to achieve this.

We believe strongly that the Kent Council is the most viable option for Kent and Medway. It would balance financial resilience, service quality and local empowerment to deliver economic prosperity, sustainable growth and excellent public services to our people and communities.

**One Kent. One Council. Our Unique County.**

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## 14. List of Appendices

*The following appendices will be included with the final Strategic Business Case.*

**Evidence Base:**

- KCC financial assessment report
- KCC engagement assessment report
- KCC democracy and local identity assessment report
- KCC transformation assessment report
- KCC devolution policy assessment report
- KCC housing growth analysis report
- KCC Analytics information pack
- Newton report on implications for people-based services
- PwC report on local government reorganisation in Kent
- KPMG financial analysis and methodology

**Options Appraisal:**

- KCC detailed scoring table
- KCC rationale for scoring
- KCC initial options appraisal of option 1a
- KPMG options appraisal
- KPMG scoring dashboard

**Supporting Documents:**

- Member Allowance calculations
- Community Engagement Toolkit
- Equality Impact Assessment

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# Kent LGR Business Case: Option 3A

# V2.0

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# Foreword (placeholder)

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# Executive summary

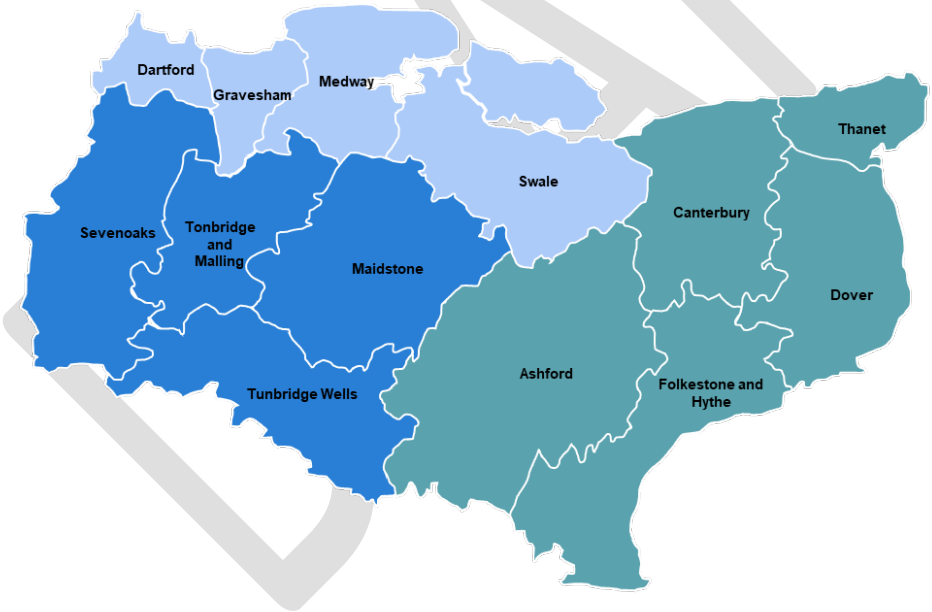
**Introducing Option 3A**

Supported by **[Councils to be inserted],** the Option 3A business case sets out a three-unitary model for the Local Government Reorganisation of Kent & Medway.

Option 3A meets each of the Government's criteria for reorganisation, and in doing so, has the greatest savings potential, lowest one-off implementation costs and shortest estimated payback period. It allows for strong local accountability and ensures services reflect community needs, whilst achieving economies of scale and supporting fiscal stability.

The 3A model offers broadly balanced populations which align to local identities and creates unitary councils with the capacity to deliver and meet the needs of changing populations.

This model has alignment and support from the county's largest public sector partners, strengthening opportunities for place-based service development alongside social and health care integration and transformation, and wider public service reform. The model will allow for pan-Kent service provision and limit the costs of other public sector partners by reducing their requirement to realign, and forms a strong basis for future devolution.




*"From the point of view of how policing is organised in Kent, I believe that if local government re-organisation is required, it should be with three unitary authorities, built on the existing District council boundaries and Kent Police's Divisional structure."*
*Kent Police and Crime Commissioner*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 |
| Current council areas | • Dartford<br>• Gravesham<br>• Medway<br>• Swale | • Maidstone<br>• Sevenoaks<br>• Tonbridge & Malling<br>• Tunbridge Wells | • Ashford<br>• Canterbury<br>• Dover<br>• Folkestone & Hythe<br>• Thanet |
| | A strategically important logistics and infrastructure hub, North Kent will drive economic growth through its proximity to London, major transport corridors (M25, M2), and international gateways like Ebbsfleet and the Port of Sheerness. It will focus on clean growth, advanced manufacturing, and professional services, with a diverse population and strong urban regeneration potential. | A knowledge-driven region with a high-quality environment that is well placed to leverage its skilled workforce, heritage assets, and green infrastructure to attract investment in life sciences, creative industries, and professional services. It shares a strong sense of identity, economic, social, and transport links, making it a coherent unit for governance while preserving local representation. | A diverse coastal and rural economy anchored by major ports and education hubs, East Kent will be the Gateway to Europe. It will focus on regeneration, tourism, creative industries, and green energy, supported by high-speed rail and strategic transport links. The area's rich heritage and cultural assets will underpin place-based growth. |

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## **Purpose and approach** (see section 1)

The reorganisation of local government presents a valuable opportunity to redesign a system that better serves the diverse needs of Kent and Medway's residents.

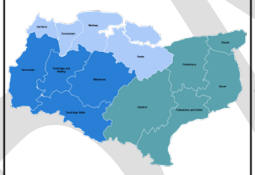
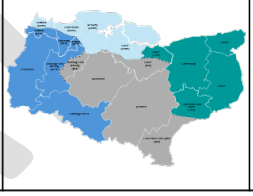
The 14 councils of Kent have collaborated to develop a model reflecting established population and economic centres as well as community and workplace patterns.

Through this joint effort, the councils have developed five business cases addressing the government's six reform criteria, proposing to replace the current two-tier system with more efficient and resilient unitary authorities.

These authorities aim to support devolution, enhance service delivery and strengthen community engagement.

Each proposal is underpinned by a shared evidence base, robust governance, transparent appraisal and extensive stakeholder and public consultation to form a united and evidence-led vision for the future of local government in Kent and Medway.

Of the five options considered, Option 3A is being put forward as the preferred proposal in this case.

| | Option 1a | Option 3a | Option 4b | Option 4d | Option 5a |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Approach to drafting** | Kent County Council leading with some shared input around finance and services. | Common approach to drafting with input from councils. | | | |
| **Structure, formatting and branding** | Separate structure, formatting and branding. | Single approach to structure, formatting and branding across four business cases. A significant proportion of content across the four cases will be shared and clearly highlighted within the cases. | | | |

## **The Kent context** (see section 2)

Kent, located in the south east of England, is a geographically diverse and economically important area.

Known as the Garden of England and the UK's Gateway to Europe, it covers 3,739 sq. km with a population of about 1.93 million.

The county combines densely populated urban centres with extensive rural areas.

Its landscape includes the North Downs, The Weald, and a long coastline featuring the White Cliffs of Dover. Rivers like the Thames, Medway and Stour support trade and settlement.

Economically, Kent has evolved from its agricultural roots into a modern, mixed economy encompassing manufacturing, logistics, life sciences, tourism and digital industries.

Major assets include the Port of Dover, the Discovery Park science and technology hub and excellent transport links.

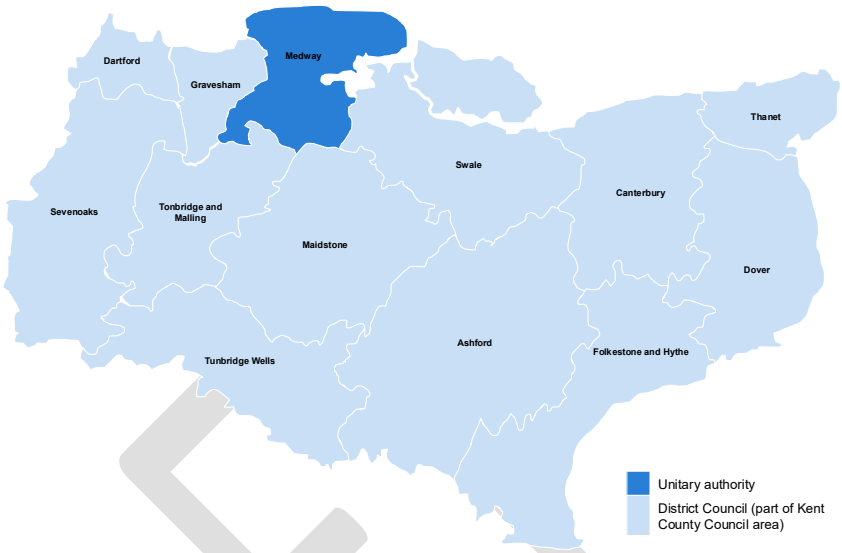
Kent's strategic location, skilled workforce and innovation hubs drive regional growth and support its case for devolution and local government reform.

Kent currently has a two-tier local government system.

At the upper tier is Kent County Council, while the lower tier consists of 12 district and borough councils.

Medway Council functions separately as a unitary authority.

In addition, there are more than 300 town and parish councils handling local-level services.




The current mixed model of service delivery creates complexity and all 14 councils recognise the potential benefits of moving towards a single-tier system with fewer organisations and a more unified governance structure.

**Challenges and opportunities** (see section 3)

Councils across the county face financial pressures and rising demand.

In Kent, key pressures include:

- uneven funding and tax bases
- escalating social care and border-related costs
- workforce shortages and morale issues
- fragmented governance across the two-tier system

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) offers a unique opportunity to create a more efficient, resilient and sustainable model.

By simplifying structures and pursuing devolution, Kent can streamline service delivery, strengthen financial stability, enhance collaboration across sectors, attract investment and build a greater sense of place to ensure more cohesive, accountable and community focused local government services.

**Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation** (see section 4)

Our vision for local government in Kent is:

**Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially-sustainable and accountable local public services delivered in partnership with communities**.

LGR is the catalyst for transformation and reform, creating resilient, digitally-enabled councils rooted in local identity and strong partnerships.

It is crucial that devolution and LGR are linked: structural reform unlocks the powers, funding and flexibility needed to make decisions locally and drive growth.

Kent's ambition is to deliver better outcomes for all residents through sustainable, accountable and community-focused public services.

All councils in Kent are united in their support for devolving powers to a single strategic authority.

This will ensure decisions about Kent are made in Kent, by those who know its communities best.

LGR and devolution are intrinsically linked. To fully realise our vision, we need the powers, funding and countywide collaboration that only a devolution deal and a new strategic Kent authority can provide.

We are committed to securing a devolution deal for Kent at the earliest possible opportunity.

Option 3A creates three strong councils and strikes the right balance between resilience, financial stability, efficiency and local connection. Guided by shared principles of resident focus, collaboration, digital innovation, and strong leadership, this proposal sets out a clear framework for a more responsive, cohesive, and future-ready system.

**The case for Option 3A** (see section 5)

Option 3A delivers balanced populations whilst respecting existing borough and district boundaries. It delivers strong alignment to transport networks, travel-to-work areas, local identity and public service geographies. The proposed unitary councils have the scale to ensure efficient coordination, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks, ensuring sustainable service delivery across provision.

The model aligns closely with health, police and fire service boundaries, reducing fragmentation and improving opportunities for co-ordination, integration and collaboration for system wide transformation. It is supported by major public service partners both for the benefits to day-to-day operational co-ordination and the potential to further develop and reinforce partnership, place-based working and longer-term integration, shared funding and transformational change. It preserves local identity while strengthening governance and resilience and lays the foundation for devolution and public sector reform.

Option 3A creates a simplified, efficient and community-focussed single tier structure, capable of delivering sustainable services and economic growth, driving up living standards and enabling good health creation. It is the most efficient and least disruptive option for Kent, with lower transition costs, and a shorter payback period than other multi unitary options, while meeting population requirements of government.

Three unitary councils creates financially sustainable and democratically accountable authorities, with sufficient scale to provide core services and the flexibility to meet the needs of the local population.

Summarised below are the key arguments for why Option 3A is best for Kent.

| Key theme | Arguments | Government Criteria |
|---|---|---|
| **Financial viability and balanced growth** | • Scale supports economic resilience, including the ability to absorb shocks in high-pressure services i.e. demand for social care.<br>• Balances tax bases and supports fair council tax harmonisation for long-term financial stability.<br>• Larger councils (567k–687k residents) deliver the optimal scale for resilience and efficiency.<br>• Consolidation from fourteen councils to three removes duplication, simplifies governance, and maximises savings.<br>• Three proposed councils have broadly balanced economic strength, tax bases, and Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita, supporting sustainable growth and resilience.<br>• Economies of scale in procurement, staffing, IT, HR, and infrastructure reduce duplication.<br>• Transformation and digital investment enabled by scale and capacity.<br>• Simplified governance improves financial oversight and transparency, reducing risk of inefficiency.<br>• Simplified structures support strong partnership across unitary areas to collaborate on strategic issues, enabling service delivery on a pan-Kent basis.<br>• Avoids boundary changes, limiting disruption and extra cost, time and risk.<br>• Strong fiscal starting positions and balanced populations ensure capacity to manage pressures and withstand shocks.<br>• Offers the best value for money, with the highest savings, lowest transition costs, and quickest payback period. | Criteria 1, 2, 3 |
| **Local identity and community cohesion** | • Proposed boundaries align with historic, cultural, and service geographies, preserving local identity and social cohesion across North, West and East Kent.<br>• Recognisable community ties are maintained (e.g. Cinque Ports, coastal towns, market towns) supporting continuation of local traditions, civic institutions, and community networks.<br>• Alignment with 'Travel to Work' areas supporting coherent economic geographies for housing, infrastructure, study patterns and labour markets.<br>• Enables coordinated housing, transport, and infrastructure planning at a meaningful scale, with critical UK port of entry points contained within one council able to support communities effectively when disruption occurs. | Criteria 1, 3, 4, 6 |
| **Population, governance and democratic accountability** | • Population densities vary logically (urban vs rural), allowing tailored service priorities (e.g. urban regeneration vs green infrastructure).<br>• Streamlined governance structure strengthens ability to engage effectively at an appropriate scale with central government and regional bodies. | Criteria 1, 2, 3 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Broadly balanced populations across unitary areas.<br>• Councillor-to-elector ratios in line with ratios seen nationally through recent LGR programmes ensuring democratic accountability.<br>• Well-developed governance arrangements and effective structural and policy measures that enhance neighbourhood and community engagement.<br>• Ensures councillors and residents have meaningful influence over local services and priorities. | |
| **Better, More Integrated Public Services** | • Aligns boundaries with NHS, Police, transport, and travel to work / study areas to improve coordination and consistency.<br>• Existing partnerships and shared services enhance capacity and reduce fragmentation, supporting public service reform. Services disrupted by LGR will be actively managed and adapted to maintain continuity and effectiveness.<br>• Scale, capacity and alignment of place-based and people services to deliver prevention and complex reforms in social care.<br>• Larger, strategically aligned councils can plan and deliver jointly on community safety, health, housing, and care.<br>• Enhances data sharing, specialist capacity, and system-wide collaboration to tackle shared challenges across unitary areas.<br>• Unites Dover, Folkestone and Ashford to provide for coherent oversight of the county's strategic road and rail entry ports. | Criteria 1, 3, 4 |
| **Platform for Devolution, Strategic Growth and Regional Priorities** | • Balanced unitary authorities meet the population scale for effective devolution and efficient delivery.<br>• Supports fair representation and joint decision-making within a future Mayoral Strategic Authority.<br>• Provides sufficiently sized areas for strategic planning to meet priorities including housing targets, economic growth and supporting integration with preventative and integrated care. | Criteria 5 |

**Implementation plan** (see section 6)

Kent's LGR implementation plan aims to follow a phased and collaborative approach across all councils, leveraging a well-established shared programme with strong governance and joint planning.

The process is structured into preparation, foundational, shadow authority, officer leadership and go-live phases, each with clear priorities to ensure a smooth transition while driving ambitious public service reform alongside devolution.

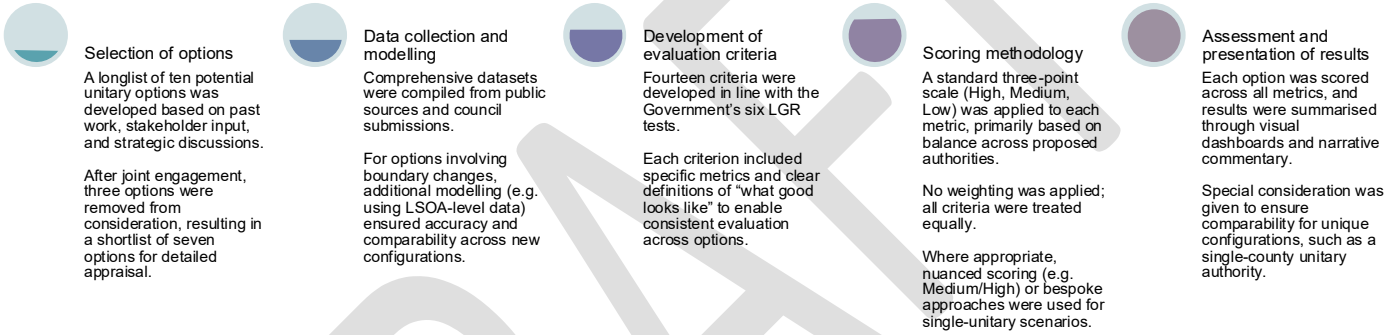
The programme builds on Kent's history of joint working and lessons from previous LGR efforts, supported by targeted governance, workstreams and stakeholder engagement to mitigate risks related to service disaggregation, aggregation, ICT and working together, aiming for a seamless, efficient transition that benefits residents and public services over the long-term.

**Options appraisal** (see Appendix 1)

A rigorous and collaborative process undertaken by the 14 Kent local authorities to appraise potential council governance options. The aim was to provide a robust, consistent, and evidence-based foundation to support local decision-making on which options should advance to full business case development.

The appraisal followed national guidance and was aligned with the Government's six criteria for local government reorganisation, as set out in correspondence from the Secretary of State in February and June 2025. Importantly, the process did not rank or recommend any preferred option but provided a shared evidence base to inform council decisions.

**Key stages of the appraisal process:**




Council Leaders reviewed the appraisal findings, supported by resident and stakeholder views. While the appraisal did not determine a preferred option, it served as an objective and structured basis for informed political judgement and democratic decision-making on which options should proceed to business case development.

**Financial modelling** (see Appendix 2)

Finance officers across all 14 Kent councils have reviewed and adjusted the financial modelling in order to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to government.

The key driver of difference between options are the number of councils being proposed.

Due to the assumptions applied within the modelling, implementation costs and recurring costs of disaggregation increase as the number of councils proposed increases.

The headline numbers for Option 3A are set out below:

| LGR option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Option 3A** | (127.8) | 69.4 | (19.7) - (29.2) | 40.2 - 49.7 | 5.4 – 6.7 years |

*A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

The three-unitary option is the proposal which offers best value, with the highest savings, lowest transition costs, and quickest payback period. This model supports larger taxbases and, in line with the financial modelling, requires lower disaggregation and transition costs while offering greater opportunities for economies of scale.

Of all the options being considered, 3A provides the most balanced population distribution, promoting resilience and strategic capacity. Each authority is sized to efficiently deliver services, withstand financial pressures, and invest in transformation, while remaining closely connected to local communities. The model also avoids boundary changes, which would inevitably be associated with increased costs, risk and complexity.

The model is designed to absorb future shocks and manage demand in high-pressure services such as adult social care and children's services and has the potential to support strengthened integration and partnership working across public sector services developing innovative and coordinated responses to areas such as homelessness.

Alignment with partner structures supports public service reform and provides a firm basis for future devolution.

***"…our preference would be for the smallest number of unitary councils to minimise infrastructure costs and the risk of fragmenting services."***
*NHS Kent and Medway*

**Data sources** (see Appendix 3)

A common data set was used for all analyses presented in this case.

Details of the data set including its source, structure and variables, are provided in Appendix 3.

# Section 1: Purpose and approach

This section includes:


## Purpose of the business case

## A collaborative approach across all Kent councils


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# Purpose of the business case

## Responding to the Government's request

On 5 February, the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, wrote to all leaders within Kent inviting them to submit options for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The letter reiterated the government's ambition to see the current two-tier system replaced with larger unitary authorities that are better able to deliver services, support economic growth and operate effectively within a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).

The government's letter set out six criteria for successful LGR which informs the structure and content of business cases submitted by Kent councils.

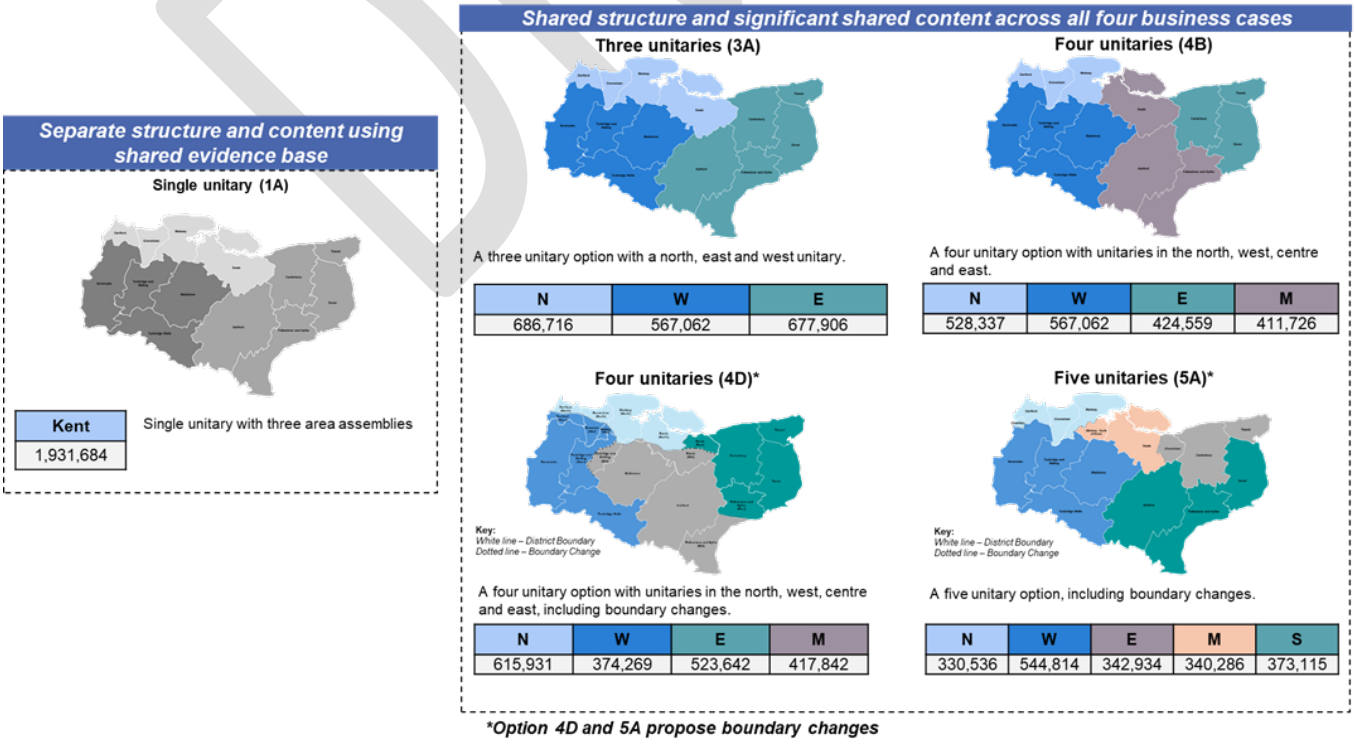
1. Establishing a single tier of local government
2. Efficiency, capacity and resilience to shocks
3. High-quality, sustainable public services
4. Collaboration to meet local needs
5. Enabling devolution
6. Strengthening community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

## Five business cases across Kent

This document is one of five business cases developed across Kent as part of a coordinated programme involving the 14 local councils.

Each business case draws on a shared evidence base, ensuring consistency and a common understanding of the context, challenges and opportunities for public sector reform.

***Figure 1:*** *The five business cases*



Option 1A has been developed by Kent County Council with a structure which varies from the other four cases.

The narrative for the 1A case has not been shared here but the supporting evidence base used is the same.

The other four business cases follow a standard structure aligned with government criteria.

Each document contains a significant amount of shared content as well as option-specific elements. That shared content is clearly marked throughout the documents.

Content that is all or primarily shared across the four cases includes:

- **Section 1:** Purpose and approach
- **Section 2:** The Kent context
- **Section 3:** Challenges and opportunities
- **Section 4:** Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation
- **Section 5:** Case for change
  - **Criteria 5:** Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities
  - **Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement
- **Section 6:** Implementation plan
- **Appendix 1:** Options appraisal
- **Appendix 2:** Financial modelling
- **Appendix 3:** Key data sources

The case for change (section 5) makes up a significant proportion of the proposal.

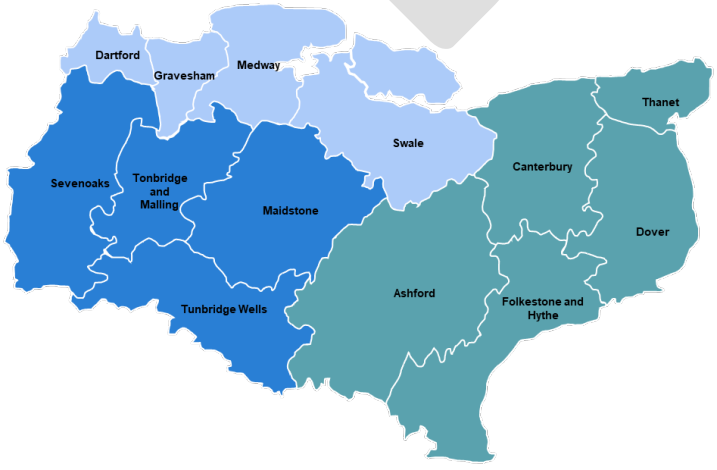
Within this section the majority of content is option specific, with some shared elements.

The case for change provides a clear and evidence-based narrative for why the proposed model is the most effective option for LGR in Kent.

**Business case for Option 3A**

This proposal presents a recommended three-unitary model (Option 3A) for the future of local government in Kent. In response to the Government's letter and subsequent feedback, it sets out a clear case for why this model is best aligned with the Government's six criteria for reform.

***Figure 2**: Population across Option 3A*




| Unitary | Areas | Population |
|---|---|---|
| *North* | Dartford, Gravesham, Medway, Swale | 686,716 |
| *West* | Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone | 567,062 |
| *East* | Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Thanet, Folkestone & Hythe | 677,906 |

This option is supported by **[Councils to be inserted].** Key factors for putting forward this specific geography are:

- **Economic viability and balanced growth:** Creates three balanced and coherent councils with the scale, efficiency, and strategic focus to plan for growth and deliver sustainable services. Avoids boundary changes, reducing disruption and supporting integrated delivery.
- **Local identity and community cohesion:** Respects local identities and existing historic, cultural and service boundaries while providing a strong foundation for future coordinated planning and community engagement.
- **Population, governance and democratic accountability:** Forms councils with balanced populations as well as streamlined and effective governance structures.
- **Better, more integrated public services:** Simplifies partnership working, with each unitary aligned to one Kent Police area and one NHS HCP team, reducing complexity, cost, and delay. Establishes congruent geographies that enable integrated, whole-system models, creating greater opportunities for prevention and delivering improved quality of life and financial outcomes.
- **Platform for devolution, strategic growth and regional priorities:** Provides sufficiently sized unitary areas that support equitable representation and enable effective alignment across government strategic priorities.

*Note: For the purposes of proposals to Government, future council names are referred to geographically (e.g. as 'East Kent'). These are holding names which are subject to change following confirmation of the option to be implemented.*

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# A collaborative approach across all Kent councils

**All Kent councils have prioritised working together, sharing information and full transparency throughout the LGR process. While five business cases are being submitted, we have minimised duplication and continually emphasised what we agree on over our differing views on specific council geographies.**

## Building on strong relationships

The Kent LGR governance framework is firmly rooted in established joint working among the 14 councils across Kent.

This longstanding tradition of partnership underpins every stage of the LGR process, ensuring inclusive and coordinated decision-making.

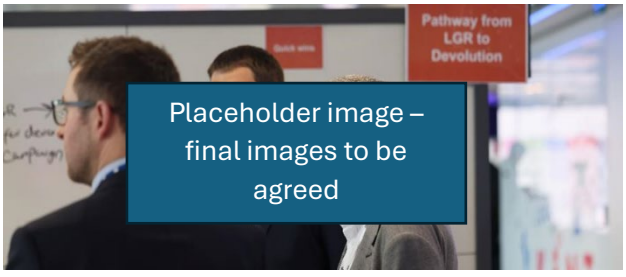
Our governance structure includes several key components:

- **Programme Board:** comprising the 14 Chief Executives, this board meets weekly to oversee progress, maintain strategic alignment and address emerging challenges across all councils.
- **Steering Group:** a smaller group of Chief Executives, Directors and Finance officers convene weekly to provide focused guidance on the development of the business cases, ensuring thorough evaluation and robust planning for reorganisation.
- **Leaders' meetings:** Held monthly, these sessions bring together Council Leaders to discuss and reach consensus on decisions, represent the voices of their communities and ensure residents' interests remain central throughout the process.
- **Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG):** All 14 Kent Finance Officers (S151s) across Kent have held regular meetings and worked together on all LGR related matters, including meeting on a weekly basis to review and challenge financial modelling.

We take pride in the collaborative spirit that has been sustained throughout the options appraisal and the development of multiple business cases.

This collective approach not only strengthens governance but also builds confidence among all stakeholders that decisions are made with shared commitment and mutual respect.

Importantly, this strong foundation will continue to serve us well beyond the decision point and the making of the Structural Changes Order, preparation for the shadow authorities and into the establishment of the successor authorities.






## Options appraisal process

The options appraisal was designed to provide a structured, evidence-based assessment of potential unitary options for Kent, helping to identify the options that should proceed to full business case development.

The approach included the following key steps:

1. **Option selection**: an initial longlist of 10 options was developed based on previous analysis submitted to government and local discussions regarding potential options. Through political engagement across Council Leaders, this was refined to a shortlist of seven options for full appraisal.

2. **Data collection and modelling**: data was gathered from publicly-available sources and direct council submissions which was used to model the potential structure and characteristics of each option, including assumptions where boundary changes were involved.

3. **Evaluation framework**: 14 evaluation criteria were developed, aligned to the government's six LGR criteria. For each criterion, specific metrics and definitions of "what good looks like" were agreed to enable consistent assessment.

4. **Scoring methodology**: each metric was assessed using a three-point scale (high, medium, low), based primarily on balance or distribution across proposed new councils. Additional guidance was applied where balance was not a relevant factor.

5. **Assessment process**: all options were scored against all metrics with results presented in dashboards and supported by narrative commentary. The output was comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad. No weighting was applied and the appraisal did not rank or recommend a preferred option.

Following the completion of the appraisal, Council Leaders met to consider the results alongside the views of their own councils and communities.

At this meeting, they agreed on a set of preferred options to proceed to the next stage, recognising both the evidence from the appraisal and the broader political and public context.

This consistent and transparent methodology ensured a shared evidence base to inform this proposal.

**Appendix 1** of this document outlines the step-by-step process, evaluation criteria and scoring methodology in detail for the options appraisal exercise.

## Stakeholder and public engagement

To ensure local voices have been central to the process, a coordinated, countywide programme of public and stakeholder engagement was carried out between 8 September and 6 October 2025.

This proactive engagement aligned with MHCLG guidance and reflected Kent's political commitment to meaningful community involvement.

A standardised resident survey, agreed across all 14 councils, captured views on local identity, service expectations and future priorities.

Alongside this, a joint stakeholder programme involved talking to key organisations across sectors, with each council engaging its local networks including residents, town and parish councils, voluntary groups and businesses.

Insights from both the survey and stakeholder discussions have directly informed the development of the business case and continue to guide local decision-making. Further details can be found in **Section 5, Criteria 4**.

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# Section 2: The Kent context

This section includes:

**Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy**

**Existing local government structures**

**Partnership landscape**

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# Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy context

**Kent is a diverse and strategically-located county in the south east of England and serves as the UK's gateway to continental Europe. 'Kent' is used to describe the geographical area covered by Kent County Council, Medway Unitary Council and all 12 district councils. The county features a mix of urban and rural settlements such as the Weald and Romney Marsh spread across a large geographic expanse. Kent has a population of approximately 1.9 million with a varied demographic profile. The economy includes key sectors such as construction, life sciences, agriculture, manufacturing, logistics and tourism, supported by major transport links including ports, motorways and railways with high-speed routes into London. The county's geography encompasses coastline, countryside, including national landscapes, and historic towns and villages, contributing to its unique regional identity.**

***Figure 3:*** *Map of Kent*




## Kent geography

Kent is a geographically diverse and economically significant county in the south east corner of England, often referred to as the UK's gateway to continental Europe.

It borders Greater London to the north west, Surrey and East Sussex to the west and south west, and is flanked by the Thames Estuary, the North Sea, the Strait of Dover and the English Channel.

This strategic location, coupled with major transport infrastructure, positions Kent as a vital hub for national and international trade and connectivity.

Covering approximately 3,739 sq. km, the county is home to around 1.93 million people, distributed across a varied landscape of urban and rural settlements.

High-density urban centres such as Medway, Dartford and Thanet (with more than 1,300 people per sq. km) contrast with more sparsely populated, rural districts like Sevenoaks and Ashford, reflecting a population profile in which 73.9% live in urban areas and 26.1% in rural communities.

The county's physical geography is marked by several distinct features.

The North Downs, a prominent chalk ridge, runs west to east through the county.

To the south, The Weald offers rolling, wooded terrain shaped by clay and sandstone.

Kent's extensive and evolving coastline, from the iconic white cliffs of Dover and Thanet to the low-lying landscapes of Romney Marsh and the shingle headland of Dungeness, continues to be shaped by erosion, sedimentation and land reclamation.

Situated in north Kent, Medway forms one of the county's most significant urban areas defined by its estuarine setting and close proximity to London.

Principal rivers such as the Medway and the Stour help define the county's natural geography.

The Medway, in particular, has long served as a vital route for trade and transport, linking inland settlements with the Thames and the North Sea.

Economically, Kent balances its rural heritage with increasing urbanisation and diversification.

Historically celebrated as the Garden of England for its orchards, hop gardens and fertile farmland, agriculture remains a cultural hallmark even as its economic influence has declined.

The region's rich heritage is a significant asset, reflected in its array of listed buildings, historic landmarks and world-renowned sites such as Canterbury Cathedral, Dover Castle, The Historic Dockyard Chatham and the Archbishop's Palace in Maidstone.

These heritage features not only reinforce the county's cultural identity but also enhance its attractiveness as a destination for visitors and investment.

In recent decades, the county's economy has shifted towards manufacturing, logistics, retail, tourism and life sciences, anchored by major hubs such as Discovery Park, Kent Science Park, and the North Kent Enterprise Zone.

This expanding economic base is supported by strong transport links including the ports of Dover and Sheerness, the M2 and M20 motorways and international high-speed rail connections.

This combination of rich natural assets, historic identity and modern infrastructure underpins Kent's evolving role and capacity to deliver sustainable growth within the regional and national economy.

***Table 1:*** *Population and geography data for Kent*

| Council area | Population (mid-2024)[1] | Geography (sq.km)[2] | Population density[3] |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Medway*** | 292,655 | 193.7 | 1,510.7 |
| ***Ashford*** | 140,936 | 580.6 | 242.7 |
| ***Canterbury*** | 162,100 | 308.7 | 525.0 |
| ***Dartford*** | 125,011 | 72.7 | 1,718.8 |
| ***Dover*** | 119,768 | 315.4 | 379.8 |
| ***Folkestone and Hythe*** | 112,411 | 356.9 | 315.0 |
| ***Gravesham*** | 110,671 | 99.0 | 1,118.0 |
| ***Maidstone*** | 187,767 | 393.3 | 477.4 |
| ***Sevenoaks*** | 122,748 | 370.3 | 331.5 |
| ***Swale*** | 158,379 | 373.4 | 424.1 |
| ***Thanet*** | 142,691 | 103.6 | 1,377.2 |
| ***Tonbridge and Malling*** | 136,853 | 240.1 | 569.9 |
| ***Tunbridge Wells*** | 119,694 | 331.3 | 361.3 |
| ***Total*** | **1,931,684** | 3,739.2 | 516.6 |

## Kent population

Kent has a population of approximately 1.9 million, making it one of the largest counties in England by population.

The demographic profile of the county is varied and reflects significant differences in age structure, ethnicity and population growth trends across its 13 council areas.

Kent's population includes a balanced mix of age groups but with distinct patterns across the county.[4]

- Children and young people (0–19 years) make up around 22% of the population. The largest numbers are found in Medway (75,236), Swale (38,217), and Maidstone (44,943).

- Working-age adults (20–64 years) represent the majority of the population at around 59%. Medway (169,350), Maidstone (107,212), and Canterbury (88,840) have the largest working-age populations, reflecting their roles as employment and commuter hubs.

- Older people (65+ years) comprise approximately 19% of Kent's population. Coastal and rural districts such as Canterbury (36,194), Dover (29,736), and Folkestone & Hythe (28,903) have proportionately larger older populations, highlighting the appeal of these areas for retirement and the resulting demand for health and social care services.

Compared to the national average, Kent has a slightly higher proportion of older residents, particularly in its coastal communities, while areas closer to London, such as Dartford and Gravesham, are experiencing population growth among younger and working-age adults due to ongoing housing development and improved transport links.

[1] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[2] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about

[3] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[4] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

Kent continues to see strong population growth, driven by both internal migration from other parts of the UK and international migration.

The availability of more affordable housing, good transport connectivity and lifestyle factors attract young families, professionals and retirees alike.

Inland districts such as Ashford and Maidstone have experienced significant growth through planned housing developments, while urban centres such as Gravesham and Dartford are seeing demographic change shaped by proximity to London and regeneration schemes.

Kent remains a predominantly White British county with 83.2% of residents identifying as such.

However, the population is becoming increasingly diverse.

Minority ethnic groups now represent 16.8% of the total population with Asian communities being the largest minority group making up 4.4% of the population.

Ethnic diversity is most pronounced in urban areas and towns close to London.[5]

Gravesham has nearly one in three residents identifying as non-White British and is home to one of Europe's largest Sikh Gurdwaras.

In Dartford, 52% of school-age children are now classified as non-White British, highlighting generational change.

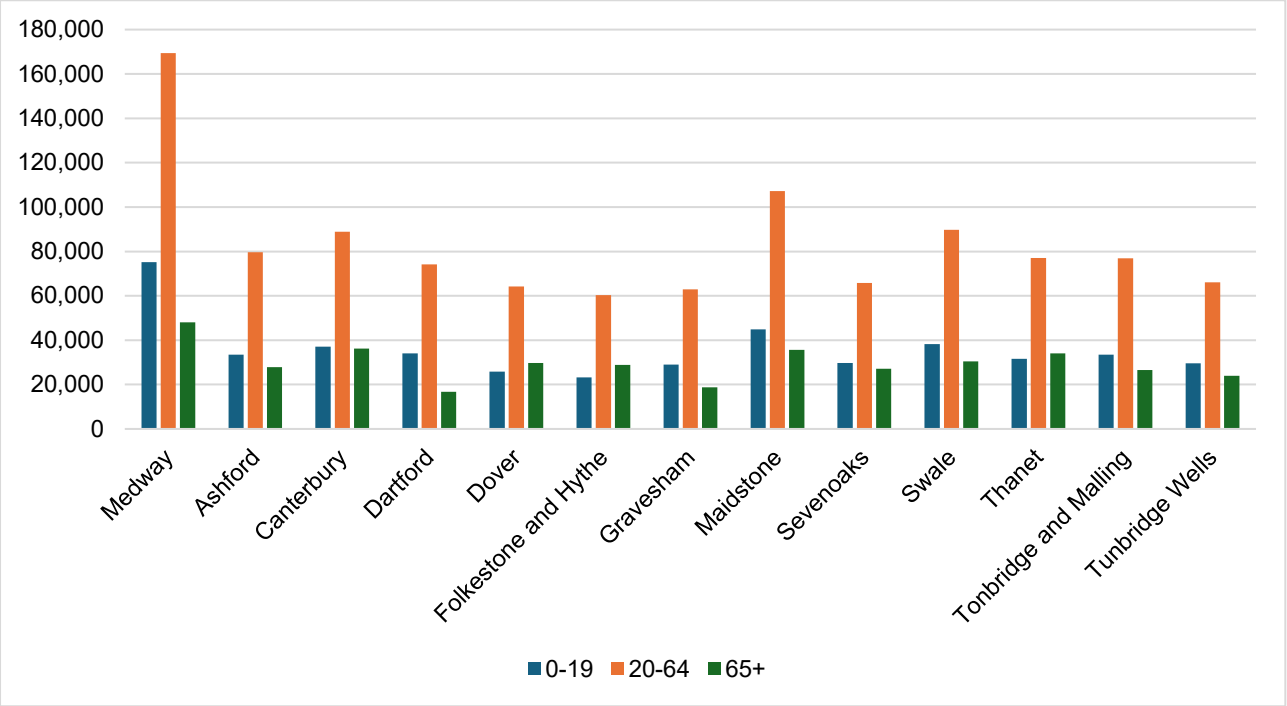
Elsewhere, local factors shape distinct community profiles: Maidstone and Folkestone and Hythe have significant Nepalese communities linked to the nearby barracks and the Gurkha regiment, alongside a growing Eastern European population.

Together, these patterns reveal a complex and locally-varied picture of diversity across Kent.

***Figure 4:*** *Population across Kent (mid-2024)*[6]

[5] https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-kent/summary-of-kent-facts-and-figures/people

[6] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales




## Kent economy

Kent is a dynamic and strategically-important region, often referred to as the UK's Gateway to Europe.

Located in the south east and bordering London, it plays a vital role in national trade, economic growth and innovation.

It is home to thriving sectors including agriculture, logistics, advanced manufacturing, food and drink, life sciences, tourism and the creative and digital industries.

Annual trade through the Port of Dover exceeds £122 billion[7], underscoring Kent's importance as a national and international logistics hub.

Kent is also a centre for innovation. Discovery Park in Sandwich, one of the UK's leading science parks, contributes an estimated £324 million[8] annually to the UK economy through its cluster of life sciences and technology businesses.

Other major business clusters include Kent Science Park in Sittingbourne, Kings Hill in West Malling and Innovation Park Medway, each providing high-value jobs and fostering collaboration with universities and research institutions.

The county's growing network of business parks, enterprise zones and research institutions further strengthens its innovation ecosystem.

[7] https://www.locateinkent.com/why-kent/kent-economy/

[8] https://www.insidermedia.com/news/south-east/kents-discovery-park-provides-324m-of-value-to-uk-economy

Kent's economic vibrancy is matched by strong civic leadership. The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) drives the region's long-term growth strategy, focused on infrastructure, innovation, skills, productivity and the ambition for inclusive prosperity.[9]

Housing and construction are fundamental to Kent's economic vitality, not only by generating significant employment within the sector but also by directly contributing to the government's national target of 1.5 million new homes this parliament[10].

This ambition is intrinsically linked to broader economic growth, as new housing and infrastructure projects stimulate productivity and prosperity, aligning with initiatives like the Kent and Medway Growth Deal.

While the industry faces challenges such as skill shortages and past insolvencies, Kent's specific demographic and economic projections underscore the critical need to strategically plan for and support continued growth in housing and infrastructure to meet future demands.

With excellent transport links to London and mainland Europe, a high quality of life and a strong track record in regeneration and investment, Kent continues to attract residents, businesses and investors.

As the UK's primary trade gateway to the continent, Kent is well-positioned to drive forward regional and national economic priorities.

These strengths also make Kent a compelling candidate for a future devolution deal, enabling greater local control to unlock further growth, tailor investment and deliver on long-term ambitions for the region.

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[9] https://www.kmep.org.uk/

[10] https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-07-30/hcws48

# Current local government structures

**All 14 councils across Kent and Medway recognise the opportunities that arise from moving towards a standardised single tier of local government with significantly fewer separate organisations, each with their own elected members, leadership and governance.**

Kent currently operates under a two-tier local government system comprising Kent County Council as the upper-tier authority, 12 district and borough councils and one separate unitary authority, Medway Council, which operates independently of the county structure.

Additionally, more than 300 town and parish councils take responsibility for delivery at a more local level.

***Figure 5:*** *Current boundary lines in Kent*

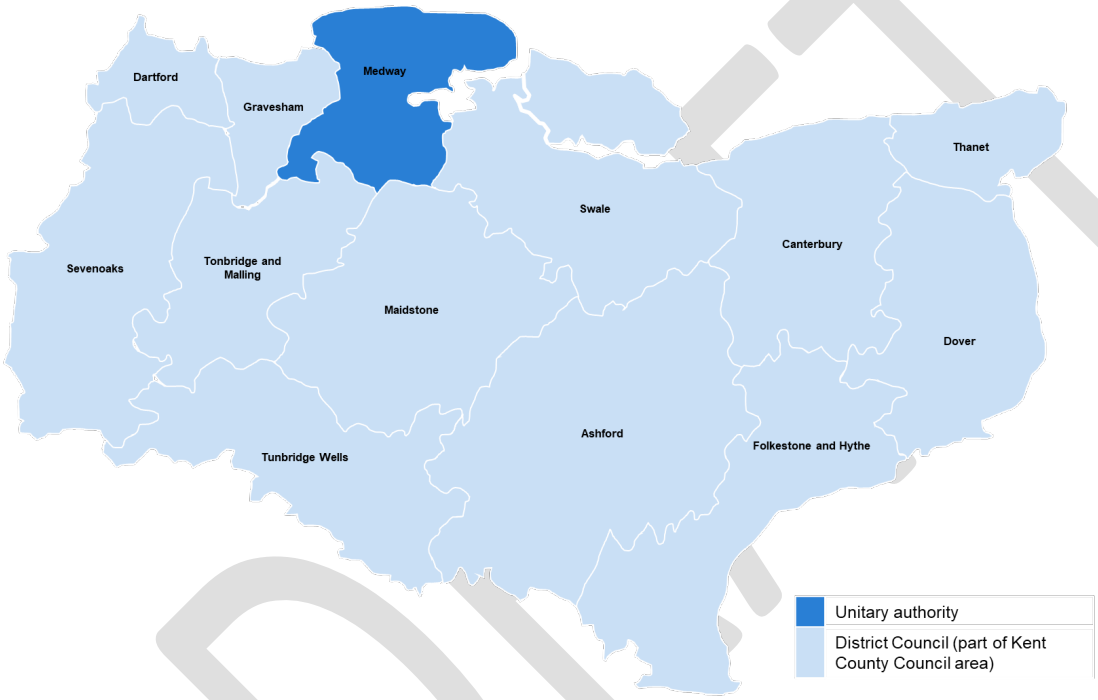



***Table 2:*** *Characteristics of areas in current boundary lines*

| Council | Population (mid-2024)[11] | Geography (sq.km)[12] | Councillors | Net Revenue Budget (£m)[13] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Medway*** | 292,655 | 193.72 | 59 | 346,727 |
| ***Ashford*** | 140,936 | 580.64 | 47 | 26,710 |
| ***Canterbury*** | 162,100 | 308.74 | 39 | 23,580 |
| ***Dartford*** | 125,011 | 72.73 | 42 | 29,009 |
| ***Dover*** | 119,768 | 315.35 | 32 | 28,274 |
| ***Folkestone and Hythe*** | 112,411 | 356.91 | 30 | 22,886 |
| ***Gravesham*** | 110,671 | 98.99 | 39 | 17,943 |
| ***Maidstone*** | 187,767 | 393.34 | 49 | 28,323 |

[11] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[12] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about

[13] FY2025/26 data received from KFOG

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Sevenoaks*** | 122,748 | 370.34 | 54 | 21,978 |
| ***Swale*** | 158,379 | 373.44 | 47 | 30,335 |
| ***Thanet*** | 142,691 | 103.61 | 56 | 21,979 |
| ***Tonbridge and Malling*** | 136,853 | 240.12 | 44 | 22,521 |
| ***Tunbridge Wells*** | 119,694 | 331.29 | 39 | 17,909 |
| ***Kent County Council*** | 1,931,684 | 3,739.22 | 81 | 1,698,857 |
| ***Total*** | **1,931,684** | **3,739.22** | **658** | **2,337,031** |

The current mixed model of service delivery presents ongoing challenges for strategic coordination, financial sustainability and service reform.

In two-tier areas, district councils are responsible for services such as planning, housing, waste collection and leisure while Kent County Council oversees county-wide functions including adult social care, children's services, public health, education, highways, waste disposal and libraries.

By contrast, Medway Council, as a unitary authority, delivers the full range of local government services directly.

The complexity of this system can result in lack of alignment, duplication, inefficiencies and inconsistencies in service provision, making it harder to respond effectively to cross-cutting challenges and to plan strategically at scale.

All 14 councils across Kent recognise the opportunities that arise from moving towards a standardised single tier of local government with significantly fewer separate organisations, each with their own elected members, leadership and governance.

Further details on challenges and opportunities can be found in **Section 3.**

The councils also recognise the need for a strategic authority to enable effective planning for sustainable economic growth.

It is essential preparations for this are dovetailed with the preparations and implementation of unitary local government across the Kent geography to avoid the need and additional cost and complexity of two phases of organisational change.

# Partnership landscape

**Local Government Reorganisation presents an opportunity to further strengthen joint working across the public sector and support partners in addressing long-standing challenges more effectively.**

Across Kent, there is an established culture of joint working between Councils and a wide range of public sector organisations including Kent Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the NHS and colleges and universities.

These partnerships provide a strong foundation for taking forward a more integrated and system-wide approach to service delivery.

There is a complete, coterminous boundary for all public sector bodies within the Kent and Medway area, the importance of which is set out in the government's white paper on devolution..

***Table 3:*** *Key partners across Kent*

| Key partners | Description |
|---|---|
| **NHS Kent and Medway** | Provides healthcare services across Kent and Medway. It oversees hospitals, GP practices, community and mental health support as well as and public health programs for the region's 1.9 million residents, ensuring accessible and high-quality care throughout both urban and rural communities. Sub county collaboration is achieved through distinct Health and Care Partnerships the geography of which is broadly reflective of local health economies. |
| **Kent Fire and Rescue Services** | Operates across Kent and Medway, delivering emergency response, fire prevention, and safety education. The service protects people, property and the environment by responding to fires, road traffic collisions, rescues and other critical incidents while promoting safety through community outreach. |
| **Kent Police and PCC** | Responsible for law enforcement and public safety across Kent and Medway. Kent Police handle crime prevention, investigation and emergency response while the PCC sets policing priorities, manages budgets and ensures the force remains accountable to the public. Service delivery comprises both pan Kent (and Essex) specialist activities with operational policing based on local divisions. Borough commands collaborate with partners in community safety partnerships to address crime and disorder challenge aligned to local needs and priorities. |

Through early engagement with partners during the interim submission phase, a number of consistent themes emerged.

Stakeholders expressed a clear desire to be involved meaningfully in shaping the future of local government and recognised the potential of reorganisation to enable improvements in service

quality and outcomes for the public including through greater alignment of public services, driving efficiency and enhancing preventative approaches.

Partners emphasised the importance of maintaining stability in frontline services, particularly in health and social care, through any period of transition.

Our Kent partners have also consistently supported devolution for Kent and recognise the importance of securing a devolution deal alongside and at the same time as delivering LGR.

Feedback gathered through a range of existing forums, including strategic partnerships, parish networks, business improvement districts (BIDs) and sector-specific meetings, highlighted the need to ensure any future model supports delivery at the right geographic level.

The importance of sustaining local identity, improving responsiveness to community needs and maximising public sector investment were also key messages.

Engagement with staff and elected members across Kent councils has highlighted several practical considerations including concerns about uncertainty, capacity and skills shortages, challenges that LGR could help to address through more streamlined structures and clearer career pathways.

Nonetheless, careful change management will be essential to support staff through any transition.

The feedback from the interim engagement phase has directly informed the development of LGR proposals.

All models seek to build on existing partnerships, promote more joined-up decision-making and integrated service delivery, reduce silo working and ensure future structures are fit for purpose, both in meeting local needs and supporting strategic collaboration across the public sector.

They also provide a strong foundation for potential devolution arrangements, including the opportunity to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority where appropriate, aligning local governance with long-term ambitions for greater powers and funding.

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# Section 3: Challenges and opportunities

This section includes:

**Key challenges to be addressed by Kent Councils**

**Opportunities through local government reorganisation**

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# Key challenges to be addressed by councils across Kent

**The government's White Paper highlights the challenges facing local government – challenges that are strongly felt in Kent. Maintaining the status quo is not a viable option and has been discounted due to the urgency and scale of the pressures on the current system and the need for structural reform to enable long-term sustainability.**

Local government in Kent is under growing pressure from financial constraints and rising demand for services. There is also a need for structural reform: the current two-tier system, comprising Kent County Council, Medway Council and 12 district councils has inbuilt duplication and inefficiency impacting service delivery, governance, workforce stability and community representation.

These issues are compounded by the county's unique geographic and demographic context.

Kent's financial landscape mirrors national challenges but is intensified by its strategic position and diverse councils.

Wide variation in council debt levels, taxbase strength and income capacity creates uneven financial baselines and sustainability risks.

Higher border-related costs present operational challenges to the county further straining the system.

Protecting existing government investment and identifying a more resilient model is essential.

Below is a summary of the key challenges for Kent, relevant to any future model.

***Table 4:*** *Challenges for Kent*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Funding & financial** | • Persistent financial constraints and the challenge of fair funding, especially when all councils are seeking additional resources.<br>• Rising social care costs, which threaten to consume budgets at the expense of other vital services.<br>• Managing the distribution of debt and services during disaggregation.<br>• Equalising tax bases and service levels across diverse areas ("levelling up, not down").<br>• Ensuring financial resilience in the face of uncertainty and change.<br>• Significant variation in financial viability across councils.<br>• Risk of councils being unable to meet rising demand in adult social care, children's services, school transport, homelessness and contract inflation.<br>• High and unpredictable costs linked to Kent's role in managing border and asylum-related responsibilities.<br>• Unequal Council Tax rates, taxbase strength and income-generating capacity across councils. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Risk of losing central government investment in coastal regeneration, public health, infrastructure and border-related services during transition. |
| **Workforce** | • Recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly for social care roles and in areas close to London.<br>• An ageing workforce with the risk of significant staff losses.<br>• Uncertainty and anxiety among staff during restructuring and transition.<br>• Cultural differences between councils, making it hard to realise opportunities and harmonise working practices.<br>• Staff morale and concerns about job security. |
| **Structure & governance** | • Fragmentation and disaggregation of services leading to inefficiencies and duplication.<br>• Siloed approaches between upper and lower tiers of government.<br>• Strategic misalignment and lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, both internally and for residents.<br>• Loss of identity for town and parish councils and the erosion of local democracy due to fewer councillors.<br>• Branding and image challenges for local government.<br>• Systemic complexity, overlapping responsibilities and inconsistent service delivery across Kent's 14 councils. |
| **Community & identity** | • Maintaining local character and identity amid large-scale restructuring and in future geographies for successor authorities.<br>• Ensuring continuity and quality of services for diverse and geographically dispersed communities.<br>• Meeting the needs of communities with different priorities and expectations.<br>• Addressing the risk that smaller voluntary and community sector organisations may not survive the transition.<br>• Variation in identity, demographics and economic conditions making consistent representation and service access more difficult. |
| **Service delivery** | • Protecting and enhancing key services (adults, children, SEND, homelessness) while managing demand and costs.<br>• Ensuring continuity of services during and after organisational change.<br>• Establishing the culture of the successor councils.<br>• Overcoming skill shortages and ensuring the right talent is in place.<br>• Managing the complexity of integrating services and delivering holistic support.<br>• Challenges arising from Kent's role as a gateway to Europe, including managing transport, borders and asylum-related services across multiple tiers.<br>• Lack of coordinated response for critical functions such as small boat arrivals and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Inconsistent stages of Local Plan development leading to disjointed housing delivery and varied approaches to shared planning challenges.<br>• Fragmentation of Housing Revenue Accounts across councils raising concerns about tenant equity and service consistency. |
| **Change & devolution** | • Managing the pace and uncertainty of change including delays in achieving devolution agreements.<br>• Achieving timely and effective restructuring without losing momentum.<br>• Navigating different cultures and leadership styles across councils and creating new cultural norms.<br>• Ensuring that future devolution delivers real benefits and is not just a structural change. |

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# Opportunities through local government reorganisation

**Regardless of the model selected by government, all future Kent councils will work together to maximise the opportunities arising from the simplification of local government structures and the devolution of powers and funding to a new strategic authority.**

Kent faces a pivotal moment to reshape its future through structural reorganisation.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) presents a strategic opportunity to streamline governance, tackle long-standing inefficiencies and build a more resilient, effective and financially sustainable system.

By moving toward a more unified model, Kent can unlock greater accountability, improve service delivery and position itself to fully capitalise on future opportunities for sustainable growth, investment and devolution.

Below is a summary of the key opportunities for Kent. These are discussed in relation to the proposed model.

***Table 5:*** *Opportunities for Kent*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Public service reform** | • Implementing whole-system approaches to public service reform (e.g. better integration with partners in health) and a more joined-up approach to council services (e.g. integrating adult social care with housing, children's services with cultural services, public health with wellbeing and housing, placemaking and custodianship services including highways maintenance and street cleansing and spatial planning with transport strategy.<br>• Streamlining and digitising processes across currently separated services, including AI, and creating data and evidence hubs to improve efficiency and support collaboration with partners.<br>• Aggregating services to build resilience and enable more holistic strategies across education, housing, skills and job creation.<br>• Creating a single front door for residents to access services, improving accessibility and user experience.<br>• Delivering structural reform that improves financial sustainability through economies of scale, streamlined service delivery and harmonised tax and income strategies. |
| **Growth and devolution** | • Securing devolution deals to unlock new powers and funding, enabling councils to drive growth and shape their own destinies.<br>• Developing a compelling sustainable growth narrative and pipeline to attract investment.<br>• Planning for growth in key areas such as ports, distribution depots, the Thames Estuary and leveraging proximity to London.<br>• Leveraging structural reorganisation as a platform for a more ambitious devolution deal. A strategically-aligned unitary structure would support the establishment of a Strategic Authority, enhancing control over inward investment, tourism and infrastructure planning, providing successor arrangements to Visit Kent and Locate in Kent which are now in administration. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Workforce and culture** | • Attracting and retaining top talent, especially in competitive areas near London and Essex.<br>• Succession planning and supporting staff development to address an ageing workforce.<br>• Empowering staff and fostering a positive, proactive culture.<br>• Supporting staff through change, enabling career development and building resilience in the face of organisational restructuring.<br>• Taking the opportunity for a strategic cultural reset to focus more on prevention and the transformation opportunities that come with partner alignment and systems working. |
| **Community and place** | • Focusing on resident-centred approaches including early intervention and impactful prevention.<br>• Enhancing place-shaping by planning places, infrastructure and services more holistically.<br>• Redesigning the sense of place and local identity, reconnecting people with their councils.<br>• Improving accessibility to councils and services for all communities, including those in larger or more diverse geographies.<br>• Designing governance arrangements that better reflect Kent's diverse communities, strengthening local accountability and enhancing trust between residents and local government. |
| **Collaboration and integration** | • Building wider partnerships across health, housing, policing, education and the voluntary/community and faith sector (VCFS).<br>• Sharing knowledge and best practice across Kent and beyond.<br>• Integrating services to deliver more holistic support and strategy.<br>• Creating a one-team culture around place, breaking down silos and enabling more inclusive, joined-up working.<br>• Enabling more cohesive sustainable economic development through unified Local Planning Authorities, ensuring continuity for major projects such as Otterpool Park near Folkestone and Heathlands near Maidstone, while improving cross-boundary management of shared constraints like nutrient neutrality and infrastructure viability. |
| **Trust and engagement** | • Re-establishing trust and confidence in local government.<br>• Improving engagement with politics and public perception of councils.<br>• Adopting fair funding models and ensuring best practice is shared and implemented.<br>• Enhancing local accountability and trust by designing governance arrangements that are more representative of Kent's diverse communities. |

# **Section 4:** Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation

This section includes:

**A shared vision for future local government in Kent**

**Design principles for reorganisation**

**How the vision and principles were co-developed**

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# A shared vision for future local government in Kent

**Our shared vision for Kent is:**

**Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially-sustainable and accountable public services delivered in partnership with communities.**

All Leaders recognise that LGR in itself will not deliver the change required. It must be the catalyst for fundamental reform in how we deliver our services, how we work with our partners and how we deliver for all communities across Kent.

Our ambition for Kent's future is bold and resident-focused. We will deliver local government that is financially resilient, community-rooted and digitally enabled, delivering services that are simpler, smarter and more joined up.

Over the next five years, our shared aspiration for Kent is to:

1 **Strengthen identity** and maintain a deep sense of place and belonging.

2 **Build trusted, transparent relationships** with residents through open communication and active engagement.

3 Provide **seamless, resident-first experience** with easy, secure access to services.

4 Deliver **place-based, people-centred services**, focused on early intervention, prevention and improving life chances.

5 **Use data and technology smartly** to personalise support, anticipate needs and improve outcomes.

6 **Work in strong partnership** with statutory partners including health, education and the police as well as community organisations to meet residents' needs.

7 **Build community resilience** to social, economic and environmental challenges through inclusive, forward-thinking services.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment to residents, staff and place, balancing ambition with stability, innovation with identity and change with care.

## LGR and devolution

All of the councils in Kent are supportive of devolving powers to a strategic authority to ensure decisions about the county are made in the county.

We do not underestimate the vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport and the benefits it would bring in terms of public service reform.

This is an opportunity to improve life chances for all.

Aligning the timeline of the strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation, by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services or to reaggregate services to go into a strategic authority shortly after.

This approach would require additional cost and create further disruption to staff as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government.

All councils in Kent support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority in April 2028 to operate alongside the future councils.

This will enable a seamless transition, enable synergies in programme management and leadership capacity and provide clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government in Kent will work.

Clarity for partners is critical given our ambitions regarding public service reform.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving service outcomes.

Our ambitions for devolution and the link to LGR is articulated further against Criteria 5.

**Why Option 3A is best placed to deliver on our vision**

Option 3A offers the strongest platform to deliver our shared vision for better outcomes through sustainable, accountable, and community-focused local government.

Creating three coherent councils – North, West, and East Kent – combines scale with local identity, enabling efficient, financially resilient, and digitally enabled services rooted in place.

Option 3A aligns closely with health, transport, and economic geographies, supporting seamless partnership working and integrated service delivery. By aligning to existing boundaries, it minimises transition complexity and cost while maximising transformation opportunities, ensuring simpler, smarter, and more joined-up services for residents.

Crucially, Option 3A provides the balance, capacity, and strategic focus needed to underpin future devolution, empowering Kent to deliver bold, resident-first public service reform and sustainable growth.

# Design principles for future Kent Councils

**To achieve our shared vision for Kent, a set of guiding principles have been agreed by its Leaders. While decisions on the detailed design and delivery models of future councils will be a matter for the respective leadership teams, these principles provide a blueprint for future council design.**

***Table 6:*** *Future council design principles*

| Design principles | Description |
|---|---|
| **Service and resident-centric** | • Design services around resident needs with a resident-first mindset.<br>• Maintain strong community identity and accountability.<br>• Ensure equity in service access and outcomes across Kent. |
| **Integrated and joined up** | • Enable seamless, joined-up service delivery across public services.<br>• Build on existing partnerships and promote shared responsibility, and budgets and co-locate where appropriate.<br>• Embed co-production and community-based service design. |
| **Data-driven and digitally enabled** | • Invest in modern digital infrastructure which allows our service delivery and enabling activity to be joined up, and automated where appropriate.<br>• Leverage data and AI to support early intervention, improve decision-making, and target resources effectively.<br>• Ensure transparency and open data to build trust and inform priorities. |
| **Financially resilient and efficient** | • Adopt place-based financial planning and maximise asset efficiency.<br>• Create efficient systems with flexible resource allocation based on demand.<br>• Secure long-term funding and manage transition costs carefully. |
| **Empowered and future-focused workforce** | • Retain and support skilled staff through predictable roles and strong leadership.<br>• Break down silos with collaborative problem-solving structures.<br>• Modernise terms and conditions for a more agile and attractive public service offer. |
| **Clear, consistent and bold leadership** | • Be brave, honest and aspirational in setting direction and expectations.<br>• Deliver clear, shared vision and values, internally and externally.<br>• Ensure messages on devolution, change and local ambition are well understood. |

These principles will be fundamental to navigating the transition, enabling Kent to go beyond safe and legal to deliver world-class public services and a better everyday experience for residents.

## How the vision and principles were developed

The vision for Kent was developed through extensive work with local government leaders, reflecting a shared commitment to addressing key challenges and seizing future opportunities.

On 17 September 2025, Leaders and Chief Executives from across the 14 councils of Kent and Medway came together to co-create a shared vision for the future of local government.

This moment marked a significant step in the LGR journey, recognising LGR and devolution as unique shared opportunities to fundamentally reshape the way local public services are delivered.

The full-day event was carefully designed to help everyone work together, learn from each other and foster strategic thinking among senior leaders.




The aim was to better understand the current landscape of challenges and opportunities, to hear from others who have been through LGR and devolution journeys, and to begin developing a long-term, unifying vision for the future of Kent.

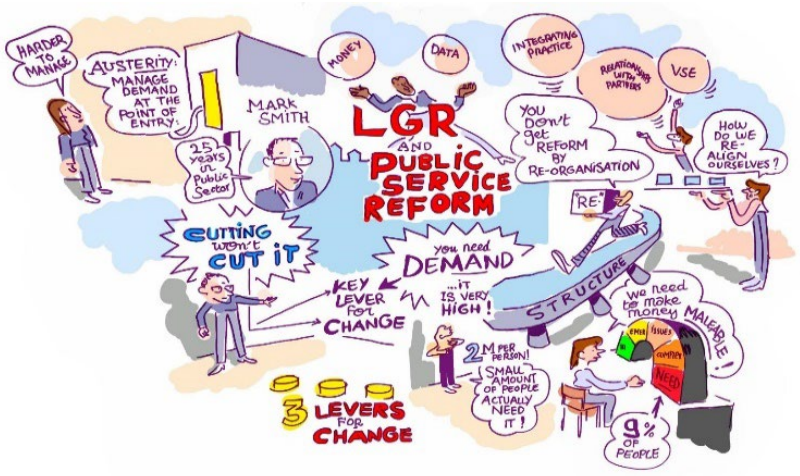
Participants were supported throughout by a facilitation team which guided discussions, captured key insights and ensured all voices were heard.

The vision for Kent emerged through genuine collaboration and a shared desire to improve outcomes for residents regardless of the final council configuration that is chosen for LGR.

The conversations acknowledge ongoing challenges such as financial constraints, workforce uncertainty and service fragmentation, with a shared commitment to tackling these as we progress through LGR.

***Figure 6:*** *Sketches from workshop on 17th September*



## How the vision and design principles will be used

The outputs from the event serve as the foundation for continued work on Kent's LGR journey.

They will inform more detailed design work, engagement with stakeholders and the development of a compelling case for change.

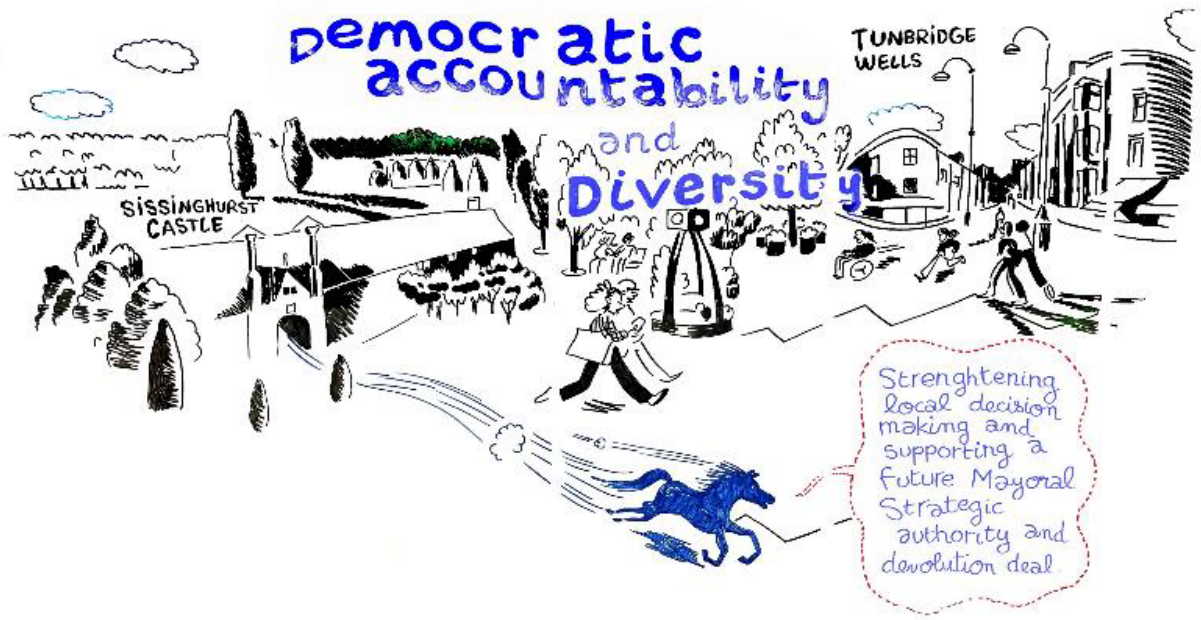
Most importantly, they represent a shared commitment by Kent's leaders to act collectively in the interests of residents, staff, and communities.

This forward-looking framework sets a foundation for a more resilient, responsive and cohesive Kent by 2028.

This vision provides a clear strategic direction for the future of local government in Kent.

It will guide future design discussions, inform service transformation and tie in with the region's approach to devolution.

It will be used to align decision-making, support engagement with residents and partners and ensure implementation remains focused on outcomes for people and communities.



# **Section 5:** The case for Option 3A

This section includes:

**The summary case for Option 3A**

**Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local Government**

**Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience**

**Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services**

**Criteria 4: Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)**

**Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities**

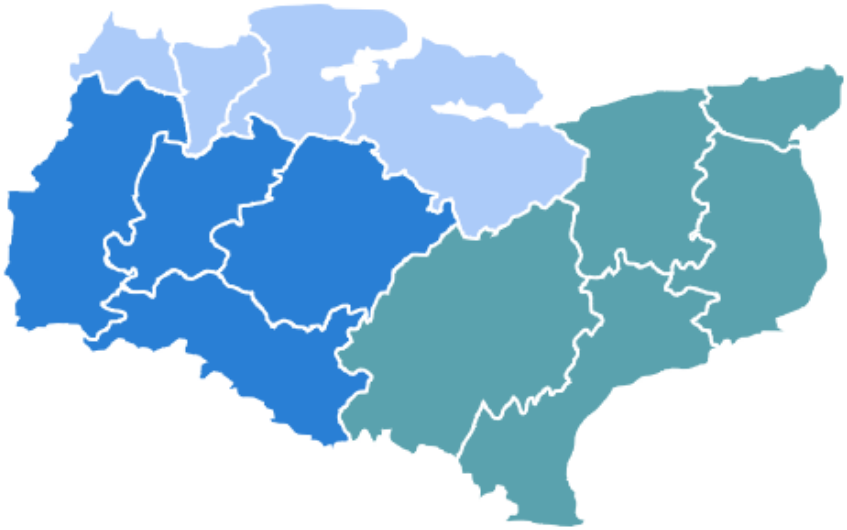
**Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment**

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# The summary case for option 3A

**Option 3A proposes establishing three, balanced unitary authorities for North, West, and East Kent, each reflecting distinct economic strengths and natural communities. The model provides strong alignment with transport networks, travel-to-work areas, and key public service geographies, ensuring effective coordination and service delivery. It is the most efficient and sustainable option, offering balanced populations, lower transition costs, and minimal disruption to existing boundaries. Supported by major partners, it reduces complexity, maintains local identity, and provides strong foundations for devolution and community-focused governance across Kent.**

***Figure 7**: Proposed councils (Option 3A) and key metrics by unitary*



| Metric | North | West | East |
|---|---|---|---|
| Population Size (mid-2024) | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 739 | 1,334 | 1,666 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 |

The summary case for Option 3A, organised by Government's six criteria for LGR, is set out below:

***Table 7:** Arguments for the proposed* model

| | |
|---|---|
| **Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government** | **Three strong, balanced councils with high growth potential and clear strategic focus**<br>• Three geographically coherent councils, enabling strategic management of housing, infrastructure, spatial planning and growth. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Strongest balance in terms of population and council tax bases compared to other proposed models.<br>• Each area has distinct strengths and areas of opportunity that will enable sustainable growth across the whole of Kent:<br>  ○ North Kent: A strategically important area combining major transport corridors, international gateways, and logistics hubs with strengths in advanced manufacturing and professional services. The area is well positioned for future growth, with a focus on sustainable urban development and high-tech industry.<br>  ○ West Kent: Knowledge-driven area with a high-quality natural environment and strong professional services, life sciences, and creative sectors. The area has a high proportion of knowledge-based employment and is well-positioned to attract inward investment from London and beyond.<br>  ○ East Kent: A diverse coastal and rural economy with major ports offering vital connections to Europe, anchored by education hubs and a strong tourism offering. Combined with competitive land values, it is an appealing area with capacity for regeneration and development to attract investment.<br>• Enables effective coordination of nationally significant infrastructure projects, particularly in the East, where the seaports of Dover and Ramsgate, Eurotunnel in Folkestone, the Port Health Authority in Ashford, and international rail links position the proposed East Kent unitary as the 'Gateway to Europe' with specialist capabilities in tourism and migration.<br><br>**Travel to work and strategic transport corridors**<br><br>• Option 3A delivers the best possible alignment to existing travel to work areas (TTWA), with all councils benefiting from strong motorway and rail connections into London and good intra-unitary transport links.<br>• There is particularly strong alignment in East Kent, with TTWA boundaries being largely maintained across the Canterbury, Margate and Ramsgate, Folkestone and Dover, and Ashford TTWAs.<br>• North and West Kent are well-served by the M25, M2, and M20 corridors and Southeastern rail links, including high-speed rail in the North.<br>• East Kent benefits from multiple high-speed rail access points and key trunk roads like the M20 and Thanet Way.<br><br>**Efficient and locally focused democratic arrangements**<br><br>• Councillor-to-elector ratios have been modelled to be in line with recent reorganisation and will deliver strong local mechanisms for effective representation. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Criteria 2: Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks** | **The most balanced population distribution**<br>• Three councils with populations ranging from 567k to 687k, each meeting the Government's guideline of 500k.<br><br>**The most efficient model, enabling long term financial sustainability**<br>• The most financially efficient of the four options modelled, with the lowest disaggregation and transition costs and the highest potential reorganisation savings. The projected annual savings are £40.2m-£49.7m with payback within 5.4 – 6.7 years.<br><br>**Minimising transition complexity and maximising transformation opportunity**<br>• Option 3A minimises transition complexity by only utilising existing boundaries and in only creating three new councils, it has the lowest transition and implementation costs.<br>• Critical to the future success and sustainability of LGR, three Kent councils will each have the scale and capacity to deliver collaborative, transformative and lasting public service reform. In partnership with our public sector colleagues the new councils will enable reform and service delivery at a Kent-wide level where appropriate.<br>• No changes to current district boundaries means that potential delays, additional complexity and cost are avoided. Some models with boundary changes will require the integration of up to six councils in many of the proposed unitary areas, which would lead to significant cost, complexity and risk in terms of service delivery, aligning policies, contracts, staff terms and conditions, ICT systems and partnerships. |
| **Criteria 3: High quality and sustainable public services** | **Alignment with key service delivery partner geographies**<br>• The model aligns closely with health and care partner geographies, particularly acute health trust geographies, minimising disruption and allowing for integrated service delivery from Day 1. Building on the existing collaboration in the Health and Care Partnerships, creates the maximum opportunity for the cultural and service transformation needed to achieve greater focus on prevention and shift from care in hospital to more care in the community.<br>• Option 3A has the closest alignment of all models proposed to other public services, including police, health and fire, minimising operational disruption and enabling continuity in partnership working. This includes through community safety arrangements blended with current county functions with respect to both safety and safeguarding.<br>• Creating councils across the three-area footprint offers stronger governance than county-wide teams, enabling place and people |

| | |
|---|---|
| | services to operate at a scale where local knowledge improves outcomes.<br><br>**Minimising service fragmentation**<br><br>• Three future councils, rather than four or five, will minimise service fragmentation of crucial upper tier services, reduce risk throughout implementation and maximise the existing expertise, knowledge and experience of colleagues in Kent County Council and Medway Council.<br>• Using existing council boundaries simplifies governance and democratic process change management, avoiding additional fragmentation or aggregation of services. This significantly reduces the risk of service delivery failure during the transition compared to options involving multiple boundary changes.<br><br>**Maximising balance in deprivation and demand between councils**<br><br>• Regional disparities within Kent, mean that under any multi-council model there will be differences in deprivation and demand levels. The three-unitary model establishes a significant 'East Kent' council with the scale, capacity and growth opportunities to effectively and sustainably address the significant challenges of deprivation and service demand specific to that part of the region. |
| **Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs** | **Respecting cultural and historic identities**<br><br>• The model respects established historic, cultural, and service geographies, including natural groupings such as the Thames Estuary communities in North Kent and coastal clusters in East Kent.<br>• North Kent combines coastal and estuary landscapes with a history of industry and regeneration, and it is notable for its cultural diversity and youthful population.<br>• West Kent is characterised by scenic countryside, extensive Green Belt, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it is rich in historic landmarks, heritage villages, and cultural hubs.<br>• East Kent is known for its strong coastal identity and tourism appeal, it features UNESCO sites, historic ports, creative centres, and iconic attractions such as the White Cliffs of Dover.<br>• The model aligns to existing economic flows, transport patterns, travel to work areas and public service access e.g. health and housing – supporting a greater sense of local identity and cohesion.<br><br>**Reflecting the clear preferences of our public service partners**<br><br>• The model has received strong endorsement from public service partners, including:<br>  ○ NHS Kent & Medway, who support the model's alignment with health economies and services; |

| | |
|---|---|
| | ○ Kent Police and Crime Commissioner, who prefers a three-unitary model as most closely aligning with existing police command units and as minimising cost and service impact;<br>○ Kent Fire and Rescue, citing opportunities for service streamlining and regional planning. |
| **Criteria 5: Supporting devolution arrangements** | **Equal regional representation**<br>• Three well balanced councils in Kent, able to operate strategically and equitably within the future Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).<br>• The small number of constituent authorities within a combined strategic area enables clearer accountability and governance, working with a future mayor and other regional partners to deliver effectively.<br><br>**Unlocking the devolution vision**<br>• The proposed councils are built on strong functional economic areas and planning geographies, aligning with the government's focus on devolving powers to areas capable of delivering large-scale projects and service transformation.<br>• The creation of three sufficiently sized unitary areas enables effective strategic planning to meet priorities including government housing targets, economic growth and care integration. |
| **Criteria 6: Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | **Strong and consistent democratic engagement and local empowerment**<br>• Across all the proposed models, future councils will be larger and therefore require appropriate new mechanisms to support local democratic engagement, such as area committees.<br>• Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are Kent's preferred model for strengthening local engagement through LGR. They connect communities with services and decision-making, integrating Town and Parish Councils, statutory services, and community groups with the aim to empower residents and drive strategic impact.<br>• The proposed unitary structure facilitates targeted support for unique communities, such as coastal towns, by grouping them within authorities that understand and can respond to their specific needs. |

## How the case for change is structured against government criteria

What follows is the case for change detail, setting out how the proposed model meets the government's six criteria.

It is a combination of shared content across four options (3A, 4B, 4D and 5A) and content specific to the individual options.

Sections and sub-sections are set out below, including how they align to Government criteria, as stated in the letter dated 5 February 2025.

***Table X:*** *Structure of case for change and link to government criteria*

| Section headings | Sub-section headings | Govt criteria |
|---|---|---|
| **Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government** | Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base | 1a |
| | Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery | 1b |
| | Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure | 1d |
| **Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience** | Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency | 2a, 2b |
| | Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies | 2c |
| | Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation | 2d |
| | Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government | 2e |
| **Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services** | Improving delivery of key services | 3a, 3c |
| | Public service reform | 3b |
| **Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs** | Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design | 4a, 4c |
| | Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance | 4b |
| **Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities** | Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent | 5a, 5b |
| | Population sizes that support devolution | 5c |
| **Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent | 6a, 6b |
| | Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) | 6a, 6b |

# **Criteria 1:** Establishing a single tier of local government

This section includes:

**Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base** **Criteria 1a**

**Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery** **Criteria 1b**

**Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure** **Criteria 1d**

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# Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base

**Criteria 1a.** Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

**Option 3A aligns with Kent's distinct economic geographies, creating sensible, functional areas with strong and sustainable tax bases. Each unitary brings together places with complementary economic strengths, ensuring balanced GVA, robust business rate capacity, and manageable council tax variations. Together, they support long-term prosperity, regional equity, and place-based growth aligned with future infrastructure and investment opportunities.**

**Aligning councils with growth opportunities**

The 3A model brings together places with complementary economic profiles and infrastructure. It reflects the distinct economic geographies of the region in a manner that will enable future development and growth.

As set out below, each of the three unitary areas has significant growth opportunity.

***Table 8:*** *Growth opportunities across the three unitary areas*

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent:**<br>• Dartford<br>• Gravesham<br>• Medway<br>• Swale | **North Kent brings together nationally significant infrastructure and economic assets, forming part of the Thames Estuary Production Corridor. This nationally significant location supports strategic housing and employment growth in Medway and Dartford, with the whole North Kent region well positioned to grow its existing industries and infrastructure to take advantage of opportunities in high-tech industry and urban development.**<br>• Ebbsfleet Garden City with its international, high-speed station creates significant housing and commercial development opportunities.<br>• The Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) will enhance connectivity between Kent and Essex, boosting economic integration and accessibility.<br>• Dartford is a strategic gateway to Kent, with the Dartford Crossing and its proximity to London, supporting high commuter flows and logistics to enhance connectivity in the future unitary.<br>• Medway is the largest urban area in Kent and Medway, with a population of nearly 300,000, offering critical mass for growth in sectors such as creative industries, engineering, and higher education.<br>• Gravesham offers key opportunities in transport and infrastructure investment for the region, given its proximity to Ebbsfleet, the River Thames, and the M25.<br>• Swale serves as the physical and economic bridge between North, East, and Mid Kent. The Port of Sheerness is a key deep-water port with national logistics importance.<br>• Swale includes both mainland and the Isle of Sheppey, offering a mix of coastal, rural and industrial assets. This diversity offers the future unitary |

| | |
|---|---|
| | an opportunity to develop balanced growth strategies across multiple sectors. |
| **West Kent:**<br>• Maidstone<br>• Sevenoaks<br>• Tonbridge & Malling<br>• Tunbridge Wells | **West Kent has a mix of rural and urban economies, with its heritage towns and creative sector leading to a thriving tourism industry. West Kent's high quality of life and access to key transport routes into North and East Kent, London and Europe, supports significant knowledge-based employment opportunities to a highly skilled workforce and ensures that the region is well-positioned to attract investment from London and beyond in areas such as green infrastructure.**<br>• Maidstone, the county town of Kent, hosts a concentration of public services and legal institutions, and is an important employment hub for the region. In the future unitary, this area will be key in coordinating public service delivery and supporting economic growth.<br>• Sevenoaks has two National Landscapes, Kent Downs and High Weald, and an array of heritage assets which strengthen its tourism potential. As a well-connected commuter town, offering direct rail links to London and Oyster card services from Swanley, it presents strong opportunities for connectivity-driven growth.<br>• Tonbridge & Malling, whilst predominantly rural, has key market towns, contributing to its strength in small-scale industry, logistics, and a growing professional services sector which can be leveraged to support the regional economy.<br>• Tunbridge Wells serves as a cultural and economic centre in West Kent, with a strong residential property market and an educated workforce. These strengths can drive regional skills development and attract investment. |
| **East Kent:**<br>• Ashford<br>• Canterbury<br>• Dover<br>• Folkestone & Hythe<br>• Thanet | **East Kent has nationally strategic transport and infrastructure with trade ports, high-speed and international rail and major motorway links, this connectivity will support future innovation and growth in the region. Regeneration and development offer significant growth opportunities, with competitive land values and capacity for significant housing growth. The aging demographic of some areas in the region provides potential for economic renewal through investment and reform in health infrastructure, education and skills.**<br>• Canterbury is a sub-regional economic centre, home to four higher/further education institutions and significant cultural heritage, including UNESCO World Heritage Sites, offering a strong foundation to foster education, culture-led regeneration, and a skilled workforce across the wider area.<br>• Thanet boasts extensive coastline, Blue Flag beaches, and a growing creative and digital economy centred around Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs. The coastal assets and creative economy present opportunities to drive sustainable tourism and technology growth.<br>• Dover is a critical international gateway for the whole region and the UK more broadly, with the Port of Dover handling a nationally significant level of UK trade in goods. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Ashford is Kent's largest borough by area, with rapid population and housing growth, supported by high-speed rail to London and access to international routes via Eurotunnel in Folkestone. This offers key opportunities to manage sustainable expansion and improve regional accessibility.<br>• Folkestone & Hythe has excellent connectivity to mainland Europe via the Channel Tunnel. It is experiencing significant regeneration and growth, focused on creative industries, digital economy, and green technologies, which will enable the future unitary to promote innovation-led regeneration and cross-border collaboration in emerging sectors, with significant housing growth planned at the new town of Otterpool Park. |

**Balanced economy and tax base**

The three proposed geographies have similar Gross Value Added (GVA), ranging from £20.1bn in West Kent to £17.0bn in East Kent. All areas have large tax bases and therefore ability to generate revenue and room for growth.

The comparatively higher GVA per capita in West Kent (£35.6k) reflects the reality of current differences in income and productivity across Kent. However, the model is designed to minimise imbalance, with North Kent and East Kent each having a mix of wealthier and more deprived areas within them, both avoiding the creation of a single authority which is at a particular disadvantage and enabling place-based growth opportunities to be identified and taken advantage of.

The three councils are broadly balanced in terms of economic strength, which effectively supports sustainable growth and resilience across each unitary.

***Table 9:*** *Economy and tax base metrics for 3 unitary model option*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gross Value Added (GVA)[14] (£m) (2023)** | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 |
| **GVA per capita (productivity)[15] (£) (2023)** | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 |
| **Council tax base (no. of band D equivalent properties) (FY28/29)[16]** | 225,749 | 231,972 | 245,804 |
| **Council tax average band D rate (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes)[17] (£)** | £1,842 | £1,904 | £1,907 |
| **Retained business rates (2024-25)[18] (£m)** | 137.7 | 113.2 | 113.7 |

[14] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[15] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[16] Financial data return submitted by councils
[17] Financial data return submitted by councils
[18] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Deprivation score (2019)[19]** | 0.13 | 0.08 | 0.14 |

## Business rates

Business rates tax bases are strong, with each unitary generating between £113m and £138m in retained business rates. All three authorities have the economic capacity to operate independently and sustainably.

Any minor imbalances between proposed councils are countered by strong growth potential, which will support longer-term economic growth and prosperity across the whole of Kent. Each authority will be able to tailor economic and employment strategies to local needs, while aligning with the wider strategic ambitions of Kent.

## Council tax

Each unitary has a sufficient council tax base to support service delivery, ranging from c. 226k to c. 246k Band D equivalent properties. Tax bases are also balanced, which supports fair council tax harmonisation for long-term financial stability. Differences in average band D rates between councils within each proposed unitary are modest, ranging from £1,842 to £1,907, minimising disruption for residents and reducing administrative complexity during transition.

## Council tax harmonisation

Council tax harmonisation is an important and sensitive area. Council tax rates must be consistent by the eighth year of a unitary authority and there are currently significant disparities in council tax rates across Kent.

***Table 10:*** *Current council taxbase, rates and yield*

| Current council | 2024-25 final taxbase[20] | Current combined Band D rate[21] | Current Tax Yield |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ashford | 49,832 | £1,799 | £89,636,805 |
| Canterbury | 53,348 | £1,851 | £98,732,177 |
| Dartford | 41,029 | £1,796 | £73,679,473 |
| Dover | 40,875 | £1,825 | £74,604,137 |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 40,466 | £1,907 | £77,159,931 |
| Gravesham | 35,995 | £1,842 | £66,296,691 |
| Maidstone | 68,264 | £1,904 | £129,958,194 |
| Medway | 90,913 | £1,755 | £159,523,255 |
| Sevenoaks | 52,395 | £1,855 | £97,168,160 |
| Swale | 50,368 | £1,812 | £91,242,368 |
| Thanet | 46,454 | £1,874 | £87,054,908 |
| Tonbridge & Malling | 53,478 | £1,849 | £98,879,623 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 48,361 | £1,816 | £87,822,911 |
| **Total** | **671,778** | | **£1,231,758,633** |

[19] Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics
[20] Financial data return submitted by councils
[21] Financial data return submitted by councils

The baseline council tax point to which the rates will be harmonised will be set through key decision by the shadow authorities.

This is a sensitive political decision as it is likely to result in an increase in council tax rates for residents in areas which currently charge lower rates.

Council tax harmonisation is governed by the referendum limits so the increase will be in line with what is legal and acceptable under the current system.

This also means the total council tax bill across Kent will be lower than if all current councils increased rates at the maximum allowed as would be typical in local government.

This is because residents who currently pay rates at, or higher than, the baseline rate set by the shadows will have their council tax rate frozen or potentially reduced to align with the baseline rate.

While there are many different scenarios including the baseline rate and the rate of increase, council tax harmonisation can be achieved within seven years and we have not assumed any increase in council tax rates into the financial modelling.

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# Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery

**Criteria 1b.** Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.

**Option 3A balances population, transport, and local needs across North, West, and East Kent. It creates manageable areas that support coordinated housing growth and infrastructure investment, while responding more effectively to spatial constraints and issues like homelessness – enabling sustainable, region-wide development.**

## Geographies and population

The model achieves a strong balance of population and geographic area across the three proposed councils. This balance enables effective governance, manageable service delivery footprints, and equitable representation. Population densities vary logically due from differences in urban and rural geographies, allowing tailored service priorities for each council.

***Table 11:*** *Geographies and population in 2023 and 2032 forecasts*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Population (mid-2024)[22]** | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 |
| **Geographic area (sq.km)[23]** | 738.9 | 1,335.1 | 1,665.3 |
| **Population density (people per sq.km) (mid-2024)[24]** | 929.4 | 424.7 | 407.1 |
| **Forecast population 2032 ONS[25]** | 709,055 | 596,059 | 705,644 |
| **Forecast growth** | 5.7% | 6.8% | 5.3% |

## Sensible geographies

Option 3A balances area sizes to avoid creating rural authorities that are too large to manage effectively or urban authorities that are too small to offer spatial flexibility. Population densities also vary, from 407 people per sq km in East Kent to 929 in North Kent, reflecting the region's natural settlement patterns. Additionally, the three-unitary model enables larger geographies which provide for a more balanced approach that supports strategic planning – facilitating more effective housing allocation, infrastructure investment, and Local Plan integration.

Alignment to spatial planning constraints

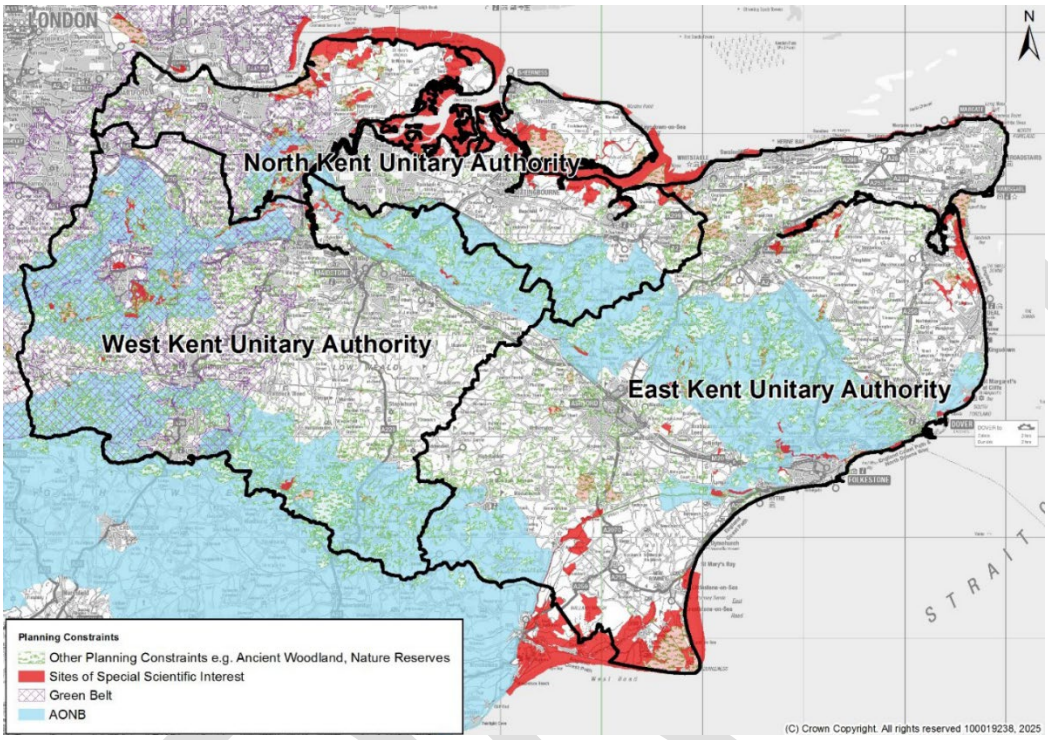
The model addresses spatial planning constraints more holistically by combining wider areas across the north, west and east, allowing for a more equitable distribution of available land for major developments, including housing, commercial space, and infrastructure. This geographic breadth provides local councils with greater flexibility to allocate development to the most suitable locations, rather than being constrained by the tight boundaries and competing land-use pressures faced by smaller authorities. In this context, there is scope for development across all three unitary

[22] Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[23] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
[24] Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[25] Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics

areas, including in West Kent, which would face greater limitations if it were not grouped with Maidstone.

Larger unitary authorities are also better positioned to strategically plan around environmental constraints, such as Green Belt land and National Landscapes (previously AONB). This broader oversight helps to ensure that growth and environmental protection are balanced more effectively, with development directed away from sensitive areas while still meeting housing demand. The model supports a stronger, more sustainable growth narrative by unlocking land where space is genuinely available, enabling the delivery of homes and infrastructure at a scale necessary to support long-term economic and community needs.

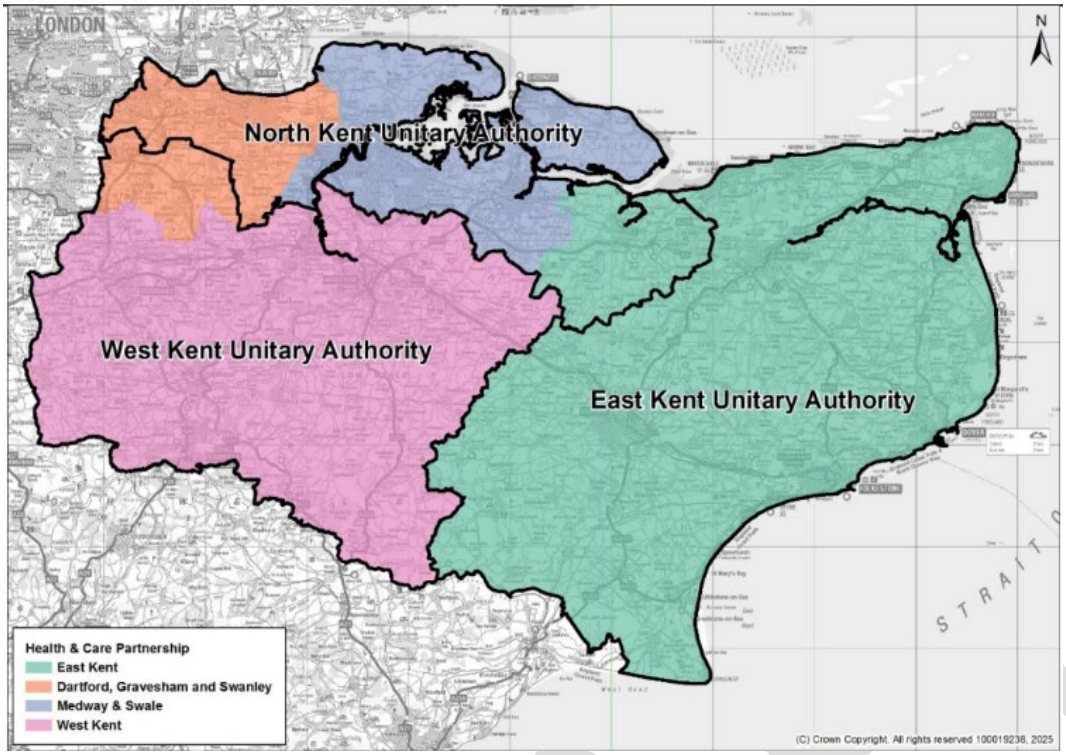
***Figure 8:*** **Map of spatial planning constraints**




Alignment to service delivery partner boundaries

The model is strategically aligned closely with NHS health and care partner geographies, as can be observed in the map below, and particularly acute health trust boundaries. This deliberate alignment ensures that the service delivery framework integrates seamlessly within existing local structures, fostering collaboration and reducing fragmentation across care pathways. By broadly reflecting the geographies of principal health partners, the model minimises disruption during implementation, enabling a smoother transition for both providers and service users. As a result, integrated service delivery can be realised from Day 1, enhancing continuity of care, improving patient outcomes, and optimising system efficiencies across the health and social care landscape.

***Figure 9:*** *Map of NHS Health and Care Partnership*




## Travel to work patterns across Kent

The figure below shows the distribution of workers across Kent, along with commuting flows into and out of these areas.

Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) are defined as geographic zones where at least 75% of residents work within the same area and at least 75% of workers also live there.

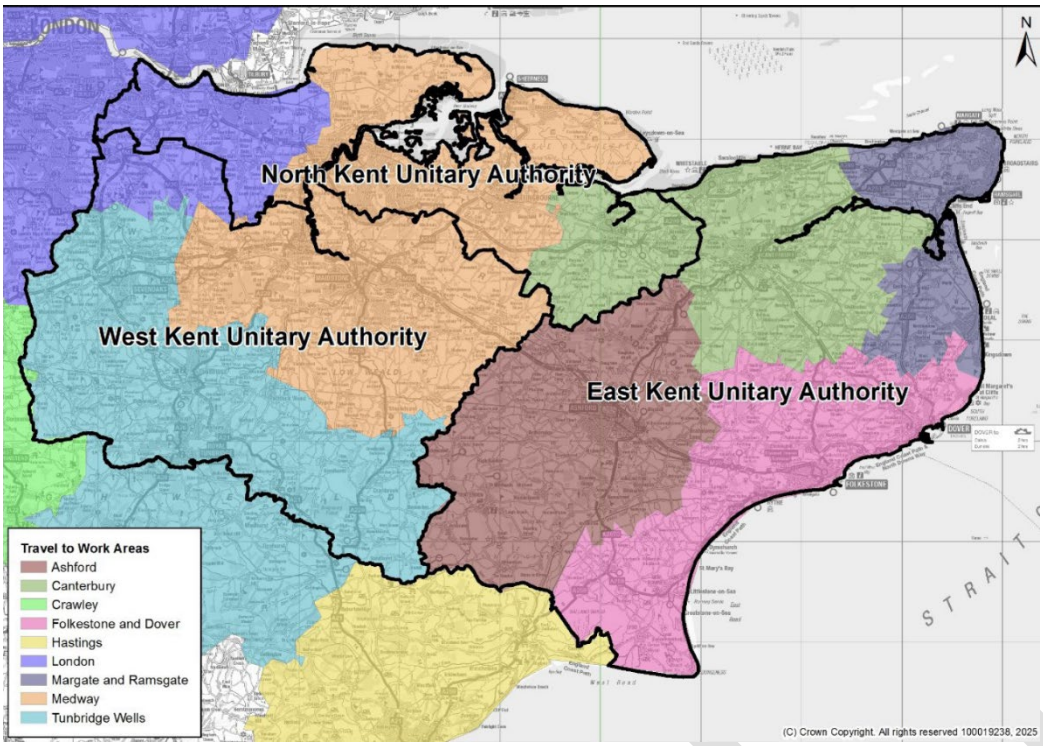
These areas represent self-contained local labour markets with boundaries statistically designed to reflect real-world commuting patterns.

The eastern Kent area has a greater local catchment of employees, with the majority of people working within 5km of their home.

In contrast, western Kent residents tend to travel, reflecting those who work locally in addition to those who travel slightly further to work in London.

Option 3A demonstrates alignment with functional geographies in relation to travel to work areas (TTWAs). In East Kent, there is strong consistency with existing TTWA boundaries, notably across Canterbury, Margate and Ramsgate, Folkestone and Dover, and Ashford.

***Figure 10*****: Map of travel to work areas against unitary areas**




The table below gives an overview of current commuting and travel patterns aligned to the three unitary geographies.

***Table 12:*** *Overview of travel to work across unitary areas*[26]

| Proposed Council | Current council areas | Key travel patterns and alignment to travel to work data |
|---|---|---|
| **North Kent** | Dartford, Gravesham, Medway, Swale | **North Kent, particularly Dartford and Gravesham, exhibits strong outward commuting flows to London and surrounding counties like Essex, enabled by rail and road connections across the region.**<br>• Dartford stands out with 7.8% of workers commuting by train, more than double the Kent average, highlighting its role as a key London commuter hub. Gravesham follows closely behind with 5.3% using trains.<br>• In contrast, Medway is more self-contained, with over 52% driving to work and only 4% commuting by train. Despite being well-connected, many Medway residents both live and work locally.<br>• Swale sees high car dependency (54.8%). This reflects limited public transport access or jobs distributed across rural and suburban areas. |
| **West Kent** | Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge | **West Kent shows distinct characteristics of a commuter belt, with significant train and car travel outside of the local area.** |

[26] https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-kent/economy-and-employment-data/kents-workforce

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Wells, Maidstone | • Train usage is relatively high: Sevenoaks has 5.4% train commuters, with Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells around 3%. At the same time, car use remains substantial, especially in Maidstone (50.1%), the largest borough by workforce.<br>• In Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells, over 42% of residents work mainly from home, significantly higher than the Kent average (31.1%). |
| **East Kent** | Canterbury, Dover, Thanet, Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe | **East Kent has lower reliance on rail than the other unitaries, with higher proportions of people walking or driving to work, indicating more localised employment or limited public transport options.**<br>• In Canterbury, 10.8% of people walk to work, the highest in Kent, reflecting its compact city layout and university economy. Rail usage remains modest (2.3%) compared to other areas.<br>• Dover, Ashford, and Thanet have high car dependency (around 50%) and relatively low train usage (~2.0–2.4%), suggesting fewer commuting options or jobs located closer to home. Thanet, with 3.5% using buses, has the highest bus usage in Kent, possibly reflecting socio-economic factors or transport access challenges.<br>• Ashford benefits from HS1 rail links, which likely contribute to 2.5% train usage, the highest in the area. Folkestone & Hythe shows similar patterns, although with more walking commuters (9.1%), possibly linked to a denser urban core. |

## Travel infrastructure

Kent benefits from a comprehensive strategic transport network.

Major motorways including the M2, M20, M25, and M26 provide vital road links to London, the wider south east and key ports such as Dover and Folkestone.

These roads primarily connect Kent from the east to west through the districts and eventually into London.

While the east to west connection is strong, the north to south connection through Kent is less direct, particularly for those not commuting into London.

The county is also well-served by rail, with services operated by Southeastern on the North Kent Line, Chatham Main Line and the UK's only domestic high-speed rail service, High Speed 1 (HS1), which connects Kent to central London via St Pancras International in under 40 minutes.

### Strategic transport corridors across the three unitary regions

Kent's three unitary regions are each supported by key transport corridors that enhance connectivity and economic activity. North and West Kent benefit from the M25, M2, and M20 motorways alongside Southeastern rail links, providing efficient routes for commuters, freight, and

access to London and the wider South East of England. East Kent is uniquely advantaged by high-speed rail services and vital trunk roads like the M20 and the Thanet Way, which connect coastal towns and facilitate rapid travel to London and continental Europe. It unites Dover, Folkestone and Ashford to provide for coherent oversight of the county's strategic road and rail entry ports. Together, these transport corridors create an integrated network that supports regional growth, trade, and accessibility, ensuring Kent remains a crucial gateway between the capital and mainland Europe.

***Table 13:*** *Transport connectivity across the three unitary areas*

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent** | • Dartford: M25 runs north to south through the district. Northern side flanked by River Thames and southern side flows into Sevenoaks. North Kent line connects to London and Medway.<br>• Gravesham: Watling Street (A2) is the main road running west to east, eventually entering the M2. Southeastern rail connects Dartford with Gravesham and high-speed rail at Gravesend and Ebbsfleet provides connection to London and East Kent<br>• Medway: A229 runs north to south and eventually meets the M2. Thameslink and Southeastern rail, with high-speed services, connects to London.<br>• Swale: M2 runs east to west connecting Faversham and Sittingbourne. Swale rail line provides local connections. |
| **West Kent** | • Sevenoaks: Well-connected with M25, M26 and A21 providing connectivity to north, south, east and west. Southeastern main line connects to London.<br>• Tonbridge & Malling: Well-connected by M20 and M26 running east to west. Southeastern rail connects to Tonbridge and West Malling.<br>• Tunbridge Wells: No motorways run through the district, though there are several A-roads providing connections to the rest of Kent. Southeastern trains provide rail connections to London.<br>• Maidstone: M20 runs east to west through the district. More rural areas outside of the M20 and A229 corridors are not as well connected. Multiple towns across the district are directly connected to London through rail, including Maidstone in the north and Marden in the south. |
| **East Kent** | • Ashford: High speed rail provides direct connection into London as well as wider Kent and the M20 runs through the district giving access to North Kent and Folkestone.<br>• Canterbury: Thanet Way (A299) runs east to west connecting to the M2, as does the A2 linking the district to Dover. Connections from rural areas into Canterbury are good. Southeastern rail provides connections to London and elsewhere in Kent.<br>• Dover: All major roads across East Kent connect into Dover, particularly the A2, A20 and A256, however outside of these main routes, road connection is more limited. Southeastern and Chatham main rail lines connect to London. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Folkestone & Hythe: M20 provides an east to west connection to Ashford and Dover in the north of the district, however much of the rest of the district relies on more minor roads. High speed rail connects through Kent and into London.<br>• Thanet: Canterbury Road (A28) is the main connection from Margate to Canterbury and Ashford in the north of the district and the A299 provides connections across the south of the district from Ramsgate. Southeastern rail provides connections to London. |

**Why Option 3A delivers on housing and homelessness**

LGR provides the opportunity to think differently and more strategically, beyond current district boundaries. This opportunity must be used to learn from the areas with the strongest track record of delivery and apply best practices across the new councils.

The three new councils will:

- Be ideally positioned to coordinate spatial planning, helping to ensure that growth is both deliverable and supported by the infrastructure residents expect.
- Address spatial planning constraints by combining wider areas across the north, west and east, allowing for a more equitable distribution of available land for housing.
- Provide a stronger platform for joined-up place-shaping and regional coordination, with balanced distribution of housing and infrastructure investment across the region.
- Have significant scale to plan strategically and negotiate effectively with government and developers.
- Reflect local housing markets and avoid the dilution of focus that can occur in overly large geographies.
- Avoid the fragmentation risks of a model with more, smaller councils, which may lack the capacity to manage housing pipelines or respond to homelessness effectively.

By combining sufficient scale with proximity to local markets, the three-unitary structure will strengthen the ability to deliver new homes where they are most needed across all three areas. In particular, East Kent – where homelessness levels are highest – will benefit from being a large council that combines areas of higher deprivation with those that are less deprived, ensuring the resources and capacity are in place to tackle homelessness effectively.

**Complementary housing profiles and challenges in the 3A model**

***Table 14:*** *Housing and homelessness metrics for Option 3A*

| Metric | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024)[27]** | 6.6 | 4.1 | 8.4 |
| **Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement (%)[28]** | 84.4 | 91.9 | 86.2 |

[27] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[28] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK

Homelessness rates between council areas are relatively balanced, with West Kent performing slightly better. Housing delivery is similar across the region, ranging from 84% to 92%.

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# Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure

**Criteria 1d.** Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

**Option 3A streamlines local government by reducing duplication and cutting costs, while maintaining strong community representation through enhanced neighbourhood engagement.**

## Current electoral arrangements

As set out in the table below there are currently a total of 658 councillors across Kent, including 81 county councillors, 518 district councillors and 59 unitary councillors in Medway.

Kent County Council is divided into 72 electoral divisions with 63 single-member divisions and nine two-member divisions.

Councillor to electorate ratios vary across Kent, but the combined ratio is 1:2,102.

***Table 15:*** *Councillor to electorate ratios across Kent*

| Council | District/ unitary councillors | County councillors | Total councillors | Electorate | Electorate per councillor | Divisions | Wards |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Medway** | 59 | N/A | 59 | 206,567 | 3,501* | N/A | 24 |
| **Ashford** | 47 | 7 | 54 | 100,660 | 1,864 | 7 | 39 |
| **Canterbury** | 39 | 8 | 47 | 111,160 | 2,365 | 8 | 21 |
| **Dartford** | 42 | 6 | 48 | 86,560 | 1,803 | 6 | 20 |
| **Dover** | 32 | 7 | 39 | 88,820 | 2,277 | 5 | 17 |
| **Folkestone and Hythe** | 30 | 6 | 36 | 84,940 | 2,359 | 6 | 13 |
| **Gravesham** | 39 | 5 | 44 | 77,240 | 1,755 | 3 | 17 |
| **Maidstone** | 49 | 9 | 58 | 133,960 | 2,310 | 8 | 22 |
| **Sevenoaks** | 54 | 6 | 60 | 90,200 | 1,503 | 6 | 26 |
| **Swale** | 47 | 7 | 54 | 111,460 | 2,064 | 6 | 24 |
| **Thanet** | 56 | 7 | 63 | 104,500 | 1,659 | 5 | 23 |
| **Tonbridge and Malling** | 44 | 7 | 51 | 100,240 | 1,965 | 6 | 19 |
| **Tunbridge Wells** | 39 | 6 | 45 | 87,340 | 1,941 | 6 | 14 |
| **Total** | **577** | **81** | **658** | **1,383,647** | **2,103** | **72** | **279** |

**As a unitary authority, Medway has a different governance structure, explaining its higher ratio than other areas across Kent*

### What we know about elections to new councils

Elections to shadow authorities will take place in May 2027.

The Boundary Commission (LGBCE) recommends using existing boundaries, e.g. divisions or wards, as building blocks for these first elections but the guidance is to focus on the number of councillors rather than drawing proposed electoral maps at this stage.

Between May 2027 and next elections in May 2032, there will be a review of electoral boundaries and new arrangements put in place.

We understand LGBCE's preference is to avoid significant changes in councillor numbers so arrangements for 2027 should align closely to expectations of councillor numbers from 2032 onwards.

### Reference points for councillor ratios

Set out below are some examples of councillor-to-electorate ratios for newly-formed unitary authorities in recent years, with a focus on larger authorities which are more relevant for comparison.

***Table 16:** Examples of councillor to electorate ratios*

| Council | Established | Councillors | Electorate | Electorate per councillor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dorset** | 2019 | 82 | 297,726 | 3,631 |
| **Buckinghamshire** | 2020 | 97 | 420,610 | 4,336 |
| **North Northamptonshire** | 2021 | 68 | 263,915 | 3,881 |
| **West Northamptonshire** | 2021 | 76 | 307,611 | 4,048 |
| **Somerset** | 2023 | 110 | 446,698 | 4,061 |
| **North Yorkshire** | 2023 | 90 | 478,539 | 5,317 |

### Proposed councillor numbers for Option 3A

In accordance with LGBCE guidance on LGR, this proposal recognises the need to put the principle of numbers of councillors first, considering effective operation and councillor capacity within the new unitary authorities. We also recognise the challenge in pinning down precise numbers at this stage of the LGR process and the complexity inherent in creating new authorities. At this stage we do not know numbers of committees and governance structures that elected councillors might want. What we do know is that:

- Area committees will be essential, both for regulatory purposes (i.e. area planning committees) and community engagement (including recognising any forthcoming requirements through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill),

- Unitary authorities have the full breadth of local authority functions to perform, and
- Kent has high populations

Therefore, this proposal aims for a range of 80-95 councillors – which sits within the LGBCE's Council Size submission guidance range of 30-100 – this is our first principle.

Secondary to that is the principle of achieving a suitable electorate to councillor ratio and electoral equality – we are aiming for 1 : 5,000 (+/-10%) due to population sizes, driven by the need to achieve the correct councillor numbers (first principle) but also to manage workload and provide local representation. This principle is being weighted on the basis that the LGBCE will be conducting a review prior to elections in 2032.

Applying those principles to each new council within this proposal produces the following:

***Table 17:*** *Calculating proposed councillor numbers per council*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Electorate[29]** | 481,827 | 411,740 | 490,080 | 1,383,647 |
| **Proposed number of councillors** | **90** | **84** | **95** | **269** |
| **Electorate to councillor ratio** | **1: 5,354** | **1: 4,902** | **1: 5,159** | **1: 5,144** |

* Electorate figures source: data provided by Kent County Council, based on governance petition verification number (February 2025) and Medway Council electorate (February 2025).

Across Kent this gives a total of 269 Councillors, and an average of 1 councillor per 5,144 electors.

In proposing these numbers, we have considered the following:

- **West Kent –** based on county divisions (splitting 2 member divisions first) – first and second principles achieved.
- **North Kent –** based on county divisions (splitting 2 member divisions first) and for Medway Unitary area using warding, combining wards to achieve an average of 3 councillors per 2 current wards. This also brings the electorate ratio (second principle) for Medway into line with the rest of the unitary area – first and second principles achieved.
- **East Kent –** based primarily on county divisions (splitting 2 member divisions first), this would produce too high a number of councillors on its own, so in some areas (starting with lower electorates per division) a combination of district wards has been used to reduce the overall number down to meet the first principle. The higher total number of councillors is required in East Kent to meet the unitary needs that will arise from Area Committees (particularly for community engagement) resulting from combining five separate authorities (covering multiple separate communities) together.

As with all local government boundary changes, flexibility will be required on both the precise final councillor numbers and boundary methods used to ensure they are fit for purpose. When the

[29] Electorate at date of May 2025 Kent County Council elections and latest available electorate data for Medway

detailed work is conducted, the LGBCE will be engaged to advise and support to ensure this is achieved.

### Caveats on proposed councillor numbers

Once the geographies are agreed, the constituent councils of each area will prepare and agree what is required for first elections to each council.

### Efficient and locally focused democratic arrangements

The 3A model will create a new democratic structure that is more efficient and delivers savings while still maintaining a scale that allows for local focus. It reduces duplication, simplifies decision-making, and ensures that powers are held at the appropriate level to provide effective, accountable leadership. 3A's simplified governance structure improves financial oversight and transparency, reducing risk of inefficiency. It will support strong partnerships across unitary areas to collaborate on strategic issues, enabling improved service delivery on a pan-Kent basis. This streamlined governance creates a stronger platform for constructive engagement with central government and regional bodies, ensuring alignment on shared priorities.

Option 3A delivers councillor-to-elector ratios that are in line with ratios seen nationally through recent LGR programmes, ensuring democratic accountability and meaningful influence over local services and priorities for councillors and residents

Well-developed governance arrangements and effective structural and policy measures that enhance neighbourhood and community engagement, such as engagement with parish and town councils and the creation of neighbourhood area committees, will provide an ongoing connection to local areas.

# **Criteria 2:** Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience


| | |
|---|---|
| **Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency** | **Criteria 2a and 2b** |
| **Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies** | **Criteria 2c** |
| **Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation** | **Criteria 2d** |
| **Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government** | **Criteria 2e** |


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# Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency

**Criteria 2a.** As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more

**Criteria 2b.** There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal

**Option 3A creates balanced populations of the recommended size, supporting larger tax bases, lower costs, and economies of scale. It promotes financial stability, efficient service delivery, and the capacity to manage future growth and challenges.**

## Government guidance on population size

Population size can be used as a proxy for the size and scale of councils.

Government has outlined a population size of 500,000 or more as a guiding principle, not a hard target.

There is recognition there should be flexibility and all proposals, regardless of the population size being proposed, should set out the rationale clearly.

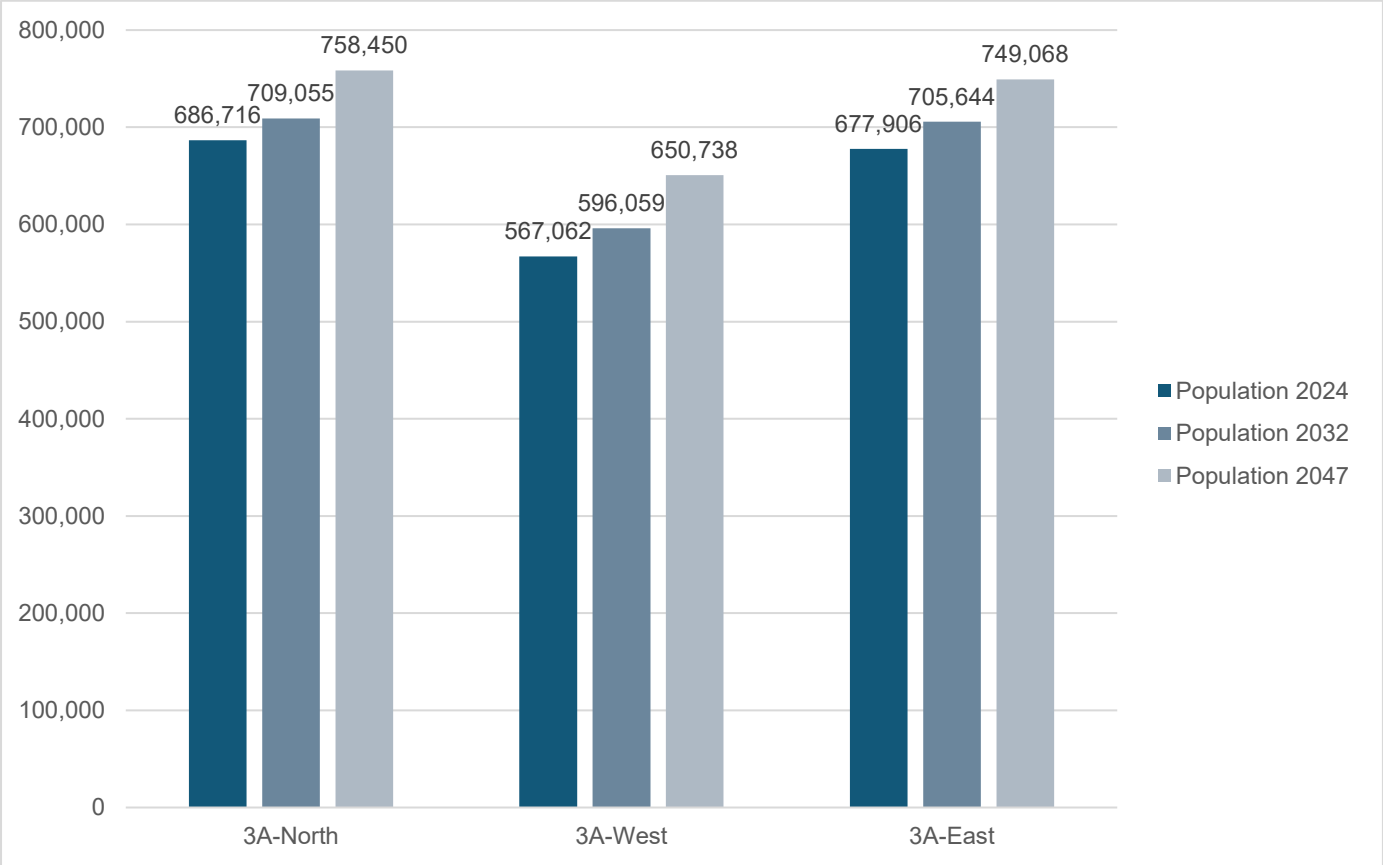
All councils across Kent agree that, given the implementation complexity of any LGR, new local government structures should be in place for generations to come.

As a result, projected future populations as well as current population sizes are considered for each proposed council.

### Populations and forward projections

Set out below are population numbers and growth projections for the three proposed councils under Option 3A.

***Figure 11:*** *Population size forecasts (ONS)*




**Balanced populations with room for growth: The argument for Option 3A**

Under the three-unitary model, each council will have a starting population between 567k – 687k.

This model supports larger taxbases and, in line with the financial modelling, requires lower disaggregation and transition costs while offering greater opportunities for economies of scale.

Of all the options being considered, Option 3A provides the most balanced population distribution, promoting resilience and strategic capacity. Each council is sized to efficiently deliver services, withstand financial pressures, and invest in transformation, while remaining closely connected to local communities. This balance ensures no single council is overburdened, especially in areas with higher levels of need, and that each can attract and retain specialist expertise for the challenges and opportunities of their area.

The model is designed to absorb future shocks and manage demand in high-pressure services such as adult social care and children's services.

# Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies

**Criteria 2c**. Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money

**Option 3A delivers the strongest value proposition, offering the highest savings, lowest transition costs, and the quickest payback period. It strikes the right balance between efficiency and manageable risk, making it the most cost-effective choice for Kent. This option provides strong foundation for public sector reform and readiness for a devolution deal.**

## Collaborative working on finance across Kent councils

All 14 S151 officers are members of the long-standing Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG).

In relation to LGR, it has been responsible for the following key activities:

- developing working relationships and shared understanding of finances, which will be a key enabler of successful LGR;
- informing a shared financial baseline; and
- reviewing and collectively updating assumptions behind a base case model for inclusion in proposals to government.

## Approach to modelling the financial impact of LGR

Refer to ***Appendix 2: Financial modelling*** for more detailed description of assumptions, approach and results of the financial modelling.

Finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have reviewed and informed the financial modelling to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to government.

The financial model aims to:
- quantify the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options; and
- compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings, costs and payback.

The financial model estimates savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs calculated with reference to a series of benchmarked LGR business cases, the characteristics of the options being put forward and the characteristics of local government in Kent.

## Assumptions in financial modelling

While being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all KFOG agrees LGR does not provide the solution combating the scale of the financial challenge being faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The KFOG has agreed the following position:

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The

scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.

- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be paid for.
- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new councils may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new councils.

**Financial modelling results**

The results of the financial modelling are shown below.

***Table 18:*** *Financial modelling summary results*

| LGR option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Option 3A** | (127.8) | 69.4 | (19.7) - (29.2) | 40.2 – 49.7 | 5.4 – 6.7 years |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

**Option 3A, a three-unitary model built on existing boundaries**, has the highest estimated savings of 69.4m and the lowest disaggregation costs and implementation costs of the options modelled, resulting in the shortest estimated payback period of 5.4 – 6.7 years.

**Payback period**

As shown in the chart below, Option 3A is estimated to pay back within 5.4 years in the positive scenario. The profile of costs and benefits have been developed collaboratively across all LGR options.

***Figure 12:*** *Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR option*

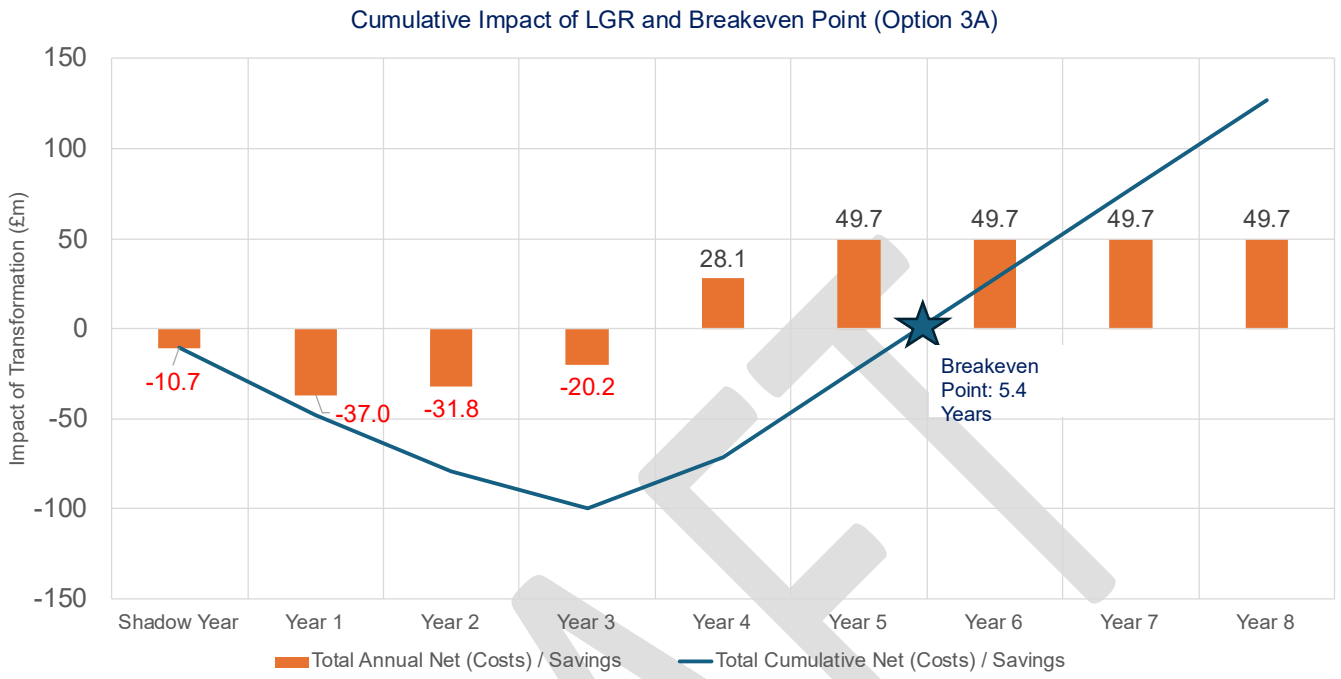



*Chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest end of the range

**Savings and financial efficiency: the argument for Option 3A**

Option 3A offers the strongest value for money among all reorganisation options, achieving the highest savings through scale while keeping implementation and transition costs manageable. By consolidating 14 existing councils into three larger councils (an approach requiring only one additional set of 'upper tier services' for Kent & Medway), it maximises financial efficiencies, reduces complexity, and accelerates the realisation of benefits. These gains arise over-time, primarily from economies of scale, workforce and back-office integration, reduced democratic support costs, and the effective rationalisation of management and support structures.

Maintaining existing boundaries eliminates the need for boundary reviews, which will:

- reduce structural and service disruption.
- minimise implementation risk.
- support organisational stability throughout the change process.

In contrast, options that involve altering boundaries introduce significant additional complexity, requiring extensive consultation, negotiation, and potentially legislative or governance changes. Such changes necessitate detailed financial modelling, redistribution of budgets, reallocation of assets and liabilities, and the renegotiation of service contracts. Collectively, these challenges can extend implementation timelines, escalate costs, and increase the risk of operational disruption.

By having no boundary changes, Option 3A will not be required to undertake these activities and therefore will have considerably less demand on staff time and specialist support, while also preventing additional disruption, uncertainty for future financial planning and avoiding delays in the

realisation of anticipated savings. Retaining current boundaries ensures a more efficient and financially stable transition, safeguarding resources and maintaining a clear focus on delivering long-term value and sustainability.

Financial modelling demonstrates that the three unitary model offers clear advantages in affordability and deliverability. Analysis indicates that each additional unitary adds around £5m in implementation costs, covering internal programme management, external consultancy support, public consultation, ICT consolidation, and shadow executive and democratic transition costs. Disaggregation costs also increase, when moving from three to four or five councils. Additionally, the three-unitary model shows greater savings, especially in SEND and children's services. These figures confirm that the three-unitary configuration provides the optimal balance between scale benefits and the cost of change, reflecting a less complex implementation programme with fewer governance and integration demands.

Because of these lower transition costs and higher recurring savings, the three-unitary model achieves the quickest payback period. This ensures that savings are realised sooner and that financial and operational risks during the transition are minimised. Conversely, adding more councils erodes benefits – assumed at a rate of 2.5% for each additional unitary beyond three – while increasing cost and complexity.

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# Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation

**Criteria 2d.** Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects

**Kent's LGR process is complex, requiring careful transition management to avoid unnecessary service disruption. The 14 councils are collaborating on plans and see LGR as a chance to transform services through digital innovation, joined-up working, a focus on residents and working with partners to deliver public sector reform under a Strategic Authority. Financially, moving to three councils offers lower transition costs than models with more councils.**

## A complex transition regardless of the option selected

LGR is inherently complex, and the size and number of councils in Kent means the Kent LGR programme will be one of the most complex implementations nationally, regardless of the option selected.

This has the potential to impact public service delivery in the short term if transition is not managed effectively.

The 14 councils have made progress on transition planning, including considerations of quick wins and capturing of key joint actions. Refer to 'Section 6: Implementation Plan' for further details.

### Transition: the argument for Option 3A

As set out in the previous section, transition implementation costs for the three-unitary model are projected to be £127.8m**.** Whilst any model of LGR has significant complexity, Option 3A minimises transition complexity and by creating three new councils rather than four or five, it has the lowest transition and implementation costs.

Option 3A deliberately avoids changes to current boundaries, meaning that potential delays, significant additional complexity and cost are avoided. Specifically, some models will require the integration of up to seven councils in many of the proposed unitary areas which would lead to significant cost, complexity and risk in terms of aligning policies, contracts, staff terms and conditions, ICT systems and partnerships.

## Opportunities for transformation

All councils across Kent have taken steps to modernise, including more effective use of data and introducing digital approaches to service delivery.

This transformation activity has already improved outcomes and enabled cost savings.

However, all councils recognise LGR presents an opportunity to transform services and ways of working more fundamentally.

On 17 September 2025, Kent councils met to discuss the future vision for Kent.

As part of these discussions, the below key ambitions for service transformation were captured:

1. Clear focus for transformation on the needs of residents.
2. Establish a consistent, whole-council approach and culture across services, breaking down silos and joining up the experience for residents accessing multiple services.
3. Digitise and automate resident journeys for more transactional services, while maintaining alternative routes for those who need them.
4. Increase focus on prevention and a more holistic person-centred approach, especially for those with more complex needs (see Criteria 3: Public service reform).

To enable this transformation the below enablers were discussed:

- continual focus on cultural change and effective communications;
- joining up key data sources across services to support seamless working across services, better understand resident needs and achieve better, more proactive decision-making;
- meaningful transformation strategies and wider approach to public service reform in advance of Day 1, informing meaningful corporate plans with clear ambitions and actions; and
- linking transformation to a shared Kent-wide approach to public service reform (see Criteria 3).

Specific transformation plans, including funding arrangements for investment will need to be agreed as part of the budget-setting process and Medium Term Financial Strategy for each new council.

Across Kent, capital receipts are expected to support this to some extent.

However, investment in transformation will be on the basis it delivers cost savings and is therefore self-funding over the medium to long term.

**Transformation: the argument for Option 3A**

Three councils for Kent will each have the scale and capacity to transform and deliver public service reform in partnership with public sector colleagues, while also working collaboratively at a Kent-wide level where appropriate. This scale enables each council to take a strategic and proactive approach to shared challenges such as housing, transport, climate resilience, and health inequalities, while remaining responsive to local community needs. With greater capacity for innovation, digital transformation, and workforce development, the councils will drive efficiencies and improve outcomes for residents. At the same time, a countywide partnership framework will facilitate coordination on cross-boundary issues like economic development and emergency planning, maintaining Kent's coherence as a unified economic and social system.

# Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government

**Criteria 2e.** For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable

## The Kent financial context

None of the 14 councils in Kent are in Best Value intervention or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support.

However, Medway Council has been granted a capitalisation direction under the government's Exceptional Financial Support.

There is collective concern regarding the financial sustainability of the current system, particularly given rising demand in adult social care and children's services, rising costs and increasing levels of debt.

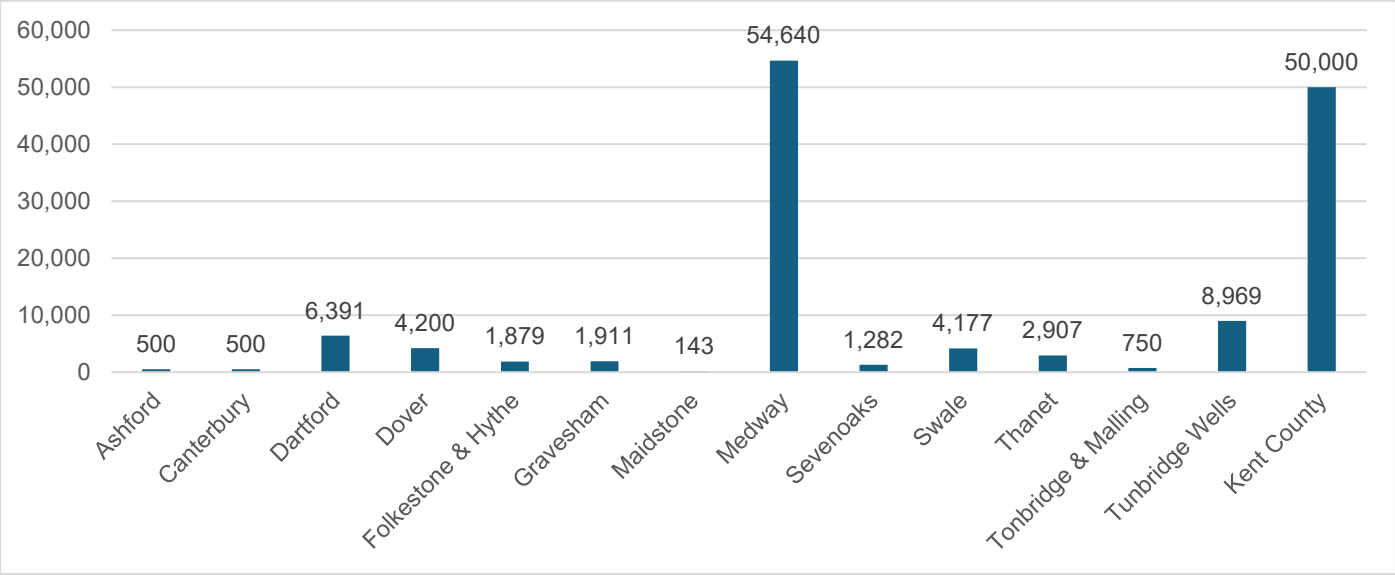
The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery across county and districts.

## Existing budget challenges

The forecast total gross budget gap, including assumed funding from reserves, for all councils by 2028/29 is £138.2m, which includes £54.6m within Medway and £50.0m within Kent County Council.

These figures exclude consideration of the impact of Fair Funding 2.0.

***Figure 13:*** *Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£'000)*




All existing councils will continue to focus on delivering savings and managing their ongoing budget gaps regardless of LGR.

However, the starting point for all new councils is expected to be stretched, with ongoing need for savings to be identified.

**Projected budget position for new councils under Option 3A**

| Local Authority | Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£m) |
|---|---|
| North Kent | 84.9 |
| West Kent | 25.8 |
| East Kent | 27.5 |
| **Total** | **138.2** |

The total projected budget gap position for Option 3A is £138.2m. The budget gaps in West and East Kent are balanced against each other, while North Kent's gap is proportionally larger, though a significant portion of this is attributable to Medway.

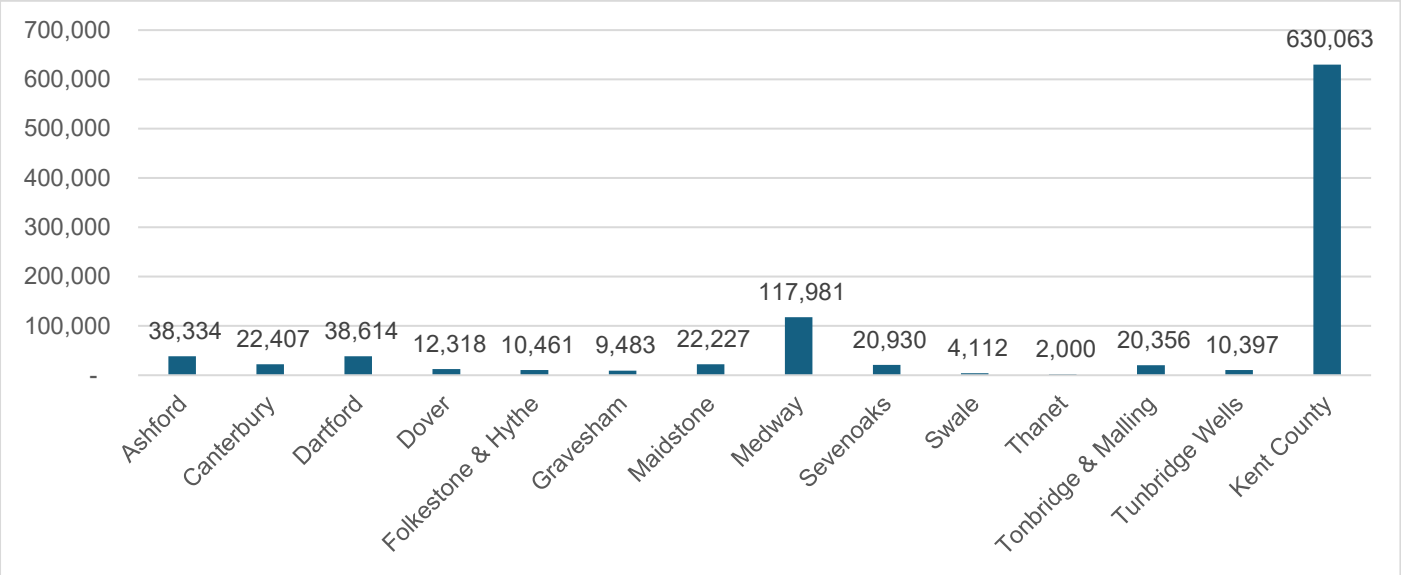
Despite the difference between North Kent and the other two councils, it is important to consider the relevance of scale in assessing financial sustainability. The formation of a new, larger North Kent authority would enable greater financial resilience. This consolidated council would benefit from a broader revenue base and enhanced capacity to absorb financial pressures, offering a more robust fiscal position than the current fragmented arrangements.

## Current reserves levels

Across Kent councils, Total Usable Reserves are forecast to be £959.7m.

This includes the full value of the Kent County Council's usable reserves of £630.1m.

***Figure 14:*** *Total Usable Reserves (FY28/29) (£'000)*




*Note – for all districts, this amount related to General Fund balance, Earmarked Reserves, Capital Receipts Reserve and Capital Grants Unapplied.*

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the new councils post reorganisation.

It will be the decision of each new council to determine how to use its resources to pay for the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

**Projected reserves levels under Option 3A**

| Local Authority | Total Usable Reserves (FY28/29) (£m) |
|---|---|
| North Kent | 394.2 |
| West Kent | 258.9 |
| East Kent | 306.6 |
| **Total** | **959.7** |

All unitary authorities have healthy reserves levels above £250m and are all relatively balanced, in the range of £259m to £394m.

## Existing council debt

The external debt position reported across all Kent councils is £1.7bn on a net revenue of £2.3bn with a total financing cost of £123.6m. 67% of the borrowing and 87% of net revenue and 87% of the financing cost is within Kent County Council and Medway.

The combined financing ratio across all Kent councils is 5.3%.

***Table 19:*** *Borrowing and financing costs across Kent councils*[30]

| Local Authority (£'000) (26/27) | General Fund Borrowing (External) | Financing cost | Net Revenue | Financing ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ashford | 95,375 | 402 | 9,009 | 4.5% |
| Canterbury | 120,358 | 5,417 | 31,800 | 17.0% |
| Dartford | - | 370 | 21,531 | 1.7% |
| Dover | 102,600 | 1,424 | 20,088 | 7.1% |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 53,000 | 2,628 | 35,504 | 7.4% |
| Gravesham | 101,955 | 2,777 | 25,693 | 10.8% |
| Maidstone | 65,000 | 4,183 | 27,945 | 15.0% |
| Medway | 442,468 | 21,731 | 481,631 | 4.5% |
| Sevenoaks | 13,934 | 1,040 | 21,868 | 4.8% |
| Swale | 13,000 | 2,802 | 31,400 | 8.9% |
| Thanet | 6,622 | 371 | 26,749 | 1.4% |
| Tonbridge & Malling | - | - | 27,346 | 0.0% |
| Tunbridge Wells | - | 529 | 21,535 | 2.5% |
| Kent County Council | 716,039 | 79,890 | 1,531,280 | 5.2% |
| **Total** | **1,730,351** | **123,573** | **2,313,379** | **5.3% (Average)** |

[30] Financial data return submitted by councils

**The projected debt position for new councils under Option 3A**

The District borrowing costs, net financing costs and net revenue have been combined and the County costs have been apportioned based on population data.

| Local Authority (£'m) (26/27)[31] | General Fund Borrowing (External) | Financing cost | Net Revenue | Financing ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Kent | 812.0 | 56.1 | 1,104.6 | 5.1% |
| West Kent | 289.1 | 29.2 | 548.2 | 5.3% |
| East Kent | 629.2 | 38.3 | 660.5 | 5.8% |
| **Total** | **1,730.4** | **123.6** | **2,313.4** | **5.3%** |

North Kent shows the highest level of external borrowing at £812 million, which corresponds with its substantial net revenue of £1,104.6 million. Despite this large borrowing figure, its financing ratio is the lowest among the three at 5.1%, suggesting a relatively efficient debt servicing capacity. West Kent, as the smallest council, has the lowest borrowing (£289.1 million) and net revenue (£548.2 million). East Kent has the highest financing ratio at 5.8%, which may point to slightly less favourable financing terms or a tighter revenue position.

While the financing ratios for each council show some variation, they are all relatively close – falling within a narrow band of less than one percentage point. This suggests that, despite differences in borrowing levels and net revenue, the overall debt servicing burden is fairly consistent across the three proposed councils.

**Three councils driving long term financial sustainability**

The scale of the three unitary authorities offers greater resilience to financial shocks, as their larger economic and fiscal bases provide enhanced stability and capacity to absorb unexpected financial pressures. When examining key financial metrics for the three unitary areas – North, West, and East – there is a reasonable balance across key metrics.

Total GVA is balanced across all councils, ranging from around £17 billion to £20 billion, while GVA per capita figures are also comparable, especially between the North and East. Council tax bases are also fairly consistent, with all councils sat around 226k to 246k. Average council tax band D rates are closely aligned across the board. Retained business rates and general fund balance peak in the North at £138 million and £68.7m respectively, though in general all three areas are balanced, especially between West and East. Net revenue expenditure varies, with the North spending the most at £833 million and the West the least at £651 million.

Due to the larger sizes of each unitary, the 3A model is most able to achieve economies of scale in areas such as procurement, staffing, IT, HR, and infrastructure to reduce duplication. Additionally, scale and capacity can also enable greater opportunities for transformation and digital investment.

[31] Financial data return submitted by councils

Taken together, these figures suggest that each future unitary authority will maintain a sound financial balance and will have the capacity to manage resources effectively, with their scale and economic strength contributing to long-term financial sustainability and resilience.

***Table 20:*** *Key financial metrics for the 3 unitary option*

| Metric | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total GVA (£ million) (2023)[32]** | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 |
| **GVA per capita (£) (2023)[33]** | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 |
| **Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (FY28/29)[34]** | 225,749 | 231,972 | 245,804 |
| **Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes) (£)[35]** | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,907 |
| **Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[36]** | 137.7 | 113.2 | 113.7 |
| **General fund balance (FY28/29) (£m)[37]** | 68.7 | 59.8 | 58.0 |
| **Net revenue expenditure (£m)[38]** | 833.2 | 651.0 | 789.6 |

[32] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[33] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[34] Financial data return submitted by councils
[35] Financial data return submitted by councils
[36] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[37] Financial data return submitted by councils
[38] Financial data return submitted by councils

# **Criteria 3:** Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Improving delivery of key services** | **Criteria 3a and 3c** |
| **Public service reform** | **Criteria 3b** |


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# Improving delivery of key services

**Criteria 3a.** Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services

**Criteria 3c.** Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

**Ensuring the delivery of high-quality, sustainable services – particularly in areas such as adult social care, children's services, SEND, homelessness, and wider public safety – stands at the heart of the future vision for local government in Kent.**

## Working together on the future of services

As part of the Kent LGR programme, the 14 councils have collectively agreed key service areas to explore in more detail through workshops, supplemented by additional discussions and data gathering.

Workshops were held in five key service areas, bringing together representation from across the councils of Kent and Medway to ensure multiple perspectives were shared.

These services were:

- Adult Social Care;
- Children's Services including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC);
- Housing and Homelessness;
- Highways Services; and
- Waste Services.

During these sessions, attendees considered the following:

- current service challenges;
- existing good practice and collaboration;
- future improvement opportunities shared across all LGR options; and
- opportunities and challenges specific to individual options where a proposal is being submitted to government.

In addition to the sessions held, colleagues from a wide range of services across Kent have had the opportunity to input to collective thinking on service-specific impacts through online forms with in excess of 125 responses.

There were a number of emerging themes and these were aligned with workshop discussions where the same themes were consistently identified.

We are continuing to engage with colleagues across the councils.

| Challenges of two tier working | How single tier working can improve performance and customer outcomes |
|---|---|

- **Service fragmentation:** Services split between county and district councils cause confusion over responsibilities, leading to resident frustration and delays.
- **Coordination and communication issues:** Lack of shared systems and contacts between tiers results in slow responses and missed opportunities.
- **Duplication of effort:** Overlapping services between councils waste resources and confuse residents with inconsistent messaging.
- **Strategic misalignment:** Differing priorities and leadership across tiers hinder cohesive planning and policy alignment.
- **Limited access to expertise and resources:** Smaller district teams often lack specialists and face challenges in recruitment and timely support.
- **Inconsistent service standards:** Variations in budgets and policies across districts lead to unequal service quality for residents.
- **Funding and commissioning challenges:** Fragmented funding and commissioning processes reduce flexibility and limit district influence over county decisions.

- **Consistent and integrated services**: Uniform standards and joined-up support for complex needs reduce disparities and improve outcomes for all residents.
- **Faster decision-making**: Simplified governance structures allow quicker, more coordinated responses and clearer responsibilities.
- **Efficiency gains**: Streamlined processes and reduced bureaucracy lead to cost savings and faster service delivery.
- **Strategic alignment**: Unified leadership and planning enable coherent strategies and better prioritisation across services.
- **Optimised resources**: Shared staffing and expertise increase flexibility, resilience, and effective demand management.
- **Enhanced data sharing**: Integrated systems improve planning, monitoring, and decision-making through better access to information.
- **Improved performance management**: Clear accountability and consistent use of key performance indicators (KPIs) enhance service monitoring and impact tracking.
- **Simplified customer access**: A single point of contact eliminates confusion, ensuring easier navigation and fewer misdirected queries.

Our shared view across Kent is that LGR must be the catalyst for fundamental reform in how we deliver our services, how we work with our partners and how we deliver for all communities.

From the engagement with services to date, it is clear there are opportunities to enhance service delivery by building on areas of good and innovative practice, alongside opportunities to operate differently post-LGR.

Initial discussions are the first steps in designing future service provision and we are committed to building on the momentum of our service specific workshops as we progress with reorganisation.

**Pan-Kent working**

There are functions and services which will be best delivered across Kent. This minimises the disruption from disaggregation but is driven by considering what the best geographic footprint and operating model for delivery of those services is.

A strategic authority across Kent and Medway provides a real opportunity to strengthen Kent as a whole and to focus the role of unitary authorities on their delivery role. The strategic authority will take a strategic role across Kent including:

- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

There are also services and organisations that operate across Kent that our approach to LGR would not disrupt including Adoption Partnership South East, Safeguarding Adults Board, elements of commissioning, Attendance Alliance for Kent and Medway, Kent Housing Group and Kent Resources partnership.

While not tying future councils into service delivery model decisions, we are supportive of partnership arrangements and other approaches that enables strategic functions, services and operations to be delivered across Kent where it is in the best interests of residents to do so.

**The key service arguments for Option 3A**

Minimising fragmentation and gaining capacity

A three-unitary model offers a compelling framework to deliver more coherent, efficient, and forward-looking public services. By reducing fragmentation across existing structures, this model will create organisations with the scale and capacity to invest in meaningful service transformation, while still maintaining a strong local focus. Retaining existing council boundaries further simplifies governance arrangements and significantly reduces the risk of service disruption during transition, compared with options involving multiple boundary changes. Avoiding boundary changes will lead to more streamlined service delivery arrangements, with clarity on funding allocations, and provide certainty for staff and stakeholders.

The creation of three strategically designed unitary authorities will help to align resources and expertise across broader geographies, enabling more consistent standards of delivery and reducing duplication in management, commissioning, and support functions. This provides a platform for greater integration and partnership working with health, education, voluntary, and private sector partners, driving a more coordinated approach to meeting the needs of residents and communities.

Achieving strategic balance and scale

The balance achieved through a three-unitary model will also help to manage differing levels of demand across the county, ensuring that no single council is disproportionately affected by demographic pressures or localised challenges. In particular, the model achieves a balance across deprivation levels, the number of adults and children in social care, our older adults' population, and registered pupils with SEND. This structure allows for economies of scale where they are most beneficial, such as business support services, digital transformation, workforce development, and strategic commissioning, while retaining the flexibility for local responsiveness

and engagement. By aligning service planning and delivery across larger, more resilient organisations, councils can better tackle cross-cutting issues like workforce recruitment, sustainability, and cost pressures. It will also strengthen strategic capacity across the system, supporting long-term planning, innovation, and investment in prevention rather than reactive intervention.

Strengthening collaboration and joint working

Congruence with the existing operating geographies of other public services including for health and policing maximises the potential, efficiency and effectiveness of the key convening role for local councils – this is more straightforward where geographies are congruent or closely aligned.

Our approach recognises that many of Kent's most complex challenges do not stop at district boundaries and require joint solutions that reflect residents' real experiences. In doing so, Option 3A would not only simplify governance and partnership working but also strengthen the collective ability of local government in Kent and Medway to deliver equitable, high-quality services that make the best use of public resources.

## Adult Social Care and Children's Services spend data

During the Options Appraisal, analysis was carried out of the actual cost incurred by different councils for key county-wide services.

This was led by KCC and tested with finance officers across Kent.

It found:

- for all of the multi-council options being put forward there is significant misalignment between the costs of delivery and the funding provided for both adult social care and children's services, with some areas at more of a disadvantage than others.
- the impact of the Fair Funding Review has been considered and is expected to have some impact on funding allocation, but based on analysis to date, misalignment between costs and funding is expected to continue for any multi-council model.
- this disparity is important for all councils across Kent to be aware of and to take appropriate mitigating steps in LGR planning. The potential to share funding appropriately based on actual demand and costs is an opportunity for discussion.

### Funding and expenditure

***Table 21:*** *Total expenditure on Social Care*

| **Total Expenditure** *(based on 23/24 spending)*[39] | **North Kent** | **West Kent** | **East Kent** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Children's Social Care (£m)** | 202.8 | 162.3 | 269.0 |
| **Adult Social Care (£m)** | 152.4 | 43.8 | 101.8 |

## Adult Social Care (ASC)

[39] Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2023 to 2024 individual local authority data - outturn - GOV.UK

Overview of current ASC delivery

Kent County Council and Medway Council deliver adult social care as part of their existing responsibilities with some place-based partnerships in place across the existing councils to bring integrated teams together to understand the needs of the population, agree plans to meet those needs and implement solutions.

Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board oversees strategic planning and resource allocation for health and care services.

Delivery is planned and co-ordinated on the footprint of four health and care partnerships which bring together health providers, social care, public health, district councils and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Partnership for Better Health.

Kent County Council and Medway Council have a history of working together to great effect, with examples including:

- The Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board: a multi-agency partnership consisting of statutory and voluntary partner organisations, working together to keep adults at risk of abuse or neglect safe.
- The Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit (VRU): a partnership between the police, councils, health service providers and other key agencies to deliver a reduction in violence the county.

Evidence of shared posts demonstrates how working together across councils can build resilience, provide flexibility, offer value for money and deliver good outcomes.

***Case study – Joint Commissioning Post – Learning Disability and Autism***

The Kent and Medway Learning Disability and Autism Delivery Partnership was formed in January 2022.

It was established after a review of previous commissioning and alliance arrangements highlighted the need for a new whole-system approach.

This approach aims to improve health outcomes and maximise choice, control, independence and human rights for citizens with learning disabilities, autism or both.

In September 2023, NHS Kent and Medway and Kent County Council formed a legal partnership to jointly plan and commission services for neurodivergent citizens.

This Partnership for Neurodiversity Agreement allows for delegated functions under section 75 of the NHS Act (2006) if deemed necessary.

This agreement is further supported by a memorandum of understanding between Kent County Council, representing the partnership, and Medway Council, which aims to explore a tripartite agreement and facilitate discussions on resources for neurodivergent individuals in Kent and Medway.

The System Programme Lead is a pivotal role established in August 2022, focusing on senior system leadership and comprehensive programme management.

This position is instrumental in fostering collaborative improvement, working with various partners to design and implement projects aimed at enhancing the health, wellbeing and life chances of individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people across Kent and Medway.

Effective and sustainable delivery of Kent and Medway's Learning Disability and Autism programme is ensured through collaboration and whole-system leadership, underpinned by securing commitment from essential stakeholders across health, social care and the third sector.

**LGR provides the opportunity to consider strategically how shared services and posts across the future councils can enhance delivery.**

Key ASC delivery challenges

CQC inspections in 23/24 across Kent and Medway rated both as Requires Improvement.

The strengths and areas for improvement included:

- for Kent County Council strengths included co-production and lived experience, improved hospital discharge, high demand management and staff development. Areas of focus included communications and information, transitions, delays in support and staff morale.
- Medway Council strengths included positive staff interactions, person-centred support, effective transitions and partnership working. Areas of focus included accessibility of information waiting times, service gaps and staffing challenges.

Given the differences highlighted there is an opportunity for KCC and Medway ASC teams to share learning and areas of good practice in preparation for LGR.

Additional challenges include:

- **Demographic and geographical challenges:** more than one-fifth of Kent's residents are aged 65 and above (20.5%), a higher proportion than Medway's 17%, and this demographic is expected to grow considerably by 2040.
- Areas of deprivation exist across Kent, particularly in eastern Kent. Coastal regions face specific difficulties, including economic precarity, geographical remoteness, and the complexities of service provision.
- **Funding shortfalls and financial strain:** budgets are insufficient to meet the rising demand and complexity of care needs, leading to difficult decisions and financial pressure on the entire system.
- **Workforce crisis:** difficult to recruit and retain enough care staff with specific challenges in Kent due to geography (coastal) and competition from neighbouring councils, alongside shortages in specialist roles like Approved Mental Health Professionals.
- **Rising and complex demand:** an increasing number of older adults with multiple health conditions, plus more younger adults with complex disabilities, means services are stretched by growing and more intricate care needs.
- **Fragile care market:** the local market of care homes and home care providers is unstable and inconsistent.
- **Fragmented health and social care:** despite efforts, integrating NHS health services with council social care remains difficult, causing disjointed care pathways, delayed hospital discharges, and gaps in support.
- **Poor data and system integration:** information sharing across different services and partners is complex and fragmented, hindering effective coordination, strategic planning and the ability to gain insights from data.
- **Policies:** differing local policies, procedures and ways of working across the area can lead to different cultures across localities resulting in inconsistent experiences for people accessing services.

Future ASC delivery and opportunities through LGR

Regardless of the geographies of future councils, we are committed to transforming adult social care by:

- **Improved, innovative service delivery:** developing and implementing new models of delivery based on best practice.
- **Fostering collaborative partnerships:** strengthening meaningful collaborations across Kent to achieve improved outcomes for all residents.
- **Strategic housing integration**: adopting a unified, strategic approach to the planning and co-ordination with housing services across the wider footprint to achieve closer alignment of these services for the benefit of adults needing support, reduce inequalities and prevent escalating need.
- **Streamlining data and systems:** enhancing data sharing and analytics through integrated systems to drive insights and improve service delivery.
- **Building workforce resilience:** exploring shared service models and new approaches to strengthen the social care workforce and ensure its sustainability.
- **Optimising commissioning:** implementing a strategic, Kent-wide commissioning approach where appropriate to better shape and influence the market, delivering enhanced outcomes and improved value for money.
- **Localising care provision:** ensuring services are delivered closer to home, with a deeper understanding of communities and individual needs.

Adult Social Care delivery under Option 3A

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the three councils making up Option 3A.

***Table 22:*** *Adult Social Care Metrics*

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Population Size (mid 2024)** | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25) | 18 | 18 | 43 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25) | 261 | 210 | 354 |
| People accessing short term support during the year, rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-25) | 27 | 30 | 58 |
| People accessing short term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 (2024-25) | 341 | 328 | 400 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| People accessing long term support during the year (18-64), rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 56 | 44 | 71 |
| People accessing long term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 438 | 326 | 392 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 1,415 | 1,444 | 1,985 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 465 | 512 | 683 |

**Key points in relation to the data:**

The data seeks to identify at a high level the indicative demand on the system. This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

- A theme of the metrics above is that demand in East Kent is consistently higher than in North Kent and West Kent.
- There is one metric where East Kent does not face the most demand, which is in People (65+) accessing long term support. North Kent faces the most demand in this area which reflect the age profile of the region.
- In two metrics, People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support and People accessing short term support (18-64), East Kent makes up over 50% of total demand.

<u>Opportunities for Adult Social Care delivery under Option 3A</u>

- There is an opportunity to manage demand in coastal areas, as the East Kent council aligns areas and towns facing similar pressures.
- Building on this the three unitary authority model provides the framework for councils to align services against key priorities for their areas, such as North Kent building an approach that reflects People (65+) accessing long term support as an area of demand for them.
- While East Kent experiences higher demand, the social care budget will be allocated proportionally to reflect varying needs across regions. The region is large enough to leverage economies of scale and manage market pressures effectively yet remains sufficiently flexible to respond to local needs as the unitary with the highest demand.
- Option 3A also aligns with acute heath and overall health economy boundaries which will enable a whole system approach between social services and health partners. NHS Kent and Medway in their consultation response have highlighted the risks and benefits from Local Government Reorganisation including: “As demonstrated in our recent Kent and Medway NHS Strategy our aim is to concentrate resources on frontline services, with a focus on sustainable and community care. On this basis **our preference would be for the smallest number of unitary councils to minimise infrastructure costs and the risk of fragmenting services**. Whilst acute healthcare service geographies are relatively fixed in their nature, the partnerships in which we operate offer potential for future alternative alignment with other public sector organisations”.
- Disaggregation costs are expected to be lower under the three-unitary model compared to more fragmented alternatives, enabling the earlier delivery of more integrated and higher-quality services.

In general, Option 3A creates a balance between having the scale to address challenges and the ability to remain community centric. Maintaining existing boundaries and being so well aligned to those of key service delivery partners will only help in this effort.

## Children's Social Care

Overview of Children's Social Care current delivery

Kent County Council and Medway Council currently deliver children's social care services with positive Ofsted recognition.

The current delivery of services is an excellent foundation for LGR and provides the opportunity to learn from each other.

Kent County Council, covering a large and diverse region, achieved an Outstanding rating from Ofsted in November 2021.

This reflects consistently high-quality social work, strong leadership and significant positive impacts on children and families, particularly in early help, child protection and support for looked-after children.

Medway Council, serving a more concentrated urban area, was rated Good by Ofsted in July 2023.

This rating acknowledges effective leadership, sound social work practice and positive outcomes for children.

Medway's success is attributed to robust multi-agency partnerships and a commitment to early intervention, demonstrating a stable and responsive service model.

The rating demonstrates the transformation journey that Medway has been on.

Delivering effective and impactful children's services cannot be done in isolation and partnership working are critical.

Whatever tools, enablers or metrics you use, there is an undeniable and fundamental need for excellent leadership, clarity of vision and values, a culture of high support and high challenge, adequate resourcing and a resilient workforce to deliver day-in, day-out.

There are multiple examples which demonstrate how services are already being delivered innovatively across organisations.

- KCC has operated Out Of Hours (OOH) services for Medway since 2014, with the current contractual arrangements being in place since April 2023. The service covers between 5pm and 7am, Monday to Friday and weekend and bank holidays and results in effective delivery and value for money. This arrangement works well, with good levels of open communication between managers. Inspection feedback regarding OOH work for Medway has always identified effective service delivery and good to outstanding practice. There is no reason why this approach could not be replicated across the Kent and Medway footprint going forward.

- The Attendance Alliance for Kent and Medway is a regional initiative, working in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE), to share good practice and develop new strategies for improving school attendance.

***Case study - Adoption Agency South East***

Adoption Partnership South East (APSE) is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) delivering adoption services for three local authorities - the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council. It was launched on 1 November 2020. Kent County Council remains the host local authority.

RAA's 2023 Three-Year Plan focuses on building a supportive adoption community.

Its mission prioritises securing permanent homes for children and providing comprehensive support to all affected by adoption.

Since its inception, RAA has encouraged innovation and collaboration across several key areas.

These include innovative projects funded by the Department for Education, development of the adoption community, training and practice enhancement, and comprehensive adoption support services.

RAA has also focused on adopter recruitment to achieve permanency for children and has implemented mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement.

The RAA has allowed a localised service to operate across a regional footprint to the best advantage of providing permanence to children.

**The principles of this approach with a host authority can be explored further across the future unitary authorities.**

Key Children's Services delivery challenges

- **Workforce instability:** a national shortage of qualified social workers, leading to recruitment and retention difficulties, reliance on agency staff and higher caseloads that impact continuity and quality of care.
- **Rising and complex demand:** services are under pressure from a growing number of referrals, often involving highly complex issues.
- **Placement shortages:** securing enough suitable and stable placements for looked-after children is a critical challenge, particularly for older children, sibling groups and those with complex needs, often resulting in out-of-area placements and increased costs.
- **Limited specialist support:** access to timely and appropriate specialist services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), is difficult, leaving social care teams to manage complex emotional and behavioural needs.
- **Socio-economic impact:** areas of deprivation in both Kent and Medway contribute to child welfare concerns, with poverty, poor housing and family stressors increasing the demand for social care intervention.
- **Inconsistent thresholds:** differing thresholds for intervention across services and partner organisations can create confusion and make navigation difficult for families and professionals alike.
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities:** The SEND system including funding through the high needs block continues to face significant national and local challenges. This includes

rising demand, increasing complexity, sufficiency of provision, capacity and capability gaps in relation to SEND specialists and educational psychologists and scale and complexity of the partnership landscape.

- **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) pressure**: the presence of UASC, particularly in Dover and the wider area, places significant strain on multiple services, including housing, with varying policies for their support.
- **Out-of-Area Placements (OOAP)**: both councils, especially Medway with its high per capita rate, face a major challenge from children placed by other local authorities, impacting housing, children's homes and foster care capacity.
- **Improving prevention:** while good social care practice exists, there is a shared need to enhance preventative services to intervene earlier and reduce the escalation of needs to statutory services.

***Case study - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children***

Kent faces a unique and profound challenge as a primary entry point for unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UAS) children, a direct consequence of its proximity to mainland Europe.

The county's UAS Children's Service holds comprehensive responsibility for the care and accommodation of these newly-arrived children, providing support until they are transferred to another local authority under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) or integrated into Kent's mainstream Child in Care Services, where support continues until they reach eligibility limits or are advised to return to their country of birth.

Since January 2016, more than 10,000 UAS children have arrived in Kent, necessitating a substantial expansion of services.

This now includes 10 reception centres and increased social work teams dedicated to assessment and placement.

Crucially, the timely transfer of these children is vital for maintaining sufficient accommodation capacity within Kent.

**This ongoing demand on the system and associated services is significant and will continue beyond LGR, representing a unique and disproportionate pressure not experienced by other areas across the UK.**

Future Children's Social Care delivery and opportunities through LGR

We are committed to continuing to transform children's services through LGR. Taking learning from across the area and delivering across the new councils.

- **Evolving best practice:** developing and putting into practice new ways of delivering care rooted in the best approaches for children and families.
- **Streamlined service delivery:** reducing complexity in delivery, for example, by consolidating current community service partnerships from 14 to enhance efficiency.
- **Leveraging convening power:** utilising our unique position to foster stronger partnerships and collaborations across the system.
- **Holistic place-based prevention:** adopting a comprehensive approach to prevention through multi-agency teams and neighbourhood working.

- **Community-centric approach:** ensuring local needs and cultures are deeply understood to influence and tailor delivery approaches.
- **Child and young person-led system:** placing the voice of our children and young people at the heart of our whole system approach, with stronger ownership and engagement from families and schools.
- **Strategic financial redesign:** designing new service budgets to optimise resource allocation, rather than relying on existing financial structures.
- **Building workforce resilience:** exploring shared service models and innovative approaches to strengthen the social care workforce and ensure its sustainability.
- **Unified housing provision:** implementing a simplified and unified approach to housing and planning to build market capacity at a local level.
- **Integrated early help pathways:** reducing duplication and improving visibility of risk across agencies.

***Case study - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities SEND***

In recent years, Medway Council has transformed its delivery of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services, driven by a commitment to accountability and collaborative commissioning.

By engaging with partners across the system, fostering a culture of shared responsibility, and holding providers to account, Medway has moved from a £24 million deficit to a balanced budget.

This strategic financial management, coupled with a high-trust-high-challenge mantra for providers, has enabled the development of more local provision and a transparent funding model, ensuring resources are effectively directed to where they are most needed.

Core to this success lies in an embedded cultural change, uniting stakeholders and particularly bringing schools around the table to address issues and problem-solve together. This approach has fostered a powerful sense of collective responsibility, resulting in a system where schools actively challenge each other, develop new initiatives and have significantly increased the proportion of EHCPs managed within mainstream settings from 26.4% to 35%.

This cultural shift is further reinforced by robust quality assurance, ensuring all provision meets high standards and is responsive to children's needs.

The size of Medway has proven to be a distinct advantage, enabling rapid change and full oversight of the entire SEND system.

This agility allows for the co-production of teams, personalised responses for complex cases and a deep understanding of families and social workers within the community.

With strong parent/carer involvement, locality-focused initiatives and a commitment to embedding accessibility policies, Medway has not only achieved significant financial stability but has also cultivated a happier, more integrated team and a highly responsive, accountable and inclusive SEND service that truly knows and supports its children.

**The proposed options are in relation to smaller scale, multiple councils where this approach and learning could be applied.**

Children's Social Care delivery under Option 3A

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the three councils making up Option 3A.

***Table 23:*** *Children's Social Care Metrics*

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Active Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) by School District, rate per 10,000) (Oct 2025) | 381 | 339 | 436 |
| Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Y12&13, rate per 10,000 (2024) | 385 | 283 | 370 |
| Child in Need (CiN) Plans, rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025) | 93 | 62 | 103 |
| Child Protection Plans (CPP) Rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025) | 92 | 65 | 104 |
| Looked After Children (LAC) by placement address, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 65 | 22 | 82 |
| Other Local Authority (OLA) Looked After Children placed in Kent & Medway, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 62 | 21 | 54 |
| Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UAS) Looked After, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 7 | 2 | 14 |

**Key points in relation to the data:**

The data seeks to identify at a high level the indicative demand on the system. This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

There is a consistent trend in all the metrics above that West Kent faces the least demand across children's services.

**High needs (SEND):** East Kent faces the most demand for EHCPs, followed by North and then West Kent. The is likely a combination of factors, including higher demand and more suitable provision available to meet need.

**NEET:** North and East Kent have similar levels of NEET, with the rate being highest in North Kent. West Kent's NEET level is lower.

**Children's services:** Each LAs demand profile for both CiN and CPPs is very consistent across the two metrics, with West Kent having the least demand across both. Nearly 50% of total LAC demand is in East Kent, which is not reflected in the OLA rate where more demand is in North Kent (45% of total OLA demand).

**UAS:** There is a large disparity in the UAS rate, which is expected given the location of East Kent and its costal make up. 61% of total UAS demand is in East Kent, with less than 10% in West Kent.

Opportunities for Children's Social Care delivery under Option 3A

- The creation of unitary authorities opens the door for new councils that are bold and ready to put prevention, early intervention and place-based leadership at the heart of their approach to children's services. The three-unitary model creates an opportunity to think big for children, act local and build in regional perspective.
- Investing in children is investing in future adults so that they are proud of their place and ready to work, contribute and live independently.
- Children aren't going to care about the size a council is. What matters to them is how they feel about where they live. It's important that children have a sense of connectivity with their local community and are ambitious about their future, with a supporting workforce confident they are making a difference.
- Unitary authorities create the best opportunity to combine the knowledge and skills that enable place-based leadership and local convening power, traditionally located in district councils, and which are essential in supporting the shift towards prevention and early intervention and co-production with children and families – with the specific and invaluable expertise of the expert children's social care workforce.
- The prevailing narrative is that big is beautiful and brings economies of scale. But there is an alternative lens. What matters most is proximity to people and the places they live in, staying close to families and supporting them. Close, connected communities, coupled with strong, passionate and ambitious leadership, will give children the best possible start in life. This is where smaller (than county) councils with the full range of unitary services can have a natural advantage. The advantages of proximity to place are not outweighed by larger scale. The evidence shows that outstanding outcomes are not correlated with scale. The elements of effective children's services are effective leadership, strong management oversight and commitment to engaging with children and families collaboratively and responsively.
- Our three-unitary model strikes the optimum balance between economies of scale, the ability to connect council services together to work to a common purpose for children, and to convene partners key to the common purpose at a place level – all of which are essential ingredients for successful outcomes for our children. In particular, Option 3A aligns with health system economic geographies (which are reflected in our established Health and Care Partnership Boards) and this congruence assists in simplifying what is a complex collaboration network in contrast with a local government structure which cuts across health service geographies and would require collaboration with multiple local health systems. Our NHS peers have said "As demonstrated in our recent Kent and Medway NHS Strategy our aim is to concentrate resources on frontline services, with a focus on sustainable and community care. On this basis our preference would be for **the smallest number of unitary councils to minimise infrastructure costs and the risk of fragmenting services.** Whilst acute healthcare service geographies are relatively fixed in their nature, the partnerships in which we operate offer potential for future alternative alignment with other public sector organisations. The 3A LGR model best meets these requirements.
- 3A would also allow for children's system partnerships including for public health, mental health support, youth justice and broader safeguarding with fewer layers than at present brining the opportunity for efficiency and increased agility; 3A would create the opportunity

for more in-depth local place and community knowledge and more effective insight from both local quantitative and qualitative data.

- Where children's specialist services need a county scale to be viable this can be created through co-operation and existing governance mechanisms e.g. S101 committees to align with our established devolution geography. Where even larger geographical scale is needed for the care of children with very complex needs, this can be achieved through participation in the South East Regional Care Co-operative

Option 3A is the ideal place to start our reimagining of children's services to build the best place to be a child, a place where communities thrive, families are supported to be the best they can be and children are proud to call home, to unlock the real potential of place and transform lives.

## Housing and homelessness

Overview of current housing and homelessness delivery

Operating within the structures of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and national housing targets, councils are pivotal in delivering housing and homelessness services.

The provision and key responsibilities vary across the type of local authority.

- **Medway Unitary Council:** full housing authority covering strategic spatial planning, homelessness services, social housing allocation, private sector housing regulation and affordable housing delivery.
- **Kent County Council:** indirect housing impact including securing supply for needs arising from social care, public health, education and strategic infrastructure planning influencing housing needs and support for vulnerable people.
- **12 district councils:** local housing authority covering homelessness prevention and relief, social housing allocation, private sector housing enforcement, local housing strategy and strategic spatial planning to enable supply of housing through land allocations including for small sites and garden communities and determination of planning applications. In addition, some districts are housing providers which includes building and managing housing stock and in some cases managing a Housing Revenue Account.

Delivering successful outcomes is a complex challenge, whether it's managing vast infrastructure projects or tackling homelessness in our communities.

While large-scale programmes demand intricate planning, addressing homelessness requires understanding a deeply personal and varied set of needs.

Homelessness itself stems from a difficult mix of financial struggles like poverty, unaffordable housing and low wages; societal problems such as domestic violence, discrimination and a lack of support; and individual battles with mental health, addiction, physical disabilities, or past trauma.

This intricate web of challenges extends beyond homelessness, frequently impacting other vital services like adult and children's social care.

Initiatives are already in place and there is the opportunity to build on these through LGR.

***Case study – Homelessness Employment Pathway - Gravesham Brough Council***

Gravesham Borough Council (GBC), using its role as the area's largest employer, has successfully tackled a critical barrier to employment for homeless individuals.

Recognising traditional employment services often fail vulnerable individuals, the council identified an opportunity to use its influence to support disadvantaged people back into the workforce and to stabilise its own frontline services, such as waste and refuse collection, which experienced high staff turnover and agency spend.

This led to the introduction of a dedicated Employment Pathway in September 2023, specifically targeting former rough sleepers residing in GBC's supported housing scheme.

The Employment Pathway is designed for holistic support, moving beyond just job placement.

Once clients are ready for employment, they receive help with CV creation and employment risk assessments.

The programme includes an induction day, two weeks of work experience and entry into casual contracts, providing a crucial first step back into the workforce.

The initiative integrates ongoing mentorship, mental health and wellbeing support through weekly sessions and flexibility during hardship, all aimed at helping individuals establish a routine, build confidence and develop essential skills for long-term stability and independence.

This innovative approach has proven highly successful, not only providing participants with vital employment history and a route to unsupported accommodation but also significantly reducing the council's in-year agency spend.

Due to its positive impact, GBC is now expanding this initiative, rolling it out to private companies to maximise job opportunities for more vulnerable individuals.

**Innovation on a local scale which can be applied across an area of multiple unitary authorities.**

The need for working together and sharing of information to deliver outcomes cannot be underestimated.

The Kent Housing Group (KHG) is a forum for housing organisations in Kent and Medway.

KHG has representation from all 12 district councils across Kent, Medway Council, 13 housing associations, four support providers, Kent County Council and Kent Public Health.

KHG also has affiliated membership with a number of organisations who have a vested interest in the housing sector across Kent and Medway.

This strong strategic approach will provide stability through LGR and beyond.

***Case study – Kent Forum Housing Strategy***

The Kent Forum Housing Strategy provides clarity on the major strategic housing challenges facing Kent and Medway, acknowledges that past ways of working may not be fit for the future and identifies where a Kent and Medway perspective can add value, stimulate innovation and contribute to the delivery of local aims.

The strategy is unique in that it looks across a whole county area and brings district, borough, unitary and county council ambitions together through a bottom-up approach.

This is not about centrally-imposed targets. This is about lower tier and unitary authorities identifying their own local housing needs and requirements, while recognising the added value that can be gained by adopting a common approach to meeting these where appropriate.

**An adaptable model which can be shaped for future delivery while minimising the risks associated with change to the current model.**

Key housing and homelessness delivery challenges

**Overarching challenges:**

- **Complex delivery landscape:** the involvement of 14 councils delivering diverse services and initiatives across the area results in significant complexity and different approaches to policy formulation through to actual delivery.
- **Data fragmentation:** Kent and Medway use the same software for homelessness and operation of housing registers. There are multiple systems for housing management activities meaning that it is difficult to gather comprehensive data and insights impeding effective decision-making.
- **Staffing and capacity gaps:** a notable shortage of skills and capacity including challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced staff, impacts the effective delivery of both large infrastructure projects and critical public services.
- **Funding constraints:** investment in housing delivery varies across Kent. Notwithstanding this, the level of investment, grant and subsidy needed to address social housing need is not available. Limited and often short-term funding restricts long-term planning and investment in housing and homelessness services, making proactive solutions difficult.

**Housing supply and delivery challenges**

- **Housing delivery shortfalls:** each district has its own challenges in delivering housing requirements both in terms of the overall amount of housing needed and housing that people can afford including social rented homes and supported accommodation. Housing cost to earning affordability ratios differ across Kent and Medway resulting in varying housing requirements. Market conditions which significantly impact the ability of housing developers to deliver housing also vary markedly. This produces a complex picture. Consequently, delivery performance varies markedly both spatially and over time in line with economic cycles. Reflecting the national picture, meeting housing delivery plans is challenging, leading to a scarcity of housing and in particular affordable housing options.
- **Rising demand:** rising demand for housing is further exacerbated by Kent's location. Our coastal position results in a situation where asylum seekers disproportionately put strain the housing system, leading to increased demand for temporary accommodation, pressure on the private rental market, significant unreimbursed financial burdens and operational challenges.
- **Proximity to London**: where housing costs and demand produce a more acute set of challenges also impacts on demand in Kent through out-of-area placements, gradients in costs for housing being generally higher in the west of the county results in out-of-area placement within Kent and the spatial pattern of this is complex. For example, currently Maidstone currently hosts 222 out-of-area placements by other Kent authorities while Thanet hosts five.

Unitary authorities covering larger geographies and populations offer the opportunity for many of these pressures to be managed within their own boundaries.

- **Private rental sector issues:** concerns exist regarding the quality of homes in the private rental sector and frequent breakdowns in relationships between tenants and landlords, contributing to housing instability. The distribution of challenges and resources are not uniform.
- **Social housing stock:** the availability of local authority social housing stock, coupled with varying quality and high maintenance costs for existing properties. Not all current authorities are stock holding. This needs to be recognised in both the transition to new unitary authorities e.g. arising from the need to appropriately engage with tenants and the time needed for successor authorities to design a structured approach to future arrangements in the larger geographies where social housing will have a more diverse landscape in terms of providers.
- **Temporary accommodation (TA) shortage:** a lack of suitable and affordable temporary accommodation options further strains services and resources. There is a mixed picture across Kent with variation in investment in TA or capacity arising within HRAs in some places. Notwithstanding this all councils use expensive nightly-paid accommodation to bridge the gap between their own accommodation levels and need.

**Homelessness services**

- **Homelessness visibility and policy fragmentation:** the propensity for rough sleeping and homelessness varies across Kent and Medway reflecting differences in the factors that cause homelessness. This impacts on the consequent demands, the distribution of cost and the solutions that have been developed. Maintaining visibility of individuals experiencing homelessness is difficult as they often move across districts. This is compounded by differing strategies and policies between councils, hindering a unified approach.
- **Disconnected services and complex needs:** homelessness is often linked to a wider range of complex individual needs, yet services are not always joined up effectively for proactive prevention and holistic support.

Future housing and homelessness delivery and opportunities through LGR

We are committed to:

- **Building on successful initiatives**: identify, scale and celebrate proven best practices and successful initiatives across Kent, fostering shared learning and replicating positive outcomes.
- **Communities**: listen to and collaborate with our diverse communities, ensuring their voices shape housing and homelessness strategies and solutions.
- **Partner collaboration:** continue to foster robust and effective partnerships with all stakeholders including statutory bodies, third-sector organisations and private providers to deliver comprehensive and coordinated support.
- **Simplified Strategic Planning**: simplified strategic plan for housing and homelessness, maximising available opportunities and resources through coordinated effort across smaller unitary and place focus.
- **Holistic service integration and prevention:** adopt a truly holistic approach to service delivery, ensuring seamless integration across all relevant services and the wider system to proactively support, prevent and reduce homelessness through early intervention.
- **Data insights:** simplified and streamlined systems will enable data and insights to be more readily available to inform strategies, measure impact and drive continuous improvement in service design and delivery.

- **Policy alignment for impact:** drive greater alignment of policies and ways of working, where practical, to achieve more consistent and effective outcomes and address systemic drivers of housing instability.
- **Sustainable**: focus on developing and implementing sustainable, long-term solutions that address the root causes of homelessness and ensure lasting housing stability for individuals and families.

***Case study – innovative use of Housing Revenue Account***

Ashford Borough Council is making innovative use of its Housing Revenue Account to deliver an ambitious programme of more than 1,000 new council-owned homes within the next six to seven years.

The council has an identified pipeline of 33 sites which will deliver a mix of affordable and social rent homes, including independent living homes for older people and accessible homes for people with disabilities, as well as properties for shared ownership.

A diverse range of delivery models are being used to achieve the pipeline of new homes.

These include:

- building on council-owned land
- regeneration schemes
- largescale acquisitions from developers of already-built homes
- purchasing affordable homes that have been secured under a s106 agreement which Registered Providers are unable or unwilling to deliver and package deals where land is purchased and the properties paid for during the construction process.

The HRA is also used buy properties on the open market and taking them into council ownership and use.

A majority of these properties are former council homes that were sold via the Right to Buy.

The strategic focus is on larger homes that can be adapted for people with physical disabilities to help them live independently.

This ambitious programme aims to significantly address housing needs and improve the quality of life for residents across the borough.

**A scalable best practice approach which can replicate positive outcomes.**

***Case study: Canterbury City Council – resettlement support***

Canterbury City Council took the decision to deliver resettlement support in house rather than using the KCC provision, supporting those arriving on resettlement schemes since 2015.

The work expanded rapidly in 2021 when the council supported the opening of two hotels to accommodate Afghan nationals within the district.

The wraparound support work includes successful integration into communities, access to services, one-to-one and group support, money management, entering into employment/skills/training and longer-term housing solutions.

The experienced team consistently deliver excellent integration outcomes for families.

A key strength of the Canterbury approach is partnership working with voluntary and statutory sector partners to deliver joined up and innovative services such as the Welcome Hub – a jobs, English language and drop-in advice service.

**This initiative was praised by the Ministry of Defence as a model of good practice and work is already underway to replicate this approach in other areas of Kent.**

Housing and Homelessness under Option 3A

***Table 24:*** *Housing and Homelessness Metrics*

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Homelessness Rate per 1,000 Households (Jan-Mar 2025)[40] | 6.6 | 4.1 | 8.4 |

Homelessness rates vary across Kent. Option 3A is designed to provide the additional capacity and scale for these challenges to be addressed, particularly in the East. There will continue to be collaboration Kent-wide to find the best solutions for critical challenges such as homelessness.

Opportunities for Housing & Homelessness delivery under Option 3A

Devolution will be a key enabler to help accelerate delivery of the future ambition through strategic joined up planning and delivery across the area.

**Housing delivery**

The current two-tier system has led to inefficiencies, lack of coordination in the strategic spatial planning of our places, and the consequent challenges in delivering housing and the complementary infrastructure. This leads to frustration, including for our communities.

The integration of all council responsibilities within a single tier of administration offers a number of benefits. Planning decisions are closely linked to transport, infrastructure, and housing, having these services under the same organisation ensures better coordination. For example, negotiating highway conditions for a Section 106 agreement is more efficient when transport and planning departments are within the same council and aligned to the same priorities.

Larger, better resourced unitary authorities will provide a more cohesive planning system, greater access to specialist expertise, and better integration of transport and infrastructure services.

The three-unitary model creates councils of larger geography and financial scale than individual districts and allows for better resource allocation for the tasks necessary to achieve this. Many district councils struggle to maintain stable dedicated planning teams due to budget constraints and recruitment challenges. Larger unitary authorities can employ more planners, improving expertise, efficiency and resilience by offering greater development opportunities and career pathways. They are also better equipped to recruit specialists such as ecologists and urban designers, roles that smaller councils find difficult to sustain.

[40] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

The critical mass of three councils would facilitate a council house building programme of scale and ambition, with efficiency derived from each having a single Housing Revenue Account, development team and housing management team, with a long-term partnership management status with Homes England to secure Social Housing Grant Funding. Such a programme would generate significant Temporary Accommodation cost savings to the General Fund and result in better quality of life for people needing to secure social housing.

**Homelessness**

People experiencing homelessness have far worse health and social care outcomes than the general population; they need services that not only provide a secure home but also provide a long-term commitment to care to promote recovery, stability and lasting positive outcomes

The creation of unitary authorities in principle is key to the integration of services to improve outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, and to contribute to ending homelessness. A unitary structure would enhance our ability to achieve the recommendations of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and the Centre for Homelessness Impact's recommendations as set out in the Integrated health and social care for people experiencing homelessness guidance in March 2022.

In comparison with two-tier working, Option 3A would better enable support for people who experience multiple and overlapping disadvantages. For example, through enabling:

- Commissioners of health, social care and housing services to work together to plan and fund integrated multidisciplinary health and social care services for people experiencing homelessness, and involve commissioners from other sectors, such as criminal justice (prison and probation services) and domestic abuse, as needed. Working in this way would enable a more effective contribution to the government's aim of ending rough sleeping and preventing homelessness.
- Homelessness multidisciplinary teams to be established to act as expert teams, providing and coordinating care across outreach, primary, secondary and emergency care, social care and housing services and providing person centred wrap round care and case management, ensuring continuity of care and enabling cost and trauma reduction through reducing the number of assessments for each person – as demonstrated for example through the model implemented in Wigan
- Local integrated homelessness health and social care needs assessments including collective work to quantify and characterise the population experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, including health inequalities, diversity and inclusion issues and specific needs and identify trends, and create better opportunities for more integrated service delivery. This could be complemented by designating a lead for safeguarding the welfare of people experiencing homelessness and practical support which is difficult to achieve across two tier local government and representing the needs of people experiencing homelessness comprehensively on the Safeguarding Adults Board

In terms of the optimum model for Kent and Medway, Option 3A creates local government geographies largely congruent with our health economy and health and care partnerships and the operational divisions of Kent Police; this alignment would enable co-terminosity which has been identified by both local government and our partners as enabling closer collaboration and opportunities for integration and transformation.

## Transport and highways system function

Overview of current transport and highways delivery

The transport and highways system function encompasses a broad range of activities from strategic transport planning and policy development to the delivery of highways programmes, planned and reactive maintenance and network management including coordination with utility works.

Highways services in Kent and Medway are managed by three primary authorities: National Highways, Kent County Council, and Medway Council.

Each holds distinct responsibilities for different parts of the road network, ensuring comprehensive coverage across the region.

While these three are the designated highway authorities, district councils also play a vital supporting role, acting as key intermediaries and advisors in local highway-related matters and securing developer financial contributions.

- **Department for Transport:** defines national policy for transport planning and systems including public transport and highways. This includes its vision for the future of the English strategic road network and a Roads Investment Strategy.
- **National Highways:** manages and improves the strategic road network including motorways and major A-roads (trunk roads) within Kent and Medway.
- **Kent County Council (KCC):** is the transport planning authority for Kent and the highway authority for the majority of Kent, overseeing the production of transport and infrastructure strategy and the management, maintenance and improvement of local roads, pavements, cycleways and associated infrastructure.
- **Medway Council:** as a unitary authority, it is the transport planning and highway authority for all local roads and highways within its specific Medway unitary boundary.
- **District councils:** provide crucial local input and advice on planning applications impacting transport and highways. While Kent County Council (KCC) acts as a statutory consultee on planning applications, providing advice, identifying conditions, and managing Section 278 agreements, district councils also act as public liaisons for community concerns and manage local amenities.

Examples of collaboration include district council engagement with KCC and National Highways to bring forward local improvements on the strategic network.

***Case study - Ebbsfleet Garden City***

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation EDC was announced in 2015 to facilitate the delivery of up to 15,000 homes and create a 21st-century Garden City in Ebbsfleet, north Kent.

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation is the planning authority for development management.

However, Dartford Brough Council (Dartford BC) is the local planning authority.

Dartford has worked closely with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation and KCC highways in the successful preparation of the Dartford borough local plan and implementation of development schemes and the associated infrastructure requirements.

This is facilitated through regular meetings and collaboration on sustainable travel projects between the EDC, Dartford BC, Gravesham Borough Council and KCC.

This builds on a longstanding history of collaboration on the Ebbsfleet area, prior to the establishment of the EDC, in relation to junction and road improvements required to facilitate the significant growth in the area.

***Case study: Bringing back international rail services to Kent***

Strong and sustained collaboration has taken place between KCC and district and borough councils to bring back international rail services like Eurostar to Kent.

This involved a concerted effort to build a strong case for resuming operations, addressing technical challenges with operators and infrastructure managers and demonstrating the economic benefits of serving the Kent passenger market.

The aim was to convince key stakeholders both Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International stations should have services restored, similar to the pre-pandemic situation in 2020.

This objective was achieved through collaboration between Kent County Council (KCC) and the district/borough councils, particularly Ashford and Dartford.

While KCC led on the transport aspects and coordinated economic arguments between the boroughs, the individual councils were crucial in championing their respective stations and highlighting local economic growth opportunities.

This combined effort allowed for a comprehensive and unified argument to the government for the reopening of both stations.

Key transport and highways delivery challenges

- **Active Travel and pedestrian infrastructure:** both authorities face challenges in maintaining and improving pedestrian environments. Ageing footways, limited accessibility in some urban centres and gaps in safe walking routes, particularly around schools and town centres, hinder efforts to promote walking. Funding constraints have slowed progress on upgrading crossings, improving public realm quality and ensuring compliance with accessibility standards, especially for vulnerable users.
- **Sustainable and public transport connectivity:** bus services continue to face declining patronage and reliability issues due to congestion, rising operating costs and driver shortages. Limited funding for service subsidies restricts route coverage and frequency, particularly in rural areas. Opportunities to enhance integration between bus, rail and active travel modes are often constrained by infrastructure limitations and inconsistent investment across the region. The ambition to grow sustainable travel is also challenged by public perceptions of reliability and affordability.
- **Private vehicles and freight movement:** high volumes of commuter, tourist and freight traffic, driven by Kent's strategic location, cross-Channel gateways and proximity to London, place sustained pressure on the road network. This contributes to congestion, accelerated asset deterioration and difficulties in meeting air quality and carbon reduction targets. The maintenance backlog, exacerbated by rising material costs and climate impacts, continues to challenge network resilience.

- **Operational, workforce and coordination challenges:** persistent workforce shortages and skills gaps across engineering, planning and operational roles affect both authorities. Coordination with utility companies and developers for roadworks and infrastructure upgrades remains complex and disruptive, often prolonging project delivery times and reducing public satisfaction.
- **Governance, geography and strategic balance:** Medway Council, as a unitary authority, has direct responsibility for all local transport functions within a dense urban area, requiring a fine balance between supporting growth and improving sustainable transport options. Kent County Council, overseeing a much larger and more rural network, faces distinct challenges in ensuring equitable access and consistent service standards across varied geographies.

Future transport and highways delivery and opportunities through LGR

Future delivery of transport and highways services relies on ongoing collaboration and a strategic approach to deliver for the people of Kent.

In the future we are committed to:

- **Integrated strategic planning:** significantly streamlining the current 12 Local Plans, this approach fosters a more cohesive and joined-up strategic planning framework across the area, particularly for transport and highways infrastructure, with improved integration of land planning and transport planning.
- **Equitable influence:** the creation of evenly-sized unitary authorities ensures each entity possesses a balanced voice, enabling effective influence over strategic decision-making for the entire transport network.
- **Service harmonisation:** standardising service provision and associated fees and charges across the entire area will simplify processes and enhance consistency for residents across all transport-related services.
- **Balanced local governance:** this model establishes unitary authorities that are sufficiently large for strategic decision-making yet remain agile enough to deeply understand and respond to local impacts and needs across the transport system.
- **Enabling devolution:** this option directly supports the ambition for establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority, facilitating greater local control and accountability over transport and highways.
- **Innovative service delivery:** exploring and implementing shared service models and pioneering approaches to enhance organisational resilience and service effectiveness which can support future devolution plans.
- **Optimised commissioning:** implementing a strategic, integrated commissioning approach where appropriate, to effectively shape and influence the market, driving better outcomes and value.
- **Resilience:** if there is poor delivery in one unitary authority, the delivery in the remaining unitary authorities is unaffected.

Opportunities for Highways delivery under Option 3A

Unitary local government will bring together strategic planning for sustainable and integrated land use and transport systems enabling alignment of strategy, policy and decision making. 3A gives an opportunity to think big, act local and work across the whole of Kent and Medway when appropriate.

Sustainable transport planning involves creating systems that are environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and economically viable. Option 3A will create better opportunities for success because it enables:

- Integrated Policy and Planning including collaboration between transport, land use, environment, and economic development services within a single organisation which is critical for improving social (including health), environmental and economic outcomes for our communities.
- More effective governance where all these factors can be considered and weighed up by one decision making body, which can then balance the different considerations to enable prioritising investments that deliver co-benefits across mobility, environment, and social inclusion.
- Enables more transparent decision making close to the public.
- Consideration of transport planning and systems alongside a greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention for social well-being, means that the opportunities are likely to be greater for environmental stewardship, accessibility and equity.

3A will result in three councils each with multiple urban centres and large rural areas requiring a transport planning approach that recognises both, and their interactions and interdependencies. Localised transport planning in the three councils enables meaningful community engagement while maintaining the scale needed for effective asset risk management, data led approaches, innovation and use of technology and leveraging of investment.

Opportunities will be created for more localised planning, including establishing mobility hubs in our market towns to connect rural and urban travel modes delivering benefits such as reduced transport poverty, more inclusive service delivery and increased connectivity for isolated communities.

Unitary authorities will reduce fragmentation, bringing custodianship of transport systems, infrastructure and related services, including street cleansing, into the same organisation. This will improve co-ordination and collaboration to improve the overall quality of the public realm for residents and visitors.

There are good examples of achieving this in the UK where there are urban/rural mixes similar to the three unitary authorities in this model, including Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) and Chesire East. BCP has created an integrated transport strategy across its three major towns, made good investment in active travel, bus priority schemes and smart parking and alongside this has strong performance in street cleaning and maintenance. Chesire East is recognised for its asset-led highway maintenance strategy and uses data-driven planning and risk-based inspections – demonstrating that this can be achieved at a smaller than county spatial footprint and critically has been small enough to achieve strong community engagement in transport planning

Kent's location, its role as the Gateway to Europe via the Channel Tunnel and ports, and the associated strategic road and rail links (including the Lower Thames Crossing) means that it is essential that Option 3A is complemented by devolution. This will be achieved through the creation of a Strategic Authority which will take responsibility for, and tackle, the consequent opportunities and challenges.

Devolution and a Strategic Authority are also key to establishing a Kent-wide Transport Partnership to coordinate strategy, funding bids, and innovation, sharing data, expertise, and

technology platforms across the three councils and engagement with regional bodies like Transport for the Southeast for strategic alignment.

## Waste services

Overview of current waste delivery

As a unitary authority, Medway Council is the Waste Collection Authority (WCA) and Waste Disposal Authority (WDA). Contracts are in place with Medway Norse, Countrystyle and Veolia with lengthy terms up to 2040.

Waste arises in Medway of 117kt per annum of which 38% is recycled, reused or composted

Kent County Council acts as the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), contracting with third parties like FCC and CSKL until 2030 to manage waste disposal infrastructure.

This includes Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), Waste Transfer Stations (WTS), Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) and Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities at Allington.

The 12 district councils serve as Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs), collecting household waste and delivering it to KCC-managed disposal outlets.

Waste arises in Kent of 650kt per annum of which 42.1% recycled, reused or composted

Kent and the districts work closely through partnerships including Mid Kent Partnership, South West Kent partnerships and the Kent Waste Partnership.

***Case study – Kent Waste Partnership***

The Kent Resource Partnership brings together staff from Kent County Council and the 12 district councils.

Together, they manage waste collection and disposal, street cleaning and enforcement services across the region.

A dedicated strategic lead guides all partnership activities including how they are run, how they communicate, and what projects they work on.

The lead also builds relationships with other groups and looks for new opportunities and funding.

The Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, developed through the partnership provides the framework for collaborative delivery with a strong focus on developing and delivering services to be efficient, effective and sustainable while navigating significant change in waste policy.

All partners contribute money each year to cover staff costs, for the lead and an analyst, and to pay for agreed projects.

A recent campaign to recycle food waste increased the average amount collected and recycled across seven areas by 20%.

**This collaborative approach and shared strategy have been crucial in driving alignment, maintaining a shared focus and ultimately achieving positive outcomes.**

Key waste delivery challenges

- **Aging infrastructure:** maintaining and upgrading existing waste management infrastructure to ensure continued operational efficiency and reliability.
- **Infrastructure capacity:** strategic planning and investment are required to meet future infrastructure demands, particularly in response to significant housing growth.
- **Divergent delivery approaches and policies:** inconsistencies in collection methodologies and varying resident expectations across different areas hinder the establishment of a unified and efficient waste management system.
- **Waste and collection strategy misalignment:** the two-tier delivery structure often leads to a disconnect between waste strategies and budgetary allocations, potentially resulting in isolated decision-making and collection approaches that do not adequately consider disposal costs.
- **Limited funding transparency:** a lack of clear information regarding the flow of funding from central government to local waste services.
- **Complex contractual landscape:** the presence of multiple long-term contracts across Kent, including one currently under dispute, complicates operational management and strategic planning.
- **Public engagement and behaviour change:** challenges in encouraging effective resident participation in recycling schemes, waste reduction and sustainable waste practices including addressing contamination issues.
- **Regulatory compliance and evolving legislation:** the ongoing demand to adapt to and comply with changes in national and international waste management regulations, environmental standards and targets.
- **Workforce recruitment and retention:** difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled personnel across all levels of waste management operations.
- **Technological adoption and innovation:** the complexities and costs associated with integrating new technologies for waste sorting, treatment, energy recovery and data management.
- **Illegal dumping and fly tipping:** addressing the persistent issue of illegal waste disposal and its associated costs and environmental consequences.

Future waste delivery and opportunities through LGR

In the future we are committed to:

- **Learning from success:** we will take what has worked well across Kent, like our Waste Liaison Officers, and build on those successes to make things even better.
- **Working together:** we will strengthen our relationships across Kent, adapting our partnerships as needed to deliver on our regional waste plans.
- **Smarter way to deliver:** we will look into creating a single, strategic waste body for the whole region, potentially linking it with how we plan for new developments.
- **Connecting the dots:** we will bring together collection and disposal budgets so we can make smarter decisions that consider the whole picture, not just parts of it.
- **Better use of information:** we will get our data and systems talking to each other so we can gain clearer insights and make better plans.
- **Planning ahead:** planning for the infrastructure we need, making sure it fits with local areas and future building projects.

- **Making decisions easier:** working together across future councils will enable us to reach consensus and move forward more quickly.

***Case study – Waste Liaison Officers***

Kent County Council (KCC) has established two Waste Liaison Officer roles to enhance the operational relationship between the Waste Disposal Authority (KCC) and the 12 district and borough councils, which act as Waste Collection Authorities.

These officers serve as a crucial link, fostering communication, promoting shared understanding, and supporting performance improvement across both tiers of local government.

Their responsibilities include facilitating quarterly liaison meetings, sharing monthly performance data for transparency and resolving operational issues arising between the collection and disposal authorities.

By acting as a bridge, they ensure service challenges are addressed collaboratively and efficiently, ultimately improving outcomes for residents.

The Waste Liaison Officers monitor performance data - tonnage, recycling and contamination - for statutory reporting and improvement, collaborating with district teams and KCC Waste Data and Insight to interpret trends.

They ensure two-way communication on policy and operational changes for consistency, translate complex data into actionable insights for districts and coordinate abandoned vehicle disposal.

In addition to strengthening relationships, the Waste Liaison Officers have significantly improved operational efficiency by resolving service issues faster and with fewer escalations.

They have also been crucial during disruptions like extreme weather or contractor problems, coordinating responses and maintaining service resilience through rapid communication and joint problem-solving.

**This has minimised impact on residents and upheld service standards.**

***Case study – creation of a waste Local Authority Trading Company***

Canterbury Council established a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) called Canterbury Environment Company (Canenco) to take over household waste collection services from a commercial contractor.

This decision was made after an options appraisal due to dissatisfaction with the previous service.

Canenco's board consists of three council officers and a managing director with extensive waste management experience was recruited.

Staff from the former contractor were transferred to Canenco and the council bought the necessary vehicles.

The council maintains oversight of the client function and waste collection strategy.

This change has resulted in a more responsive company for waste collection and street cleansing.

The council and Canenco teams work closely, leading to efforts to reduce contamination in dry recycling bins.

**Following the successful transfer of waste collection and street cleansing in February 2021, grounds maintenance services were transferred in December 2021 and public toilet cleansing and maintenance in June 2024.**

Opportunities for Waste delivery under Option 3A

The move toward unitary status will enable Waste Collection Authorities in Kent to improve efficiency and consistency. Councils that are larger than our current districts will be beneficial in terms of economies of scale in vehicle fleets, staffing, and contracts, standardised service design (e.g. bin sizes, collection frequency) and better capacity for data-driven service optimisation.

This is achieved to some extent through current shared service collaboration. For example, Maidstone, Swale and Ashford have a joint contract as do Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling. The need for these arrangements would diminish if three unitary authorities are created, reducing complexity, improving transparency and potentially improving recycling rates and reducing confusion for the public. The population sizes achieved by a three-unitary model offers a good balance for operational efficiency and local responsiveness.

Waste Disposal Authorities manage infrastructure-heavy services like landfills, incinerators, and recycling centres and need to be large enough in terms of financial capacity and resilience to invest in advanced treatment technologies and waste volumes, co-ordinate strategic infrastructure planning, and negotiate long-term contracts with private operators effectively. The economies of scale are different from those applying to waste collection – typically WDAs need a larger population for optimal operation.

Combining collection and disposal under each unitary authority improves efficiency, accountability, and innovation. However, a balance needs to be struck in terms of scale. The disposal arrangements for the three councils would need to be aligned to ensure resilience and strategic control: which would be achieved through establishing a S101 Committee.

# Public service reform

**Criteria 3b.** Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money

**At the core of any successful public service organisation is the desire to do the best for those who need those services most. Kent, as an area, starts from a high base but there is an obvious desire to push further and faster for the citizens of Kent. LGR provides the platform to meet the moment and drive for fundamental change. There is a clear desire to be ambitious and to change public services. There is an underpinning set of shared principles focused around shifting the system to a preventative model. Public services cannot just keep meeting demand. They must move from being responsive to being proactive. LGR can be a catalyst to this change. Kent will drive the reform of public services, ensuring they are rooted in their communities with outcomes at the centre of decision making.**

## What is public service reform (PSR) and why is it needed?

Public service reform will be the core to the transformation of any new configuration of local government in Kent.

LGR offers an opportunity to rethink how people and communities are supported, moving from a fragmented, reactive system to one that is proactive, integrated and designed around the needs and strengths of Kent's residents.

There will be the opportunity to root this in reform of public services in the community and people of Kent.

Public service reform will seek to change the way public service professionals work together and ensure residents feel the positive benefits of that work, fundamentally changing the way services are configured and delivered.

Too often services are organised around institutional and professional boundaries rather than people.

In the latest Spending Review, the government outlined three principles to its approach to PSR:

- to integrate services so they are organised around people's lives;
- to improve long-term outcomes for people through a focus on prevention, relying less on expensive crisis management; and
- to devolve power to local areas that understand the needs of their communities best, with services that are designed with and for people, in partnership with civil society and the impact economy.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring together services and improve outcomes.

A move from a demand-led model to a preventative model will allow for greater focus on outcomes and using precious resources in a more effective way.

## Demand and prevention

Nationally and across Kent, public services face growing pressures.

The system is struggling to meet the demand for key services that are vital to the health and wellbeing of the community.

Services, such as adult social care and children's social care, are being stretched to breaking point. The system is broken for those who need it most.

**Cuts to non-statutory services**

Failure to see the connection between prevention and demand, and to join the dots across the silos between service providers, means statutory services are protected from deep root-and-branch transformation.

This leads to cuts in non-statutory services which are often preventative services.

Cutting preventative services only increases demand in the more expensive acute part of the system, resulting in increased costs and increased pressure on statutory services.

**The 'front door' and thresholds**

At the 'front door' of these statutory services, more and more expensive specialist staff are being deployed to triage and assess.

This means that these specialist staff are using their time on assessment rather than treatment.

Furthermore, given the cuts to services, and their lower capacity to deal with demand, eligibility thresholds for support are rising further, leading to gatekeeping and meaning help is only available at the point of crisis.

As a result, the most pressing demand - those in crisis - continues to grow, creating a cycle where services intervene too late and at greater cost.

**Assessments and siloes**

Given this increase in pressure, services often refer cases on to one another in attempt to control in-service demand and residents are frequently required to repeat their stories to multiple agencies, undergoing assessment after assessment.

Services have slipped into an 'assessment mindset' where practitioners and leaders have been siloed into their respective organisations.

This not only causes frustration but also erodes public trust and confidence in local services.

**Outcomes**

These mounting pressures are leading to poorer outcomes for residents.

The danger is this provides a negative loop where demand keeps growing and preventative services cannot be prioritised as resources are used to address the immediate challenge.

**Fiscal control**

At the same time as outcomes are declining and there is less preventative focus, public service leaders, trying to counteract growing financial risks, are increasingly reliant on salami slicing - incremental cuts to service budgets.

These cuts are a way to demonstrate better financial control but ultimately mean that services fail to address underlying demand and associated costs.

**The urgency of now**

The continued cutting of services will not resolve these challenges.

As crisis response consumes a larger share of resources, the underlying problems persist and intensify.

The system becomes reactive rather than proactive, focusing on managing emergencies rather than preventing them.

This approach is unsustainable, both financially and in terms of outcomes for residents.

A focus on prevention and early intervention needs to be prioritised before services hit breaking point. Now is the time to act.

Public services in Kent need to be fit for purpose and fit for the future.

Public service sustainability cannot be addressed without PSR.

Without reform, councils will be forced to make ever deeper cuts, further reducing the quality and accessibility of services and undermining the support available in communities.

LGR offers an opportunity to embrace change and deliver a different form of support that will serve communities in a way that works for them.

**PSR: a new approach**

Kent leaders are fully aware of the need to act and are ambitious to embrace PSR.

On 17th September 2025, leaders and chief executives from county, unitary, and district councils came together to outline and agree the opportunities presented by the LGR process. PSR was a central theme of the day, with stakeholders discussing and agreeing a vision for the region.

To achieve these ambitions for Kent and to break this cycle of growing costs and poor resident outcomes, the focus must shift to public services being more community based and preventative. This means focussing on outcomes, managing demand more effectively, and supporting people before their needs escalate.

Through the discussions between Leaders and Chief Executive, five PSR principles have been defined.

1 Community first
2 Outcomes focussed
3 Prevention and early intervention
4 Collaborative partnership working

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| **Community first** | • Service delivery must be led by the needs and aspirations of communities, with openness and transparency in the governance and the delivery of public services.<br>• By working closely with residents and local groups, services can better understand what matters most and tailor their offer accordingly.<br>• Residents should feel that their voice is being listened to, and the subsequent service design reflects their input.<br>• Services should be reshaped to reflect the needs of local people in flexible, community-focused provision.<br>• By designing support around the lived experience of residents, Kent can deliver more effective, efficient, and equitable outcomes.<br>• Leadership at all levels should mirror the diversity of Kent's communities, ensuring that a broad range of voices and experiences shape decision-making. |
| **Outcomes focussed** | • An outcomes focussed approach should drive the reform of public services.<br>• Leaders must focus on providing joined-up support that is accessible and tailored to the presenting need of a person and designed around meeting that need.<br>• A relational approach should be applied, where public servants focus a person, rather than just dispensing the services of their organisation. |
| **Prevention and early intervention** | • Prevention and early intervention are fundamental principles underpinning effective PSR that are essential to deliver better outcomes for residents, achieve financial sustainability, and build public services that are fit for the needs of the people of Kent.<br>• By intervening before issues escalate, services can help people maintain control over their lives, access support at the right time, and avoid the distress and disruption that comes with crisis intervention.<br>• Evidence demonstrates that pre-crisis intervention delivers financial benefits through a more effective and better targeted use of public services. Early help can reduce demand on high-cost crisis services and enable resources to be targeted where they have the greatest impact. For example, investment in family support, community health, and neighbourhood-based services has been shown to reduce the need for statutory intervention in both children's and adults' services. |
| **Collaborative partnership working** | • LGR presents a unique opportunity to reset and strengthen relationships across the public sector in Kent.<br>• The benefits have been seen from a number of successful partnerships across the geography, involving statutory and non-statutory services, the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, and a wide range of public bodies.<br>• While there are excellent examples of joint working, these are often isolated and not yet embedded as the norm across the system.<br>• Key partners that collaborate together include the police, health services, the Department for Work and Pensions, fire and rescue, housing providers, waste management, social services, education, and asylum support, among others. |

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| **Digital mindset** | • To set up services for success, Kent needs to embrace the benefits of adopting a digital first mindset, seeking to leverage opportunities in LGR to transform services with a digital approach.<br>• Integrated digital systems and improved data sharing between services will enable a single, holistic view of residents' needs, leading to a more joined up service. This will support more timely interventions, reduce duplication, and ensure that every professional involved has access to the right information at the right time. There is an opportunity to strengthen evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.<br>• AI can be used to better understand large data and identify resident need or risk earlier. This can be used by services to more quickly and better understand the residents they serve, so more time can be spent on treating need rather than identifying it. |

***Case study – development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams***

In eastern Kent, the health and care partnership is working with four Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) as Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) early adopter sites.

They are looking at tools to identify those most at risk of needing social care or who are likely to experience worsening health outcomes.

This is known as risk stratification and will help identify those people who will benefit from remote monitoring and early identification of deterioration to provide additional support.

This is a formal programme working alongside John Hopkins University and will be invaluable in informing how INTs develop across the county of Kent.

This integrated approach is emerging across western Kent too as they prepare for INTs. This includes examples such as, but is not limited to:
- the core frailty team with shared case management and shared system use working well in Tonbridge PCN area.
- a mental health multi-disciplinary team dealing with complex mental health needs working well in Weald.
- Maidstone PCNs have worked together on a joint service provided by the VCS for people with complex mental health-related needs across all their PCNs.
- the Sevenoaks area has established a health and wellbeing huddle approach to link in with the core primary care networks/Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.

The development in INTs with health, social care, the VCS and other key organisations working together are a foundation of good practice to build off when adopting the PSR principle of partnership working.

**Enablers of PSR**

To realise the full potential of PSR, partners must work together to embrace its core tenets.

This means moving beyond organisational boundaries and focusing collectively on the needs of the person.

It requires a cultural shift. One where engagement is purposeful, open and rooted in a shared ambition for Kent as a whole.

Several enablers are critical to making this collaborative approach a reality:

1 **More permeable boundaries between partners and services:** services must become more open and flexible, allowing for the free flow of information, resources and expertise. When one partner's actions benefit another's budget or outcomes, this should be recognised and the benefit shared.
2 **Shared benefits and budgets:** a move towards shared benefits naturally lends itself to the possibility of shared budgets. By pooling resources, partners can take a joined-up approach to tackling key issues, ensuring investment is targeted where it will have the greatest impact.
3 **Co-location of services:** Bringing services and organisations together physically - whether in community hubs, shared offices, or integrated teams - can drive a more joined-up way of working, break down silos and make it easier for residents to access the support they need.
4 **Inclusive partnership:** No partner should be left out of this process. Every organisation, whether statutory, voluntary or community-based, must feel a sense of purpose and importance in helping the people of Kent. Organisations should embody a shared learning culture, recognising that they have something to learn from someone else round the table.

Achieving this vision will require organisations to work together differently.

It means moving away from transactional relationships and towards a model where partners are engaged as equals, united by a common purpose.

It means recognising the challenges facing communities cannot be solved by any one organisation alone.

**The next steps for PSR:**

There is broad agreement among Kent Leaders they want to:

- **Refresh working arrangements between organisations**: updating governance structures and shared forums between Chief Executives to enable more effective joint working. This will result in better alignment and a collective approach to PSR.
- **Establish shared learning culture**: councils and partners actively sharing key learning, where best practice is actively sought and embedded.
- **Purposeful and reassuring staff communication**: ambition for reform must be communicated clearly and confidently to staff, providing reassurance about their future and a sense of shared purpose.
- **Prepare for a seamless transition**: LGR should a seamless handover between services with support that feels joined up and easy to navigate. Residents should feel well informed about the changes from LGR, what to expect and the positive impacts that will be driven.
- **More voices are required and welcomed**. There is also an ambition to engage with voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to understand excellent practice that drives resident outcomes currently. To achieve more community-centred, outcome focused service delivery, collaborating with the VCSE, who are at the heart of communities and places, will be pivotal.

***Case Study – Dover SmART project***

Dover SmART Project is a charity founded in 2013 to support disadvantaged children, especially young carers, through creative activities to improve their wellbeing and boost their confidence.

It runs creative groups to boost children's aspirations and as a safe space away from other responsibilities.

The charity has evolved to support other age groups now, such as supporting older people who may be isolated in the community or have conditions like dementia.

Dover SmART project is funded by a variety of fundraising efforts including the private sector and the district council.

In 2025, the Dover SmART Project was named a winner at the Kent Mental Health Wellbeing Awards.

The SmART project demonstrates the impact the VCS can have on the community.

**There is an opportunity for voluntary and community sector projects to use their expertise and knowledge to support statutory services in supporting vulnerable people, acting as partners where there are opportunities for a holistic approach.**

**PSR under Option 3A**

Option 3A is closely aligned with existing public sector geographies, particularly Health and Care Partnerships and acute trusts, which are among the most complex and costly structures to reconfigure. This alignment minimises unnecessary disruption, fragmentation and financial risk while creating a strong platform for wider public sector reform through more integrated planning, joint commissioning, and place-based approaches to service delivery. By maintaining coherence with established boundaries, Option 3A enables more effective collaboration across health, care, and local government. The model is further reinforced by the support of key strategic partners, including NHS Kent & Medway, Kent Police, and Kent Fire and Rescue.

In addition, the scale and capacity of a three-unitary model enable Option 3A to deliver more ambitious and complex reforms in social care.

# **Criteria 4:** Working together to understand and meet local needs

This section includes:

**Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design** **Criteria 4a and 4c**

**Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance** **Criteria 4b**

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# Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design

**Criteria 4a.** It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal

**Criteria 4c.** Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed

**Through resident surveys, partner meetings, and community outreach, Kent has ensured local voices shape the business case. Strong support for Option 3A from key stakeholders – including NHS Kent & Medway and Kent Police – reflects a shared strategic vision focused on minimising fragmentation, enhancing service delivery, and aligning with existing operational structures. This proactive engagement exceeds MHCLG guidance and demonstrates Kent's commitment to meaningful community involvement.**

## Overview of the approach taken to engage the community and stakeholders:

Kent's approach to LGR has been firmly rooted in the principles of transparency, inclusion and shared ownership.

Kent's 14 councils have worked together to formulate a set of joint proposals and have a coordinated, county-wide programme of public and stakeholder engagement.

We ran a resident survey in September and October 2025, have met with key partners and have engaged with communities through our usual engagement routes to ensure the voices of local people and organisations are central to business case development.

Reflecting local identity and fostering a shared vision across the county requires meaningful engagement with residents, businesses and key stakeholder groups at every stage of the process.

This engagement activity aligns with the political commitment across Kent to meaningfully involve communities in shaping their future governance while exceeding what is required under MHCLG guidance.

While MHCLG has not prescribed the extent of engagement, Kent's Leaders chose to pursue a proactive and inclusive approach.

The process has been informed by best practice from previous LGR areas, advice from the cross-Kent communications group and feedback from council Chiefs Executives and Leaders.

We gathered the views of more than 2,000 stakeholders to understand reflections, including:

- Kent residents
- businesses
- community groups
- councillors and officers
- Members of Parliament
- strategic partners across housing, health, emergency services, social care and safeguarding, education and skills, economic development, government, public sector and volunteering

## Overview of engagement activities:

A) Standardised resident survey
B) Stakeholder engagement programme

The feedback from the public survey and stakeholder engagement has been analysed by the Canterbury City Council Policy and Communications team, which led the communications and engagement workstream. The findings are reflected below and throughout this proposal.

A) Standardised resident survey

A standardised resident survey, agreed across all Kent councils, was launched during the engagement period.

This consistency ensures data comparability across districts and enables the creation of both Kent-wide and locally-specific insights.

The survey aimed to capture residents' views on their local identity, service expectations and priorities for the future shape of local government.

These insights have informed the business cases and local decision-making processes within each council.

The survey received 2,107 responses, which includes written responses and survey responses.

B) Stakeholder engagement programme

In addition, a joint stakeholder engagement programme has been developed, via a coordinated letter sent on behalf of all Kent councils to a wide-ranging list of county-level stakeholders.

Each council has also engaged with its own networks including parish and town councils, voluntary and community organisations, businesses and sector-specific partnerships.

Councils were encouraged to host meetings and discussions to ensure stakeholders could explore the implications of different governance models and offer their perspectives on how local identity and service delivery can be best preserved and enhanced.

Across all Kent councils, priority strategic partners* have been engaged in dedicated workshops to understand key reflections, including:

- challenges that can be addressed through reorganisation
- opportunities to be realised through reorganisation
- issues that may arise through reorganisation that need to be mitigated

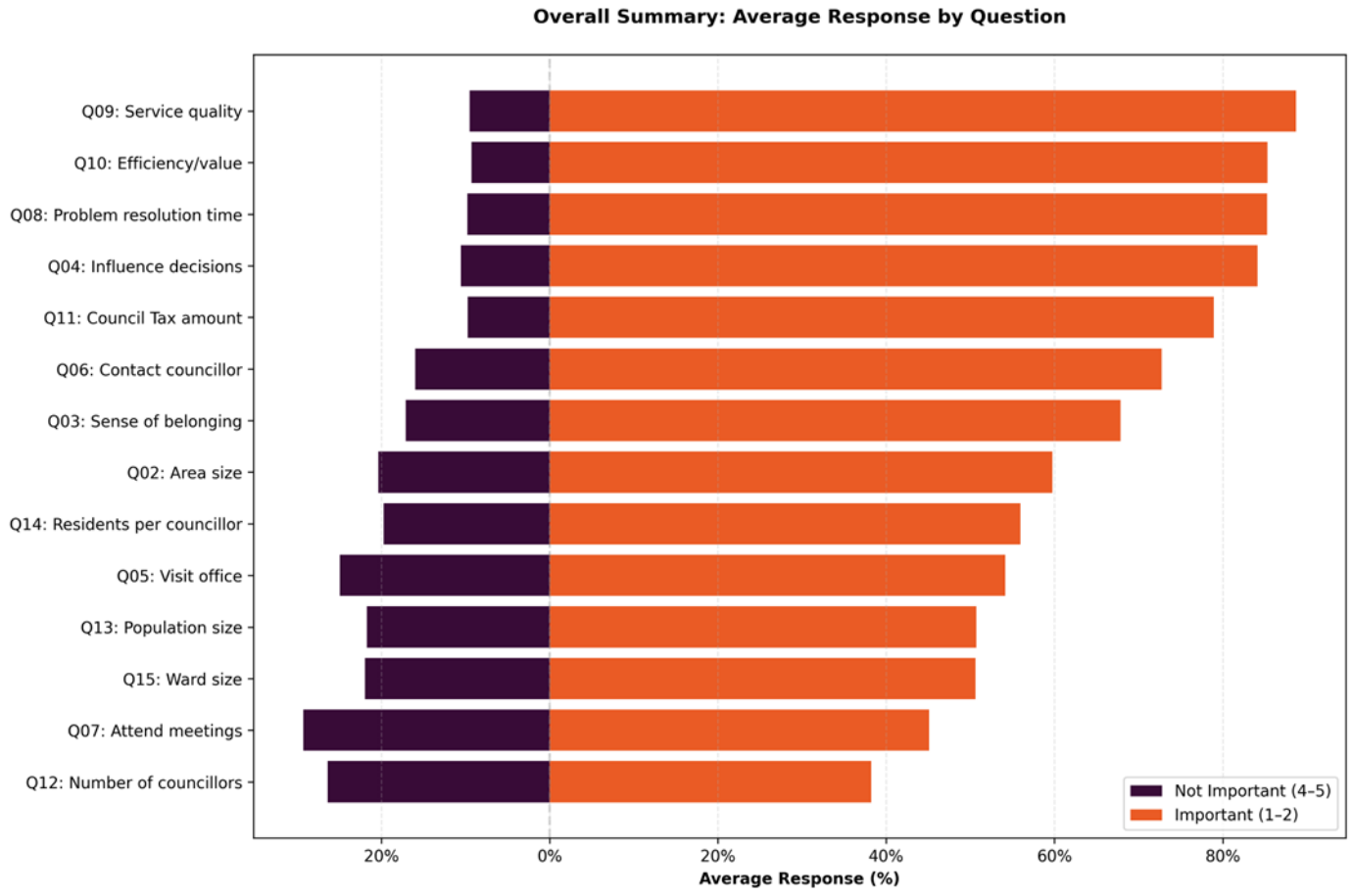
***Table 25:*** **Priority key strategic partners*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Health** | • NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB)<br>• Kent Integrated Care Alliance<br>• NHS Provider Trusts<br>  ○ East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust<br>  ○ Medway NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Emergency services** | • Kent Police<br>• Kent Police and Crime Commissioner<br>• South East Coast Ambulance Service |
| **Social care and safeguarding** | • Chairs of Safeguarding Boards – Adults and Children's<br>• Chairs of any Partnership Board<br>• Chair of Kent and Medway Resilience Forum |
| **Education and skills** | • University of Kent<br>• Canterbury Christ Church University<br>• University of Greenwich<br>• University for the Creative Arts<br>• FE colleges |
| **Economic development** | • Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce<br>• Federation of Small Businesses |
| **Government and Public Sector Partners** | • Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)<br>• National Highways<br>• Port health authorities<br>• Housing associations |
| **Volunteering** | • VCSE sector representation |

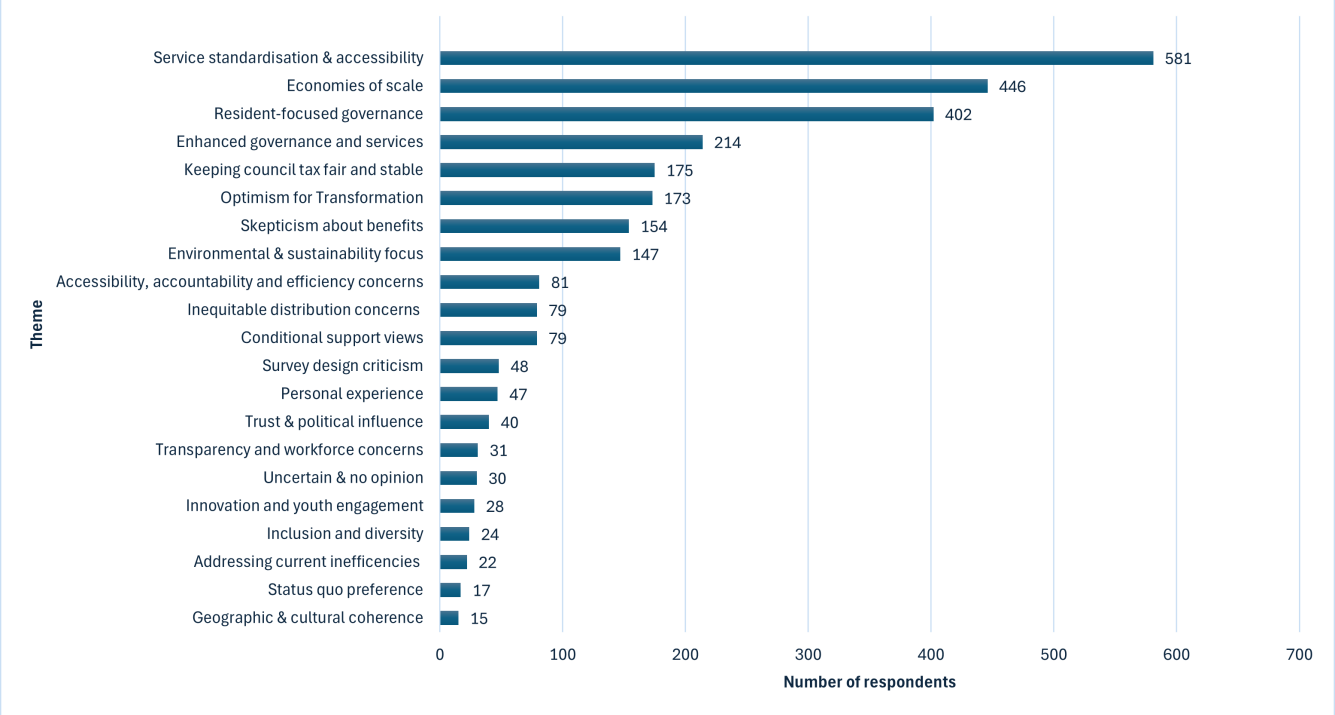
### The perspective of Kent residents

***Figure 15:*** *What Kent residents value most about their local council*



Overall, the highest-rated aspects were service quality, efficiency and value, problem resolution time, decision-making influence and council tax amount.

***Figure 16:*** *Opportunities identified by Kent residents from local government reorganisation*

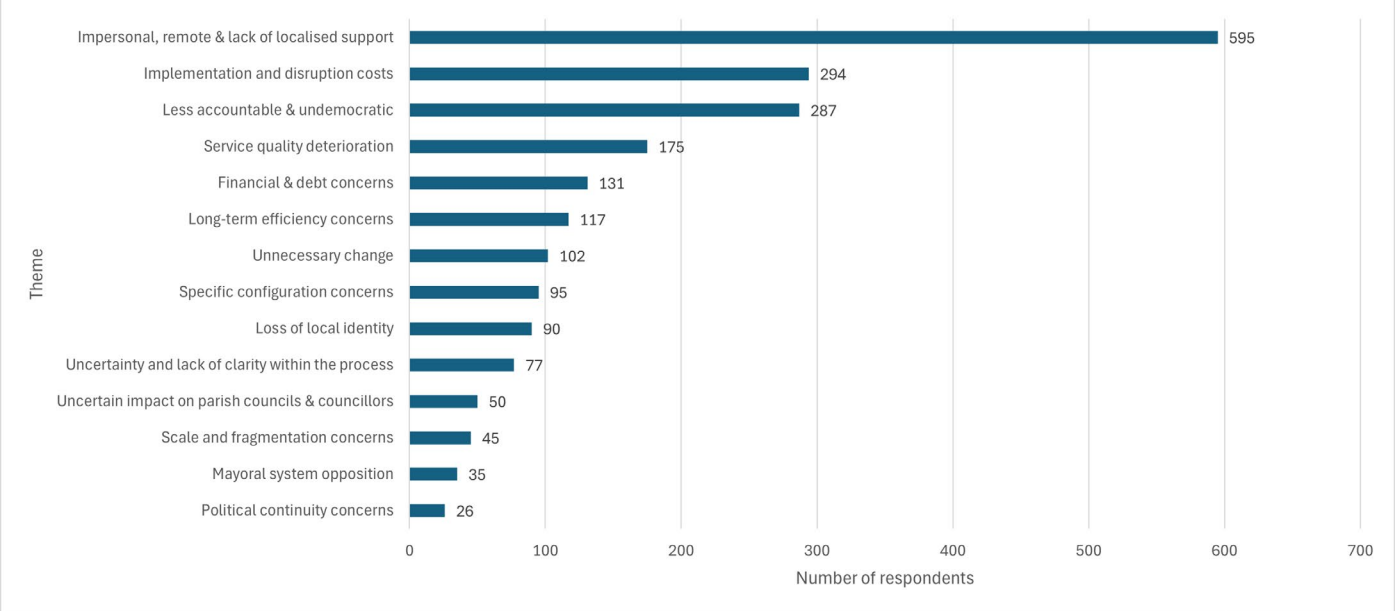



Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Participants identified economies of scale as another key opportunity of reorganisation, seeing it as a means to streamline operations, reduce bureaucracy and deliver better value and a fairer balance of power across areas.

*"This is a generational opportunity, use it wisely or it will slip away like the last one… this is a chance to make a council work in new and innovative ways delivering services fit for 2025 not 1980." – Kent resident*

***Figure 17:*** *Kent residents' concerns about local government reorganisation*




Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote with fears that larger councils could become disconnected from communities, particularly in rural and coastal areas.

Participants questioned whether the promised efficiencies would outweigh the significant costs of restructuring and expressed concern about potential service disruption.

There was some concern that reorganisation will undermine local democracy and some fears that larger councils could weaken local accountability, reduce democratic representation and limit residents' ability to influence decisions that affect their communities.

*"[I am concerned by] loss of local connection, information and knowledge… Impersonal services due to number of residents, vulnerable residents suffering and likely to be left behind. Reduced opportunities for employment locally with risk of redundancies and increasing levels of unemployment. Potential increase in levels of vulnerabilities and failings of individuals, households and families mental health, safeguarding and domestic abuse." – Kent resident*

**Overview of key themes that emerged from the resident research:**

1. Service quality is a top priority for residents, yet many are concerned that services will deteriorate throughout the reorganisation process

Service quality ranked as residents' top priority with 81.4% rating it very important and a further 7.5% as important, underlining the need to maintain reliable everyday services through LGR.

Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Overall, there is an expectation for high quality, reliable and effective council services.

Residents want services to be responsible to community needs and to support local economies.

There was a strong desire to see improvements in coordination of local services, particularly those that impact daily life such as waste collection, highways, social care and community safety.

*"My main priority is to have big enough bins that are emptied on a weekly basis. This is very important to me and my family due to the amount of medical waste we have as a result of chronic illness." – Kent resident*

Some residents expressed concern LGR will result in a decline in service quality across the board, driven primarily by cost cutting measures rather than genuine efficiency improvements.

There is some anxiety essential services including social care, special educational, needs, waste collection and community facilities will suffer as budgets are spread thinner across large populations and competing priorities.

Many respondents noted any short-term financial savings from reorganisation will be offset by transition costs and the loss of established relationships and local expertise, ultimately leaving residents paying more through increased council tax while receiving demonstrated demonstrably worse services.

*"I work in education in Medway, we also have pupils who reside in Kent. From my experience, current services for education (especially SEND) and social care provision are poor and do not meet need" - Kent resident*

2. Service quality and input into decision-making is of particular importance for residents with disabilities

Residents with disabilities and those with long-term health conditions prioritised both service quality and having meaningful influence over decisions, reflecting a desire for responsive, inclusive services and concerns about accessibility, loss of voice and potential disruption to existing support.

While service quality remains priority for people who consider themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition, they also put a strong emphasis on influencing decisions.

This may suggest disabled residents value both swift service resolution and meaningful say in decisions affecting them, possibly reflecting experiences of services sometimes being designed without adequate input from people with disabilities.

When asked to outline their concerns about local government reorganisation, one of the respondents who considered themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition said:

*"Ability to be heard and to influence decision making in a much larger council area; The loss of a local Council making decisions for local people; The possibility of the Council offices being located somewhere that I can't get to (I don't drive); The possibility of losing services currently provided." - Kent resident*

Residents with disabilities want to ensure their voices are included in the redesign process to ensure their perspectives can shape services and meaningfully influence decision-making.

*"As a disabled resident who is passionate about shaping policy, I believe local government reorganisation presents a vital opportunity to build a more inclusive and accessible system… I hope any new council structure prioritises digital accessibility, transparent decision-making, and proactive outreach to underrepresented voices. It's essential that disabled people can contact councillors easily, attend meetings remotely, and have their concerns heard without barriers. Efficiency and value for money are important, but so is ensuring that no one is left behind. I urge decision-makers to design councils that reflect the diversity of their residents—not just in services, but in how they engage and empower us. This reorganisation is also a chance to improve accountability."- Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 3 for further detail on the option-specific support high quality and sustainable service delivery.

3. Residents want to protect local identity, connection to community and democratic representation

Kent residents feel connected to their respective towns, villages and districts and want this to be reflected in new council arrangements.

67% of residents said a sense of belonging to their council area was important.

However, participants had concerns LGR will erode the distinct identities and characters of individual areas, towns and communities across Kent.

Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote.

Residents were worried councillors representing significantly larger populations will lack local knowledge and understanding of area-specific issues, making it harder for residents to reach their representatives and have their voices heard.

Some comments highlight fears that some areas, particularly rural and coastal communities, will be forgotten and abandoned in favour of larger urban areas.

*"Living in a rural area I consider that at larger authority including larger populated areas will mean our needs and wants are ignored." - Kent resident*

There is a desire for strong local representation.

Residents want to feel connected to their councillors and have confidence their voices will be heard and can shape their neighbourhoods.

68% of residents rated the ability to influence local decisions as very important.

Clear access to decision-makers and accountability in council actions was also highly valued by residents.

Residents emphasised the importance of maintaining a clear local voice in decision making and expressed concerns that larger councils may become distant and disconnected from the communities they serve.

*"If authorities are too large then councillors will have insufficient knowledge about the people they are representing and not be seen as part of their local community." - Kent resident*

Many expressed anxiety about the ability of a remote council to address everyday local concerns, with some noting that they already struggle to contact their current MPs due to large electorates and fear this problem will worsen.

There was concern amongst some residents that council offices may become physically inaccessible and that service quality may decline as decision-making becomes centralised among people unfamiliar with local needs and contexts.

*"Residents will have less representation and therefore local concerns or issues will not be sufficiently represented or addressed." - Kent Resident*

Notably, the ability to visit a council office, population size, ward size, attendance at council meetings and number of councillors were considered least important to residents when compared to other factors like service quality.

See Section 4: Criteria 1 for further detail on the model defines functional and coherent geographies and Section 4: Criteria 4 for further detail on how the model maintains local identity.

4. Residents view local government reorganisation as an opportunity to deliver better economies of scale value for money, but many are concerned with the cost to transition

Efficiency and value for money was the second highest priority among residents, with 74.3% rating it very important and 12.3% as important and residents expressing anxiety about costs and desire that promised savings materialise in practice.

*"The chance to simplify structures, reduce duplication, and make better use of resources across Kent and Medway. Clearer accountability for residents, with one council responsible for all services rather than multiple tiers… [as well as] efficiency and savings." - Kent resident*

Many participants viewed the reorganisation process as an opportunity to deliver more efficient, streamlined local government services that ultimately deliver better value for money for residents.

There was an expectation that reorganisation should bring economies of scale, reduce bureaucracy and ensure fairer balance of power across areas.

*"A single, unified authority could make it easier for people to understand who to turn to, and ensure that concerns are addressed without being passed between layers of bureaucracy." - Kent resident*

While many residents are hopeful about the potential benefits of reorganisation, some are concerned about the financial and operational cost of reorganisation, with many questioning whether the promised savings will ever materialise.

Participants were sceptical about transition costs, redundancies and systemic integration outweighing any efficiency gains, ultimately resulting in higher council tax for residents without any service improvements.

Comments highlight substantial anticipated expenses including restructuring, retaining and redundancy packages, IT system migrations, rebranding, new office infrastructure and external consultant fees.

*"My concerns relate to time and cost and how and the cost to Council Tax payers. With any reorganisation the short-term risk is always upheaval, delays in each council dealing with Business as unusual." - Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 2 for further detail on how the model supports resilient and efficient finances.

**The perspective of Kent partners and organisations**

There were shared perspectives across partner organisations and businesses:

1. There is genuine recognition among many stakeholders that reorganisation could unlock efficiencies.

Pooling resources, efficiency savings, reduced duplication, improved integration, stronger local voice, improved collaboration, joined-up policy making and clearer accountability were all highly referenced by stakeholders as potential benefits of reorganisation.

In particular, participants saw potential for improved mechanisms for communities to be heard, through co-production, forums or strengthened parish/town councils.

Economies of scale were also highly referenced. Participants acknowledged larger councils could enable efficiencies in back-office services, contracts and procurement, as well as recruitment and retention of specialist staff.

*"What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why? Duplication of services and confusion about which tier of local government is responsible for certain functions could be reduced. Larger councils may be able to pool resources to tackle county-wide issues such as major infrastructure or environmental challenges." - Kent partner*

2. Many stakeholders were concerned that reorganisation could exacerbate inequalities

Many stakeholders warned of risks relating to reduced local representation, loss of community identity, widening inequality, unresolved financial pressures and disruption to housing and estate management during transition.

Canterbury Foodbank raised concerns that reorganisation could worsen east/west inequality by separating poorer coastal areas from wealthier western districts.

They highlight new unitary authorities need strong, well-funded regional support to address inequalities.

*"There is a strong risk that unitary reorganisation will divide richer and poorer areas, so that the potential to cross-subsidise between areas of high social need (located mainly in the existing Thanet, Dovel, Folkestone and Hythe and Swale districts) and richer areas (Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells) is lost. At the same time opportunities to create high value-added employment in the poorer areas, whose economies currently rest on low-paid services (tourism, hospitality, social care) and primary sector agriculture will not exist." - Kent partner*

A concern of equality was also raised by a councillor who questions financial sustainability for the East Kent council, which concentrates the poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income.

There are concerns about resource allocation precision avoiding overlooked small, deprived areas and emphasis that local access points are essential for digitally-excluded residents.

3. There were concerns about loss of in-house heritage expertise and local heritage services.

Multiple stakeholders worried that community assets like parks, libraries or historic buildings could be sold off or transferred without adequate funding or consideration of their community.

Many also highlighted that geography should not be the sole driver of reorganisation.

Cultural identity, history, and existing community synergies were seen as equally important drivers e.g. coastal towns sharing challenges.

One stakeholder noted Canterbury's historic significance and other unique identities should be preserved:

*"That resources that people hold dear, such as the heritage in Canterbury or the coastal strip from Reculver to Seasalter, are not cherished in the same way in the unitary as they are in the district council." - Kent partner*

***Table 26:** Nuanced feedback from stakeholders*

| Grouping | Key reflections from LGR | Verbatims |
|---|---|---|
| **Health** | • Stakeholders from the health sector emphasised opportunities for better integration if local government boundaries align with health and care partnership areas. The NHS trusts see potential for more seamless join working in social care, public health and prevention. | *"...we would value geographical alignment with NHS boundaries wherever possible and reasonable. Given that poor health is so strongly influenced by social factors, alignment facilitates coordination of approach."* |
| **Parish Councils** | • Parish councils highlighted community identity and local knowledge are essential to resident wellbeing, concerns that extend to fears about lost heritage expertise, potential sale of community assets and diluted local oversight over planning and service decisions.<br>• Some stakeholders from parish councils emphasised parishes provide valued highly local, responsive community services and argue community identity is vital to resident wellbeing.<br>• Some acknowledged reorganisation could bring efficiency and clarity benefits, but stress local democracy or community identity should not be sacrificed in pursuit of these.<br>• They also emphasised parishes need proper recognition, empowerment and funding. | *"Parish Councils occupy a unique and invaluable position within their communities. As elected representatives who live and work within the areas they serve, Parish Councillors have a direct connection with local residents and a deep understanding of their needs and concerns."* |
| **Councillors** | • Councillors were concerned that reduced councillor numbers and increased | *"I am very concerned about using strategic planning and transport* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | responsibilities may deter candidates and reduce local representation and loss of local knowledge among councillors. Residents<br>• Some respondents opposed abolishing district councils and list risks such as service disruption, higher costs and weaker democracy.<br>• A concern around equality was raised by a councillor who questioned the financial sustainability for an East Kent council concentrating poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income. | *links on a wider scale to connect people to more places of value, build sustainable homes and vital infrastructure and bolster local growth. It is also important to me that we maintain local representation and community cohesion."* |
| **Housing** | • Stakeholders from the housing sector were concerned about service disruption during transition, delays to housebuilding, confusion over social housing priorities and potential disaggregation of county-wide social care services.<br>• An estate manager argued property management requires local knowledge and RICS regulations require surveyors to practice in known area and questions whether someone unfamiliar with an area can manage valuations accurately, maintain estates or prevent loss of land through statutory rights. | *"Potential problems which could be created… Delays to housebuilding if newly-created unitary authorities opt to abandon adopted or emerging local plans in favour of developing their own; Confusion amongst residents on the housing waiting list over how local government reorganisation might affect their priority for social housing…"* |
| **Education and skills** | • Further education leaders highlighted possibilities for coherent county-wide skills strategies and apprenticeship coordination that could better serve small-sized medium enterprises across Kent.<br>• However, among other things, they also highlighted that the reorganisation may have implications for learners with high needs. | *"Ensuring consistency, equity, and adequate provision will require any new local authorities to have the capacity and expertise to properly co-ordinate and oversee High Needs responsibilities."* |

**Support from partner organisations for Option 3A**

The three-unitary model is supported by a number of partners who have been consulted.

There is broad endorsement of this model from:

- NHS Kent & Medway – highlighting that the model minimises fragmentation and reduces infrastructure costs
- Kent Police and Crime Commissioner – who prefers a three-unitary model as most closely aligning with existing police command units and as minimising cost and service impact
- Kent Fire and Rescue – citing the potential to improve efficiency, streamline service delivery, and enhance regional economic planning
- Visit Kent and other stakeholders

This support reflects a shared strategic vision among key regional stakeholders, who emphasise the benefits of a three-unitary model in terms of operational alignment, cost-effectiveness, and service continuity.

NHS Kent and Medway stated in their consultation response that their **"preference would be for the smallest number of unitary councils to minimise infrastructure costs and the risk of fragmenting services."**

Similarly, the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner noted, **"From the point of view of how policing is organised in Kent, I believe that if local government re-organisation is required, it should be with three unitary authorities, built on the existing District council boundaries and Kent Police's Divisional structure."**

The consistent preference for Option 3A across emergency services and public sector partners underscores its potential to deliver integrated services and reduce duplication from aligning with existing administrative and operational boundaries.

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# Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance

**Criteria 4b.** Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance

**Option 3A creates three future councils each reflecting distinct cultural, historic, and economic identities. It supports local communities, coastal economies, and natural travel and service patterns to strengthen regional identity.**

## Maintaining local identity across Kent

Kent is a large and diverse region with a rich history, strong civic traditions and distinct local identities.

From coastal towns and rural villages to historic market centres and modern urban hubs, the geography and culture of Kent have shaped how communities live, work and relate to their local institutions.

We know from engagement with our residents they associate their identify with their local town and not their local council.

They do not live their lives according to administrative boundaries.

Their daily experience is shaped by functional geographies – commuting patterns, access to hospitals, schools, and community services – that often extend beyond council borders.

The lived reality is that every road, bus route, and service network crosses boundaries.

New councils must recognise this and work together to create coherent, strategic plans that reflect how people move and access services.

This includes transport, health and preventative care, which are most effective when delivered through local, community-based interventions.

New councils must support both strategic coordination and planning across council boundaries and local responsiveness.

*Placeholder for collage showing geographical identity of Kent*

## Option 3A: Three councils with clear identities

Option 3A demonstrates strong alignment with established and recognisable historic, cultural, and service geographies, including the management of certain pan-county service structures.

It supports existing identities and ways of living by grouping communities with shared characteristics, such as those along the coast and across the Thames Estuary.

Option 3A also recognises the economic importance of coastal leisure activities and other tourism attractions, which are integral to the local economy. It strikes an effective balance between delivering value for money and maintaining a scale that is not too large or remote, ensuring accessibility and engagement for both residents and partners.

Furthermore, the model reflects natural economic flows, including shared travel-to-work patterns, housing markets, and health service areas. It strengthens alignment with acute health trusts, strategic highway networks, and coastal management frameworks. These factors contribute to a stronger regional identity and improved service cohesion, particularly across East Kent and other coastal communities.

***Table 27:*** *Identity and culture for each council area*

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent:**<br>• Dartford<br>• Gravesham<br>• Medway<br>• Swale | **A diverse, regenerated region blending historic heritage with modern development, characterised by Thames Estuary landscapes, vibrant cultural communities, and a legacy of industry transformed into thriving modern hubs.**<br>• Characterised by coastal and estuarine landscapes along the Thames and Medway rivers with urban and industrial areas.<br>• Reflects natural groupings of Thames Estuary communities.<br>• Historically, North Kent was an industrial area with a strong presence in building materials, quarrying, naval shipyards, and papermaking. While these traditional industries have undergone restructuring, the region has diversified and seen successful regeneration projects in areas like Bluewater, Chatham Maritime, and Rochester Riverside.<br>• Notable for its heritage, the area includes the former home of Charles Dickens, the first Victorian seaside destination for visitors from London, and landmarks such as Rochester Cathedral, Rochester Castle, the Historic Dockyard, as well as the ongoing operation of the Shepherd Neame Brewery, Britain's oldest brewer.<br>• The area is one of the most culturally diverse. In Gravesham nearly 1 in 3 people identifying as non-white British, and 52% of school age children in Dartford are now classified as non-white British. The urban centres of Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham have also been identified as having significant Asian, Black and Eastern European communities.<br>• Dartford has one of the youngest median ages outside London and university cities, at 37.2 years in 2022. Gravesham also has a comparatively young population.<br>• Medway is home to a shared university campus known as the ‘Universities of Medway’, with presence of University of Kent, University of Greenwich and Canterbury Christ Church University. |
| **West Kent:**<br>• Maidstone<br>• Sevenoaks<br>• Tonbridge & Malling | **A scenic region of chalk downlands and wooded valleys, steeped in heritage with castles, historic towns, and cultural landmarks, protected by extensive Green Belt and National Landscapes.**<br>• The area’s natural environment is defined by hilly, wooded countryside with chalk downlands, valleys, and Areas of Outstanding |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Tunbridge Wells | Natural Beauty with two National Landscapes – Kent Downs and High Weald.<br>• Covering 92% of its District, Sevenoaks has one of the highest levels of Green Belt in the UK and includes sections of both Kent Downs and High Weald National Landscapes.<br>• The region is rich in history from its many ancient sites such as Oldbury Hill and Eccles Roman Villa to medieval castles and landmarks including Hever Castle and Leeds Castle, through to Chartwell House (home of Winston Churchill).<br>• Historic villages and towns are found throughout the region featuring timber-framed buildings, Georgian pubs, and medieval architecture.<br>• West Kent is home to Grade I listed landmarks such as Penshurst Place, Ightham Mote, Scotney Castle, and the Archbishop's Palace.<br>• Cultural hubs are found throughout the region and include The Pantiles in Royal Tunbridge Wells, The Amelia Scott centre, The Stag Theatre in Sevenoaks, and Maidstone Studios – celebrating 40 years of broadcast excellence.<br>• This natural environment, historic buildings and cultural variety has shaped the identities of the communities within the West Kent region as well as supporting strong creative and tourist industries.<br>• |
| **East Kent:**<br>• Ashford<br>• Canterbury<br>• Dover<br>• Folkestone & Hythe<br>• Thanet | **A region defined by strong coastal and rural identities with rich natural and cultural heritage. Its historic significance, iconic landscapes, and educational institutions reinforce its role as a centre of heritage and learning.**<br>• Strong coastal and rural identities, with landscapes ranging from chalk cliffs to coastal plains and downs.<br>• The region's coastline features historic towns such as Herne Bay, Whitstable, Deal, Sandwich, Folkestone, Hythe, Margate, Ramsgate, and Broadstairs, offering tourism opportunities.<br>• This area hosts four of the five head Cinque Ports as a well-defined historic confederation of south-east English towns (Dover, Hythe, Romney, and Sandwich), as well as five of the nine limb ports (Tenterden, Folkestone, Lydd, Deal and Margate). The network remains active and gives the area a unique sense of place with a deep cultural and heritage identity dating back to the 11th century.<br>• Canterbury is home to four higher/further education institutions and significant cultural heritage, including UNESCO World Heritage Sites Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey, and St Martin's Church.<br>• As well as it's thriving port, Dover has rich natural and cultural heritage with Dover Castle and the iconic White Cliffs.<br>• Folkestone & Hythe combines vibrant coastal communities with rich agricultural land on the Romney Marsh and parts of the Kent Downs AONB.<br>• Other cultural assets include Margate's Turner Contemporary and creative quarter, Folkestone's Creative Foundation, Marlowe Theatre, and Dover Castle, English Heritage's most popular visitor destination. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • The area's natural and built heritage is among the strongest in Kent, supporting tourism and creative industries. |

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# **Criteria 5:** Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent** | **Criteria 5a, 5b** |
| **Population sizes that support devolution** | **Criteria 5c** |


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# Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent

**Criteria 5a.** Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.

**Criteria 5b.** Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.

**All of Kent's councils recognise the critical need to devolve powers to a strategic authority to unlock public sector reform and empower decisions about Kent to be made in Kent. The vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport, and the benefits it would bring across Kent in terms of accelerating public service reform, cannot be underestimated. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve life chances for the residents and businesses of Kent and Medway.**

## A devolution deal for Kent

We were disappointed to not be accepted onto the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and have been pressing the case with ministers and MHCLG to understand the path towards devolution in Kent.

This is particularly important in light of the critical role Kent plays in national infrastructure and border management, and the opportunities that arise from a strategic county-wide approach being taken on economic growth, education and skills.

## Partner support

Key local public sector partners - the Chief Executives and Chairs of the ICB, health and care partnerships and acute trusts, the Chancellors/Vice Chancellors of the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and Greenwich University which has a campus within Kent, the Chairs of the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, Business Advisory Board and Kent Invicta Chamber, the Chief Executives of Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover and the Chairs of the Kent Housing Group and Kent Developers Group - all share our concerns that reorganisation in Kent without devolution would result in a piecemeal approach and sub-optimal transformation.

## Timelines that work for both priorities

Aligning the timeline for the creation of a strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services through localised arrangements only to reaggregate services into a strategic authority shortly after.

This two-stage piecemeal approach would generate additional cost, complexity and create further disruption to staff and services as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government in delivering national objectives and policies.

Kent's district and borough councils and Medway strongly support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority at the first available opportunity in April 2028 to operate alongside the new unitary authorities.

Government support and agreement for devolution to be aligned with local government reorganisation in Kent will enable effective transition planning of key services resulting in a seamless transition, enabling synergies in programme management and leadership capacity while providing clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government and devolution opportunities will be embraced in Kent.

Clarity for partners is critical given our deep ambitions regarding public service reform at the earliest opportunity.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving outcomes.

Kent is a natural fit for devolution as critical partners already work coterminously with the footprint of the strategic authority including Kent Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the integrated care board and many voluntary and community service organisations.

A failure to bring forward devolution simultaneously alongside reorganisation in Kent represents a significant additional cost pressure through missed opportunities, delay, disruption and duplication of effort.

The proposals for LGR in Kent and Medway directly address the rationale given by MHCLG for excluding Kent and Medway from the DPP, namely addressing population disparity imbalance between the area of Kent and the unitary authority of Medway.

We urge ministers to accelerate devolution in Kent to meet the timescale we have proposed as this will deliver the greatest opportunity for successful public sector reform.

**Enabling strategic leadership through a regional governance model**

A strategic authority across Kent and Medway provides a real opportunity to strengthen Kent as a whole and to focus the role of unitary authorities on their delivery role.

The strategic authority will take a strategic role across Kent including:

- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

A Mayor for Kent will provide a clear single voice for the region, support inward investment and ensure the county punches its weight on the national and international stages.

Kent requires a voice on the Council of the Nations and Regions, not only for its size but also for the critical role it plays in national infrastructure, travel and borders.

This high-profile leadership role with government will support growth in Kent and, through the national role, address a gap that would otherwise be apparent in addressing national priorities.

The future councils will be balanced and powerful constituent authorities on the strategic authority, alongside the mayor, and will provide the voice for their distinct economic areas.

We know from existing combined authorities that a single strategic approach does not mean that one size fits all.

A Kent strategic authority will also enable the councils to focus on effective local delivery and deep public service reform on an appropriate footprint.

The councils will have different strengths and needs, local partnerships and communities they represent.

A strategic authority will provide clear overall direction and coherence, enabling councils to focus delivery in their local area which will mean they can become more agile through a place-based approach within a larger strategic framework.

**Progress towards devolution**

Despite not being on the DPP, we have continued to develop our approach to devolution in Kent to enable us to rapidly take advantage of the opportunity when provided.

We have started work to agree our vision and strategic intent regarding devolution and the role and purpose of the strategic authority in delivering it, and the most effective relationship required with the constituent councils.

We are refreshing our shared priorities by identifying critical strategic challenges and opportunities requiring a strategic and Kent-wide approach.

Following MHCLG support for our devolution approach, we will finalise the preferred structure and identify the processes and resources required to integrate into the combined LGR and devolution implementation programme.

This will enable us to prepare the ground for the Mayoral Strategic Authority, develop the early investment programme and begin development of the statutory policy framework.

This will set robust foundations for the mayoral election and strategic authority to vest in April 2028.

**Devolution governance: the argument for Option 3A**

Option 3A proposes a three-unitary model for Kent that supports strategic devolution and regional priorities through a streamlined and balanced governance structure. By establishing three unitary authorities with proportionate population sizes, the model ensures equitable representation across the county while maintaining the capacity for strong regional partnerships.

This structure simplifies governance and enhances leadership clarity, enabling Kent to engage more effectively with central government and regional bodies. A unified and effective voice on strategic issues such as infrastructure, housing, economic development and supporting integration with preventative and integrated care, is more achievable with fewer, larger councils that can coordinate across broader functional economic areas and transport corridors. This alignment improves service delivery, reduces duplication, and strengthens Kent's position in regional devolution discussions.

The proposal is built on a foundation of collaboration among Kent's councils, reflecting a shared commitment to reform and a willingness to work together toward common goals. This cooperative approach fosters trust and transparency in decision-making, reinforcing Kent's credibility as a proactive and capable regional partner.

Option 3A also embraces place-based leadership by preserving local identities within each unitary authority. The three councils are designed to be large enough to deliver services efficiently and at scale yet remain sufficiently connected to their communities to ensure responsive and locally tailored governance. This balance supports neighbourhood-level engagement while advancing broader strategic ambitions.

By aligning Kent's geography with its functional realities – such as transport corridors, environmental zones, and economic clusters – Option 3A creates a governance structure well-suited to managing land use, planning, infrastructure, and environmental priorities across the county.

More than any other, Option 3A balances opportunity and risk across the councils, ensuring that no single area bears disproportionate financial or social challenges. This equitable distribution of responsibilities and opportunities supports sustainable growth and resilience across Kent.

# Population sizes that support devolution

**Criteria 5c.** Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities

**Option 3A meets government criteria by creating balanced and sufficiently sized authorities. It supports effective devolution by enabling strong collaboration with a Mayoral Strategic Authority and promotes equitable, efficient local governance.**

**Population sizes: the argument for Option 3A**

Option 3A provides a strong foundation for devolution by aligning with functional economic areas and sensible planning geographies. Each unitary authority offers sufficient scale and capacity to engage directly with a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA), enabling effective delivery of devolution priorities.

This model creates three councils with the most balanced population sizes of the models proposed and is the only model that meets the Government's guidance of 500,000 populations in each of its unitary areas.

The balanced population ratios support equal representation and encourage an equitable partnership within the strategic authority, fostering collaborative governance and strengthened local delivery under the MSA framework.

Establishing three councils across Kent and Medway, each grounded in the region's real communities and places, strikes the right balance between sufficient scale and local representation, ensuring that each authority truly reflects the communities it serves.

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# **Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent** | **Criteria 6a, 6b** |
| **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)** | **Criteria 6a, 6b** |


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# Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent

**Criteria 6a.** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged

**Criteria 6b.** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment are central to achieving our LGR objectives in Kent. Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) represent a powerful opportunity to transform how communities take part in local decision-making.**

**Through LGR in Kent, communities will have a stronger voice within their new councils and with partners. We will ensure local insights shape discussions between unitary authorities and service providers, while building on and strengthening existing approaches that are already working well.**

Effective local government is a function of the relationships between elected members, service provision, residents and communities.

Empowered, engaged communities know who they are and what they need.

They know what services are available in their area and they expect to co-design and shape those services.

They see and know their councillors and local service providers.

And they are not afraid to share their perspectives and they are confident they will be heard.

Councils at all levels across Kent and Medway have longstanding commitments to community engagement via county-wide initiatives such as Crowdfund Kent, district and borough forums like the Thanet Youth Council and direct grants for local organisations from parish and town councils like Faversham.

At the heart of this commitment lies a requirement to use LGR as an opportunity to work differently by tempering the tension between the economies and resilience that come with delivering at scale and the granular responsiveness and relevance that thrives on close working with each community.

Having fewer, single-tier councils offers greater opportunities for scaled models, consistent investment of resources and potentially smoother co-operation with statutory partners.

Conversely, a larger number of smaller councils provides a stronger basis to co-design locally-specific services that adapt to communities' distinct needs and priorities.

Regardless of the model selected by government, councils will deliver stronger community engagement and enable genuine neighbourhood empowerment, bringing decisions closer to communities and ensuring services are relevant, joined-up and efficient.

To do this, Kent recognises it requires a new vehicle for community engagement that is at once locally rooted and strategically impactful.

This is the Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC), a neighbourhood hub for partnership working and co-production that unites communities, elected unitary and town and parish councillors and service partners. NACs, working alongside service providers as well as unitary and town and parish councillors, will enable LGR to realise the generational opportunity to improve community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

Alongside the major changes to our council structures, this vehicle will support communities to be closer, more informed and more empowered in the decisions affecting them.

The participation of services will ensure NACs convert local perspectives into meaningful influence, while representation from town and parish councillors will allow close coordination and alignment with local governance and priorities.

Therefore, we have assessed our plans to enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment using three key criteria:

- will the reforms enable communities to make their voice heard by their unitary authority and by partners delivering services?
- will they enable unitary authorities to work effectively with service providers in response to insights from community engagement?
- will they allow unitary authorities to build effectively on community engagement approaches that are already working?

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# Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)

**Criteria 6a:** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

**Criteria 6b:** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are Kent's preferred model for strengthening local engagement through LGR. Led by ward councillors, NACs connect communities with services and decision-making, adapting to local needs and ambitions. They integrate town and parish councils, statutory services, and community groups. Their success will depend on inclusive engagement, strong local partnerships and responsiveness to community priorities.**

## Role of NACs

Central government has made clear that Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are the preferred way for Local Authorities to 'hardwire community engagement into their own structures'[41] through LGR.

Led by ward councillors, NACs are seen as maximising the structural efficiencies brought about by LGR and strengthening localism and community participation across all areas.

Our approach takes advantage of this opportunity to realise these benefits in ways that meet our distinctive Kent context.

This approach has been the prevailing view amongst Kent Leaders and officers during recent engagement with stakeholders

Kent's NACs will be a central hub for local partnership working, connecting residents and communities with services and their council.

Each NAC will identify its initial priorities, which may be specific local issues with significant opportunity to flex new powers and responsibilities around new solutions.

Over time, we anticipate NACs will gravitate towards more strategic arrangements between partners across their areas of responsibility.

NACs will be able to take on different levels of responsibility and decision-making in response to the size and ambition of their area.

Some may begin as largely advisory and consultative, acting as an effective platform to communicate local perspectives to strategic forums in the new unitary authority and other statutory partners.

[41] MHCLG, 'Local government reorganisation: summary of feedback on interim plans', available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-summary-of-feedback-on-interim-plans/local-government-reorganisation-summary-of-feedback-on-interim-plans

Others may request and receive devolved responsibility and budget from their unitary authority.

We want to see NACs tending towards taking on more devolved responsibilities as they develop more mature local ways of working.

**Membership of NACs**

Elected unitary authority councillors will be the anchors of their NAC, ensuring that democratic accountability is central to local collaboration and delivery, and while making listening, understanding, and advocacy integral to their role.

As well as unitary councillors, NACs will include representation from town and parish councils where applicable and statutory services such as police, health, children's and family services.

Residents' associations and business groups will be encouraged to attend, as will Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, to ensure local perspectives and needs are well represented.

Precise membership of each NAC will vary depending on the needs and context of that community but all should enable participation by individual members of the public.

**Scale and local adaptations**

Kent's NACs need to be effective neighbourhood structures.

As such, they need to cover a small enough population for a clear local identity to apply.

NACs in cities are likely to cover a larger population than those in villages, for example.

We will work with stakeholders to identify NAC boundaries and these will be informed by other neighbourhood-level footprints such as primary care networks which cover 30,000 to 50,000 residents.

These areas will cover substantially smaller geographies than those of statutory services and the unitary authorities and NACs will need to work with statutory partners to develop and iterate effective models of engagement.

On the other hand, NACs will cover a substantially larger population than most town and parish councils.

It is recommended these work in clusters to engage with this model.

Across Kent, different community engagement models are in use.

These need to shape NAC formation so that the new NACs work 'with the grain' of local energy and trust.

**Integrating NACs and town and parish councils**

Town and parish councillors will be core members of well-functioning NACs.

The pivotal and established role that Kent's 317 town and parish councils play in community engagement in Kent will remain critical for any new council model.

These hyper-local councils, covering an average population of just over 5,000, are the closest tier of government to residents.

They provide an irreplaceable platform for direct interaction and feedback, and they will allow this representation to be sustained through the disruption and change of LGR.

Town and parish councils in Kent convene and facilitate face-to-face and online discussions and allow residents to ask questions, make suggestions and raise concerns in a setting that ensures their local context is respected and understood.

These forums empower communities and clearly position their unique needs and priorities within broader governmental decisions.

No other level of civic engagement can match their capacity to help smaller towns and villages retain their distinct identity.

Kent's local councils have widely varying numbers of town and parish councils (see below), due to population size and historical context.

Approximately six to 10 town or parish councils might expect to cluster into each NAC, though this will vary in accordance with local need and context.

| Council area | Town and parish councils[42] |
|---|---|
| Ashford | 42 |
| Canterbury | 26 |
| Dartford | 8 |
| Dover | 35 |
| Folkestone and Hythe | 29 |
| Gravesham | 5 |
| Maidstone | 40 |
| Medway | 11 |
| Sevenoaks | 31 |
| Swale | 37 |
| Thanet | 10 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 27 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 16 |
| **Total** | **317** |

**Creating the conditions for community empowerment**

NACs can be a powerful structure to drive community and neighbourhood empowerment in Kent, but success depends on three key conditions for success:

1) inclusive community engagement
2) being rooted in communities and existing structures
3) the ability to drive strategic impact

[42] Borough, District, and Unitary Authority websites

| Conditions for success | How this can be achieved in Kent |
|---|---|
| **1. Inclusive community engagement** | • **Embed openness, inclusion, and co-production** as foundational operational principles. Where communities feel 'done to' they vote with their feet, causing meaningful initiatives to wither on the vine. NACs' membership structures and role provide a context for genuine inclusion and co-production. NAC chairs and councillors must visibly and consistently model these values or participation from day one or participation risks quickly reverting to previous levels. This includes allowing NACs to form on different timelines depending on local appetite and capacity.<br>• **Resource communities to shape their NAC's scope and priorities**: Having the authority and resources to make a difference is at the heart of localism. Clear, permissive frameworks will support NACs to use their knowledge to define and tackle the subjects that matter to them.. NACs will be encouraged and supported, with the potential for seed funding and officer support where appropriate, to explore co-production and participatory models in the design and commissioning of services.<br>• **Poor transport links and digital isolation may hamper participation in rural or deprived communities**. And some places will have less past experience of collective action and deliberation. NACs will need support to work through these questions.<br>• **Confusion or cynicism borne of past restructures may demotivate communities** and prevent engagement. NACs and councils must be transparent about the rationale and roadmap for change and demonstrate with actions that NACs represent a real opportunity to make a difference. |
| **2. Drive strategic impact** | • Unitary authorities will need a **sustained commitment to gather and listen to NAC feedback** when developing strategies. The new councils will need structures and practices that embed listening and learning from NACs which should become advisory partners in policy formation.<br>• NACs will need to be supported and empowered in ways that acknowledge historic inequalities.<br>  ○ Given Kent's diversity, some NACs will need participation and resourcing mechanisms that take account of differences in civic capacity and social infrastructure, including additional capacity-building support.<br>  ○ Unitary authorities will need to be willing to listen closely to quieter voices from less well-resourced communities. |
| **3. Rooted in communities and existing groups** | • Accessible, skilled, and informed unitary and town/parish councillors<br>  ○ NACs will need **councillors who are skilled at local convening, mediating, and building coalitions for action**, sometimes in new ways. To support this, future councils will invest in updated councillor development programmes that include community leadership and co-production methods.<br>  ○ **Councillors will need access to local intelligence and data**, ensuring they can respond with insight and evidence to residents' concerns. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | ○ **Councillor remuneration and practical support** will need to be reviewed where new expectations on councillors' time exceed current commitments.<br>• A sustainable ecosystem of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations<br>○ **Strong and resilient VCSE partners are essential** for translating local priorities into tangible outcomes. Kent's small and medium size VCSEs, which will be vital delivery partners, sources of local insight and anchors of community trust within thriving NACs, are collectively experiencing significant financial strain with more closing than opening in recent years[43].<br>○ Unitary authorities will **build on existing work to strengthen local VCSEs**, and NACs will have an important role to play in amplifying VCSE insights and supporting the commissioning of smaller organisations.<br>• Boundaries that promote local engagement and strategic influence<br>• Unitary authorities will need to **develop boundaries that balance competing requirements** in order to unite meaningful communities with shared concerns, and to be coterminous with statutory and other partner geographies (for example, GPs and primary care networks) to support partner participation and dialogue. Community Governance Reviews going on across the region should also be considered in this process. |

[43] KCC, Headline analysis of the voluntary and community sector in Kent, available online at: https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/61718/Kent-voluntary-sector.pdf

# Section 6: Implementation plan

This section includes:

## Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)

## Programme governance and workstreams

## Summary risks and mitigations

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# Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)

## Joint implementation planning across Kent

We are operating a shared programme across all Kent authorities including a Steering Group, Programme Board and have a mature programme team with shared funding operating across all councils.

We have a long history of working across councils which is a very strong foundation to start our LGR journey from.

We bring significant momentum, shared understanding and common purpose that we will maintain into the future phases of the work.

We have worked extensively with colleagues from previous LGR programmes to discuss their approach and lessons that we can take into our implementation approach for Kent.

Our approach is guided by prudence regarding the scale and complexity of Kent but also ambition regarding public service reform and the role that an effective and efficient reorganisation can play in it.

Our approach is designed to implement reorganisation alongside devolution and the establishment of a Strategic Authority across Kent (see Criteria 5 for more detail).

There are significant synergies from operating a combined devolution and LGR programme where they can be done in parallel.

## Implementation principles for LGR in Kent

We have established principles to guide our approach to implementation and to ensure it is aligned with our wider public service reform ambitions. We will:

1) maintain and enhance our collaborative approach
2) ensure LGR decisions enable the bigger picture of devolution and public service reform
3) plan ahead and communicate
4) engage and co-create with partners and residents
5) support staff and partners on the journey
6) minimise disruption to staff and residents
7) establish governance to ensure delivery
8) transparent decision-making
9) be ambitious in what we can achieve beyond safe and legal
10) Keep provision of services to residents at the forefront of decision-making

## The phases of LGR

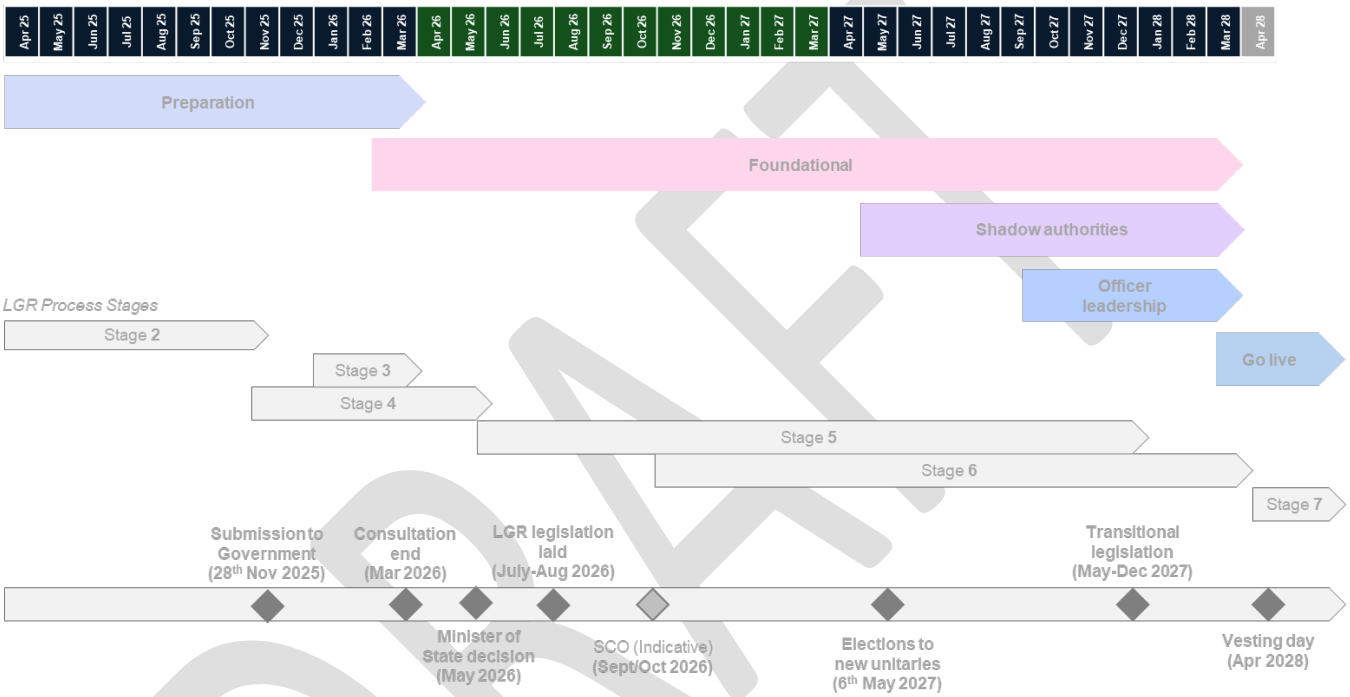
We understand the distinct phases that an LGR programme requires, the relative governance, priorities and resourcing required to make them a success.

Through working with colleagues who have delivered LGR and MHCLG officials we have developed a timeline for reorganisation which maps our phases onto the stages outlined by MHCLG.

We have transitioned our programme approach from development of this proposal into establishing the programme management that we will require through the preparation phase.

The plan and our advance preparation will enable us to deliver efficiently and continue engagement and consistent communication with partners and staff.

This will maintain the resilience of local government and maximise the benefits of reorganisation in Kent throughout the process.




1. **Preparation** Before a decision on the shape of the new councils. We have started work on implementation early to set it up for success. We have a plan for Day One and are ambitious to deliver strong, cohesive councils to deliver transformation and public service reform beyond safe and legal transition. We will appreciate a timely ministerial decision to enable us to move beyond this phase.

2. **Foundational** When a decision on the shape of the new councils has been made, initially before the election of shadow members or appointment of officer leadership.

3. **Shadow authorities** With members elected but only with programme or unofficial groupings of officers for capacity.

4. **Officer leadership** When statutory and senior officers have been appointed and can prepare the new councils working with the appointed councillors.

5. **Go-live** After vesting day when the councils deliver services.

There are fundamentals that will remain in place throughout the reorganisation process:

- staff support and communication
- communication with partners and residents
- access to the right skills and capacity
- clarity on Day 1 requirements and target state
- management of programme creep and over-optimism
- change management
- collaboration and ownership

In addition, these are the summary priorities by phase:

| Phase | Summary priorities |
|---|---|
| **Preparation** | • Collaborative service working – identifying opportunities, risks and shared understanding<br>• Set up the programme (governance, workstreams and finance)<br>• Recruit Strategic Partner(s)<br>• Agree target position for Day One and scenario planning<br>• Set up the plan, timeline and critical path including provisional Day One requirements and milestones<br>• Set up a data hub - gather and maintain consistent programme data<br>• Define and agree scope of LGR-related decisions with sovereign councils |
| **Foundational** | • Adapting programme to specific milestones<br>• Commencing Day One programme plan (what is in appropriate scope of the programme e.g. ICT infrastructure, treatment of systems and contracts)<br>• Service alignment and transformation including reconfiguring existing area based working arrangements to match boundaries of new councils<br>• Options appraisals and preparing for key decisions<br>• Elections<br>• Compliance with Structural Changes Order and legal checks and assurance<br>• Project plan for safely winding down sovereign authorities |
| **Shadow authorities** | • Continuing delivery of Day One programme plan<br>• Appointing Chief Executives and statutory and leadership roles<br>• Member inductions and service briefings<br>• Key decision timetable<br>• TUPE transfer arrangements |
| **Officer leadership** | • Tier 2 and Tier 3 Leadership Recruitment<br>• Service planning<br>• Development of council plan, budget MTFP<br>• Key policies and strategies (strategic priorities and corporate plans, unitary strategic risk register, constitution)<br>• Operating model and staffing allocations |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Preparing for Day One and alignment with Day One vision and change (particularly for vulnerable people and those reliant on services for health and wellbeing). |
| **Go-live** | • Stability and seamless experience<br>• Improvement and post-LGR transformation planning |

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# Programme governance and workstreams

We will operate an LGR Programme Board across Kent and Medway which will report to the existing Leaders group, though acknowledging it does not have decision-making powers, and in due course into Joint Committees.

This Board will include the Chief Executives and Programme Director and will oversee the programme and address strategic issues and risks.

We will establish a Day One Board to focus on managing delivery of the programme plan following the ministerial decision.

This will include tracking progress against milestones and completion of Day One requirements.

We have set up workstreams with Chief Executive sponsors and agreed engagement principles regarding representation from authorities as service leads and on workstreams.

We will set up unitary delivery groups to focus on issues specific to each new council including elections, council plan, member induction, policies and culture.

These groups will increase in importance when working to shadow authorities and when interim heads of paid service are appointed but by starting early, we are setting the councils up for success.

## Our workstreams

We know the importance of operating a single programme across Kent to drive consistency, efficiency and to address challenges where possible.

Our workstreams will cover services and the following key themes:




We will establish Unitary Delivery Groups to focus on preparations for the new councils.

These are collaborative by definition and will be agile to take advantage of opportunities that may arise but relate to one of the new councils individually.

These workstreams will evolve and governance structures will develop to support the Shadow Authorities and establish the new authorities when permanent officers are appointed.

## Stakeholder engagement

We know we need to work closely with partners, staff and residents to avoid LGR having negative impacts on the quality or resilience of services in Kent.

We know we need to communicate early, clearly and transparently with partners and provide opportunities for co-creation and innovation to improve how we work and set the right foundations for public service reform.

We are liaising with stakeholders and are developing an engagement plan to ensure proactive, timely and constructive conversation with stakeholders.

**Our ambition for Day One**

To deliver a seamless transition from the perspective of our residents where those who rely on public services for their health or wellbeing continue to be protected.

We will lay the foundations for improved collaboration across the public sector and harnessing the benefits of transformation.

**Our progress on implementation**

From our experience of reorganisation, we know the value of starting early.

We have a head start as we already work closely together and have a number of shared services, roles and contracts aligned with the new unitary structures.

To build upon this we are working collaboratively to:

- map our ICT infrastructure and enterprise architecture
- set up unitary delivery groups to identify and take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities such as shared roles or where contracts or licenses are expiring
- map our contracts to inform integration opportunities
- bring our service leads together to compare policies and processes and to identify opportunities
- clean up and standardise data across Kent
- establish a Project Management Office
- identify skills and capacity requirements to deliver the programme
- consider further shared roles and skills sharing across councils
- develop a datahub to drive forward the LGR process
- agree how sovereign councils in Kent will operate prior to vesting day
- maintain and transition our LGR programme Board and tools to power the programme
- stakeholder and resident engagement and a significant communications programme

# Summary risks and mitigations

We understand the risks LGR presents and are already working to mitigate them through our programme structure and approach:

- **Disaggregation** – we understand the challenge and risk of disaggregating key services and that this will take up significant programme capacity. We are planning early regarding Day One requirements and supporting services with significant capacity from workstreams to enable them to focus on their specific requirements.
- **Aggregation** – aggregating services requires alignment of policies, processes and systems in addition to fundamentals like organisational culture and ICT infrastructure. These can take time but are critical to achieving the benefits of local government reorganisation.
- **ICT capacity** – ICT is a key service, workstream and enabler of all services and elements of the programme and is a risk to the safe and legal function of the new councils.
- **Collaboration** – LGR requires collaboration across councils, tiers of local government, across political parties and with partners. We are mitigating this through:
    - Building on existing close working arrangements;
    - Developing 'no regrets activities' – a set of actions and decisions that we can deliver across Kent that will benefit the programme regardless of future decision;
    - Discussing protocols for how we will approach LGR.

We know the value of 'good endings and safe beginnings' and will setup the programme efficiently to maintain focus on service delivery in sovereign councils while setting up the future councils for success.

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# Appendix 1: Options appraisal

This section includes:


## Options appraisal process

## Options appraisal results


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# Options appraisal process

**This appendix outlines the approach taken to appraise potential unitary options for Kent by the 14 local authorities. The appraisal was designed to ensure a robust, consistent and evidence-based assessment to support local decision-making on which options should progress to full business case development.**

**The options appraisal approach was rooted in government guidance, with alignment to the six local government reorganisation (LGR) criteria set out in the Secretary of State's letter dated 6th February 2025 and further clarified in June 2025.**

**The appraisal did not produce a ranked list of options or identify a preferred option.**

**Councils drew on the shared evidence base, alongside resident and stakeholder views, to inform their conclusions.**

## Overview of the approach

The appraisal process followed five key stages:

### Step 1: Selection of options for appraisal

The process began with the development of a longlist of 10 potential unitary options.

This longlist was informed by previous work carried out by local authorities, submissions to central government and extensive input from stakeholders, including council officers and Leaders.

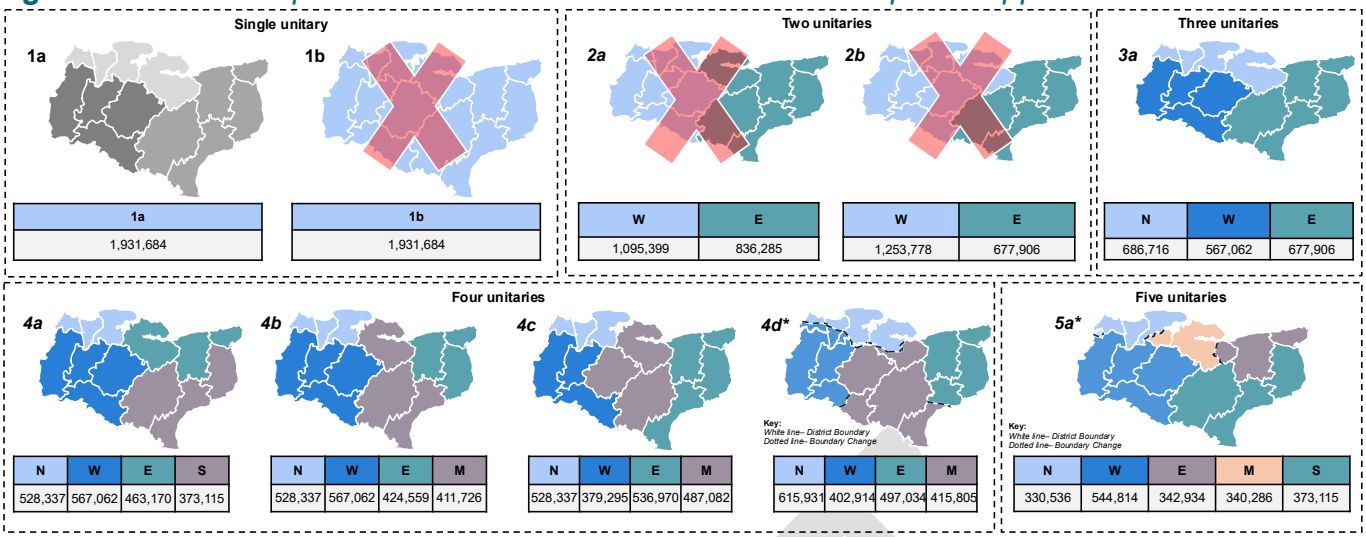
These options encompassed all permutations raised in prior discussions, including suggestions made during initial interviews and strategic workshops.

Following this initial development, a series of engagement sessions were held with Leaders from all 14 authorities.

Through these discussions, three options were jointly agreed to be out of scope for full appraisal, resulting in a refined shortlist of seven options to be taken forward for comprehensive evaluation.

This agreement marked a critical stage in the process, reinforcing the joint ownership of the appraisal exercise.

***Figure X:*** *Potential options that were raised at the start of the options appraisal*




| 1a |
|---|
| 1,931,684 |

| 1b |
|---|
| 1,931,684 |

| W | E |
|---|---|
| 1,095,399 | 836,285 |

| W | E |
|---|---|
| 1,253,778 | 677,906 |

| N | W | E |
|---|---|---|
| 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 |

| N | W | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 528,337 | 567,062 | 463,170 | 373,115 |

| N | W | E | M |
|---|---|---|---|
| 528,337 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 |

| N | W | E | M |
|---|---|---|---|
| 528,337 | 379,295 | 536,970 | 487,082 |

| N | W | E | M |
|---|---|---|---|
| 615,931 | 402,914 | 497,034 | 415,805 |

| N | W | E | M | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |

**To match the current total population of 1,931,684, we applied a proportional multiplier to the original figures for options with boundary changes. This preserves the relative population distribution across the four areas while ensuring the total aligns with up -to-date data.*

## Step 2: Data collection and modelling

To assess each option, a comprehensive dataset was compiled using both publicly-available data sources and specific submissions from individual councils.

This ensured that the appraisal drew from a consistent and authoritative evidence base. Data was initially collected for each existing local authority and then aggregated or modelled to create a coherent picture of each potential new unitary configuration.

For options that involved redrawing boundaries, most notably options 4D and 5A, additional modelling was required.

This included the use of Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)-level population estimates to produce reliable approximations of how existing data would translate to proposed future geographies.

Where appropriate, other datasets not available at LSOA level, were looked at on a pro-rata basis and were based on population estimates to align with the proposed unitary boundaries.

The methodology applied population-weighted approaches and, where possible, consistent assumptions across datasets.

This modelling ensured the integrity and comparability of data across all options.

## *Figure 18: Example metrics*

*Example metrics gathered across all current authorities*

| Metric | Medway (unitary) | District councils | | | | | | | | | | | Kent County Council | Total / Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Ashford | Canterbury | Dartford | Dover | Folkestone and Hythe | Gravesham | Maidstone | Sevenoaks | Swale | Thanet | Tonbridge and Malling | Tunbridge Wells | |
| Population (mid-2024) | 292,655 | 140,936 | 162,100 | 125,011 | 119,768 | 112,411 | 110,671 | 187,767 | 122,748 | 158,379 | 142,691 | 136,853 | 119,694 | 1,639,029 | 1,931,684 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 194 | 581 | 309 | 73 | 315 | 357 | 99 | 393 | 370 | 373 | 104 | 240 | 331 | 3,545 | 3,739 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 1,509 | 243 | 525 | 1,712 | 380 | 315 | 1,118 | 478 | 332 | 425 | 1,372 | 570 | 362 | 462 | 517 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023) | 7,657 | 3,939 | 4,352 | 4,343 | 3,277 | 2,802 | 2,206 | 5,550 | 5,098 | 3,633 | 2,588 | 5,406 | 4,114 | 47,308 | 54,965 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 26,164 | 27,949 | 26,848 | 34,741 | 27,361 | 24,926 | 19,933 | 29,558 | 41,532 | 22,939 | 18,137 | 39,502 | 34,371 | 28,863 | 28,454 |

*Metrics consolidated by potential future unitary authority for options in scope*

| Metric | Option 1A | Option 3A (example) | | | Option 4A (example) | | | | Option 5A (example) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | N | W | E | N | W | E | S | N | W | E | M | S |
| Population (mid-2024) | 1,931,684 | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 | 528,337 | 567,062 | 463,170 | 373,115 | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 3,739 | 739 | 1,334 | 1,666 | 366 | 1,334 | 786 | 1,253 | 287 | 1,267 | 503 | 429 | 1,253 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 517 | 929 | 425 | 407 | 1,444 | 425 | 589 | 298 | 1,151 | 430 | 682 | 793 | 298 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023) | 54,965 | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 | 14,206 | 20,168 | 10,573 | 10,018 | 9,373 | 19,244 | 7,815 | 8,515 | 10,018 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 28,454 | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 | 26,888 | 35,566 | 22,827 | 26,850 | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |

## Step 3: Development of evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'

The appraisal was structured around fourteen evaluation criteria, developed directly in reference to the government's six tests for LGR, as outlined in its correspondence dated 6 February 2025 and subsequent guidance issued in June 2025.

These criteria reflect key considerations such as efficiency, local identity, capacity to deliver sustainable services and readiness for devolution.

For each of the 14 evaluation criteria, a set of specific metrics was identified to enable detailed assessment.

Alongside each metric, a definition of 'what good looks like' was agreed to provide a consistent standard against which all options were evaluated.

While some elements of government guidance were treated as threshold requirements, e.g. minimum standards for all options, others were differentiating factors and thus formed part of the comparative framework.

## *Figure 19: Evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'*

***Evaluation criteria defined to structure options analysis***

| Headline Government Criteria | Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance |
|---|---|
| 1. Establishing a single tier of local government | 1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base |
| | 1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs |
| | 1.3 Single tier governance structures |
| 2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks | 2.1 Appropriate population size |
| | 2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money |
| | 2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities |
| | 2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing |
| 3. High quality and sustainable public services | 3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation |
| | 3.2 Public service reform and better value for money |
| | 3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness |
| 4. Working together to understand and meet local needs | 4.1 Local identity, culture and historical importance |
| | 4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns |
| 5. Supporting devolution arrangements | 5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority |
| 6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment | 6.1 Enabling strong community engagement |

***Example of metrics to be assessed***

| 1.1: Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base | |
|---|---|
| **Metrics/factors** | **What does good look like?** |
| **Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita (2023) (£)** | Balanced GVA per capita between unitaries, suggesting balanced levels of productivity and positive implications for the distribution of economic prosperity among residents |
| **Total Gross Value Added (GVA) (2023) (£m)** | Each unitary has a sufficient GVA to generate tax and there is balance between unitaries, meaning good long-term prospects for all future authorities |
| **Council tax base (number of properties at Band D equivalent)** | All authorities with a sufficient number and profile of properties to provide a council tax base which can sustainably support services, with a reasonable balance between authorities |
| **Council Tax harmonisation / difference in Band D rates** | District areas within a unitary have low to no difference between council tax rates. The least difference between councils within a unitary would provide minimal administrative and resident disruption in harmonising rates |
| **Alignment to major Kent industries** | Unitaries demonstrate alignment to one or more of the key industries |

## Step 4: Assessment parameters and scoring methodology

Each metric was assessed using a standard three-point scale: high, medium or low.

For most metrics, this scoring was determined through statistical balance analysis i.e. evaluating the degree of variation in outcomes across the proposed unitary authorities under each option.

The underlying principle was that a more balanced distribution of characteristics-, e.g. population size, financial resilience, service demand- across new authorities would indicate greater equity and resilience.

The scoring process followed a clear sequence:

1. Identify the range of values between councils under each option for each metric.
2. Determine percentile thresholds for categorising those ranges:
    - High = below 33rd percentile (most balanced)
    - Medium = 33rd to 66th percentile
    - Low = above 66th percentile (least balanced)
3. Assign scores for each option accordingly.

In cases where balance was not a relevant concept, i.e. for county-wide service considerations or unique single-unitary configurations such as Option 1A, bespoke scoring definitions were applied.

Additionally, to allow for further nuance in interpretation, intermediate scores such as Medium/High or Medium/Low were used where appropriate.

No weighting was applied to either the criteria or the metrics. Each was treated as equally important for the purposes of the appraisal.

The model is explicitly comparative: the scores for each option reflect how they perform relative to others in the shortlist, rather than against an absolute benchmark.

## Step 5: Assessment and presentation of results

Each option was scored against every metric, producing an average score for each of the 14 evaluation criteria.

The results were presented via a visual dashboards, supplemented with detailed narrative and commentary to contextualise the findings and highlight key trade-offs or assumptions.

In some cases, particularly for Option 1A, which envisages a single county-wide unitary authority, additional analysis was undertaken to ensure comparability, given that balance metrics were not applicable in the same way as for multi-unitary options.

# Options appraisal results

**All 14 councils worked together to complete an options appraisal prior to business case development. Following joint analysis, review and discussion, the options being put forward are those that Leaders believe are both workable and offer the best value for Kent.**

Following the completion of the appraisal, Council Leaders convened to review the evidence presented.

During this meeting, they collectively identified preferred options to proceed to business case development.

This decision was informed both by the technical appraisal and by the views of their individual councils and local residents.

While the options appraisal itself did not rank or recommend a preferred outcome, it provided the objective foundation upon which political judgements and democratic input could be made.

***Figure 20:*** *Summary assessment by evaluation criteria*

| Headline Government Criteria | Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance | Summary assessment by option | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1A* | 3A | 4A | 4B | 4C | 4D | 5A |
| 1. Establishing a single tier of local government | 1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base | M | H | M/L | M | M/H | M | M/L |
| | 1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs | M | H | M | M | L | M | M |
| | 1.3 Single tier local government structures | L | L | M | M | M | H | M |
| 2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks | 2.1 Appropriate population size | M | H | M | H | M | L | L |
| | 2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money | H | H | M/L | M/L | M/L | M/L | L |
| | 2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities | H | H | M | M | M | M/L | L |
| | 2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing | H | M | M/L | M/H | M/H | M/L | M |
| 3. High quality and sustainable public services | 3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation | M | H | M | M/H | M/L | M/L | M/L |
| | 3.2 Public service reform and better value for money | M | M | M | M | M/L | M/L | M |
| | 3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness | M | M | M/H | M | L | L | M |
| 4. Working together to understand and meet local needs | 4.1 Issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance | M/L | M | M | M | M | M | M |
| | 4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 5. Supporting devolution arrangements | 5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority | L | H | H | H | H | M | M |
| 6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment | 6.1 Enabling strong community engagement | L | M | L | H | M | H | L |

**Option 1a appraised separately due to it proposing a single unitary and an innovative model of local government which is not suited to the appraisal methodology.*

Notes:

- Each evaluation criterion was scored as High, Medium, or Low, based on an average score derived from multiple metrics.
- For most metrics assessed, the process evaluated how well each option achieves balance across all proposed unitary authorities.
- The model is comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed, rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad.
- Minor differences between options still resulted in at least one option scoring High and one Low, due to the comparative nature of the model.

# Appendix 2: Financial modelling

This section includes:


## Financial context

## Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling

## Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model

## Financial modelling summary outputs

## Implementation costs

## Reorganisation savings

## Disaggregation costs

## Phasing and payback period


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# Financial context

**Councils across Kent are under pressure from rising costs and demand. LGR can help to address these challenges, but in itself will not address the scale of the financial challenge.**

## National financial context

The local government sector faces a major financial challenge with an estimated £4 billion funding gap over the next two years.

Demand for critical services is increasing because of population growth and ageing populations.

Councils are also facing rising costs, with adult social care costs estimated to have increased by 9% and children's social care costs by 18% in real terms over the past five years.

There continues to be uncertainty over long term funding arrangements, which have placed many councils in increasingly fragile financial positions. The growing number of Section 114 notices in recent years highlights the systemic strain across the sector, with pressures in Social Care, Housing and Temporary Accommodation, and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits now common drivers of instability.

At the same time, the absence of clarity on the Fair Funding Review, ongoing uncertainty over business rates reform and reset, and the limited scope of multi-year settlements have constrained council's ability to plan sustainably. Against this backdrop, LGR offers an opportunity to strengthen financial resilience through streamlined structures, integrated service delivery, and more sustainable use of resources over the long term.

## The Kent financial context

Combined net revenue expenditure across the 14 Kent councils is £2,337m, with 73% in Kent County Council and 15% within Medway - the authorities delivering statutory adult social care and children's services.

Across Kent, councils are facing sustained financial pressures.

Rising demand in adult social care, children's services and SEND, alongside inflationary cost pressures and debt, are placing significant strain on budgets.

The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery.

## Reserves and funding the reorganisation

Across all Kent councils combined there are forecast Total Usable Reserves of **£959m by 2028/29.**

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the future councils post reorganisation.

It will be the decision of each new council to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

## Debt across Kent councils

Total external debt across Kent stands at £1,730m. Due to the provision of upper tier services, 26% of borrowing stands in Medway and 41% in the County Council. Three districts, (Dartford, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells) report no general fund borrowing.

### Gross budget gap of existing councils

The forecast total gross budget gap for all 14 councils by 2028/29 of **£138.3m**, has therefore not been included within the breakeven analysis.

However, there is recognition that if there were any budget gaps post vesting day, the recurring savings projected from our proposal could contribute to closing any future gross budget gaps across the new authorities.

The financial modelling does not take direct account of existing council budget gaps, which will need to be managed regardless of LGR.

### Impact of Fair Funding 2.0 on Gross Budget Gap

The Fair Funding Review is ongoing nationally. While considered by all councils across Kent, the complexity and uncertainty of the review mean it has not been modelled in detail.

There is recognition that Fair Funding 2.0 is likely to have an impact on councils' financial positions.

There are distinct additional needs in the county related to deprivation which are expected to benefit with the Fair Funding formula but no assumptions have been made within the gross budget gap assumptions above as it is not possible to quantify at this stage.

### Dedicated Schools Grants

The financial analysis assumes that all existing councils will manage their Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG) positions regardless of LGR, therefore DSG surplus or deficits (if any) have not been included within the breakeven analysis.

It will be the decision of each new authority to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation against any funding pressures observed from DSG.

The combined DSG deficit position as at 31 March 2025 was £150.1m (Medway Council had a £16.4m deficit and Kent County Council had a deficit balance of £133.7m).

Kent County Council entered the Department for Education's "Safety Valve" process in Summer 2022, which involves the local authority reforming its high needs systems and associated spending in return for additional funding to contribute to the historic deficit.

Deficits on the DSG is a national problem affecting county and unitary authorities.

At the present time these are being managed through a statutory override which enables a technical adjustment in the statutory statement of accounts to hold these deficits without recognising the impact against General Fund resources.

A consultation is expected by the government in 2026/27 on reforms to SEND, the root causes of deficits and to invite proposals for a resolution.

Members of the Shadow Authorities for the proposed unitary authorities will need to carefully consider proposed reforms in light of their local circumstances.

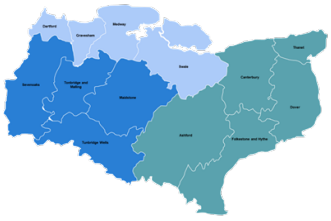
# Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling

**Financial modelling is a key component of the LGR proposal. Its purpose is to evaluate the financial implications of local government reorganisation across Kent in a consistent way across all LGR options.**

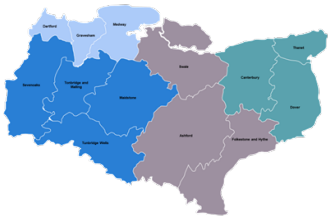
## The LGR options in scope for financial modelling

A single approach to estimating financial impact of LGR was taken across four options for LGR:

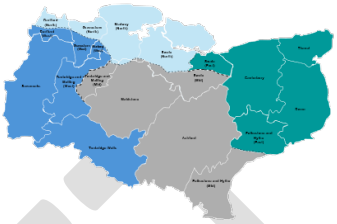
Three unitaries (3A)



Four unitaries (4B)



Four unitaries (4D)*



Five unitaries (5A)*



## Purpose of financial model

The financial modelling aims to:

- estimate the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options
- compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings costs, and payback

## Limitations of scope to date

Whilst being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all Kent finance officers agree that LGR does not in itself provide the solution to the scale of the financial challenge faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG) have collectively agreed on the following position on the analysis carried out:

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.
- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be funded.

- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new authorities may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new authorities.

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# Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model

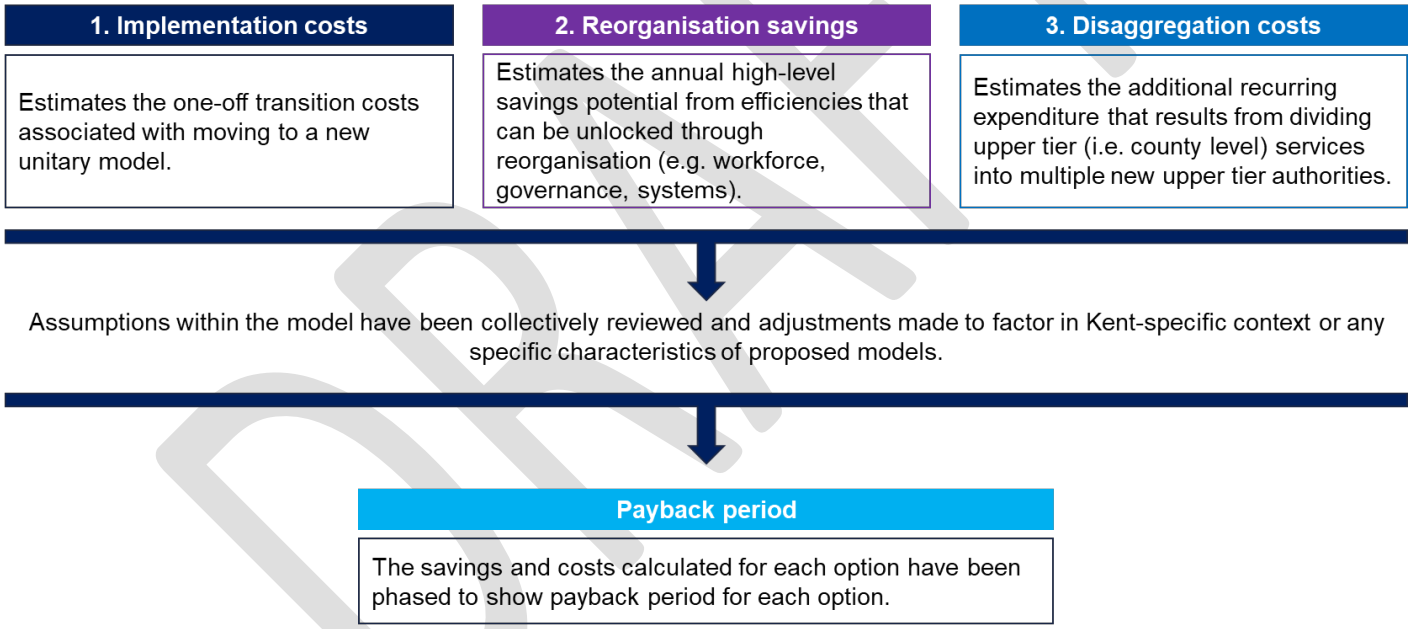
**All finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have reviewed and adjusted financial modelling in order to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to Government.**

## Baselining

1. **Standardised data requests** were completed by all 14 councils, covering revenue budgets, reserves, capital plans, balance sheets and key service metrics. Alongside numerical data, contextual narrative was gathered to support understanding of pressures, risks, and transformation plans.
2. **A consolidated financial baseline** was created, using data returns to combine district, unitary and county budgets into unified figures based on agreed assumptions.
3. Baseline information was then used to create a **financial view of all proposed councils** under each of the five options being submitted to government.

## Three elements of the financial modelling

The financial model is made up of three calculators, which have been applied to all options:




Financial calculations are underpinned by benchmarking of previous LGR proposals and the estimated costs and benefits modelled in those reports, adjusted for the budgets, populations and current local government structures within Kent.

Adjustments have been made to reflect experience of local government reorganisation implementation and through discussion with all Section 151 Officers across Kent.

## Further detail of methodology

The calculation of each element of the model applied is explained separately within this section of the report.

# Financial modelling summary outputs

**The key driver of difference between options are the number of councils being proposed. Due to the assumptions applied within the modelling, implementation costs and recurring costs of disaggregation increase as the number of councils proposed increases.**

Our financial modelling shows **Option 3A, a three-unitary model built on existing boundaries**, has the highest estimated savings of the options modelled, the lowest disaggregation costs and lower implementation costs, resulting in an estimated payback period of 5.4 – 6.7 years.

***Table 28:*** *Summary of financial modelling*

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3A** | (127.8) | 69.4 | (19.7) - (29.2) | 40.2 - 49.7 | 5.4 – 6.7 years |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

### Further analysis

The calculation of each element of the financial model is explained in the following pages.

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# Implementation costs

**Implementation costs definition:** The estimated one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model.

**Method of calculation**:

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of implementation costs per capita.
- Multiplied the benchmarked costs per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total implementation cost per unitary model.
- Applied an uplift of costs per additional unitary authority being created, due to additional costs through establishing governance structures, IT systems, administrative frameworks, etc.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. A specific uplift of £5m was added to reflect the additional complexity and implementation effort to deliver boundary changes.

**Implementation costs**

***Table 29:*** *Implementation cost summary*

| Option | Implementation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **3A** | (127.8) | Implementation complexity and costs are relatively high due to need to integrate and disaggregate to form three unitary authorities, but lower than other options modelled. |

## Categories of implementation cost

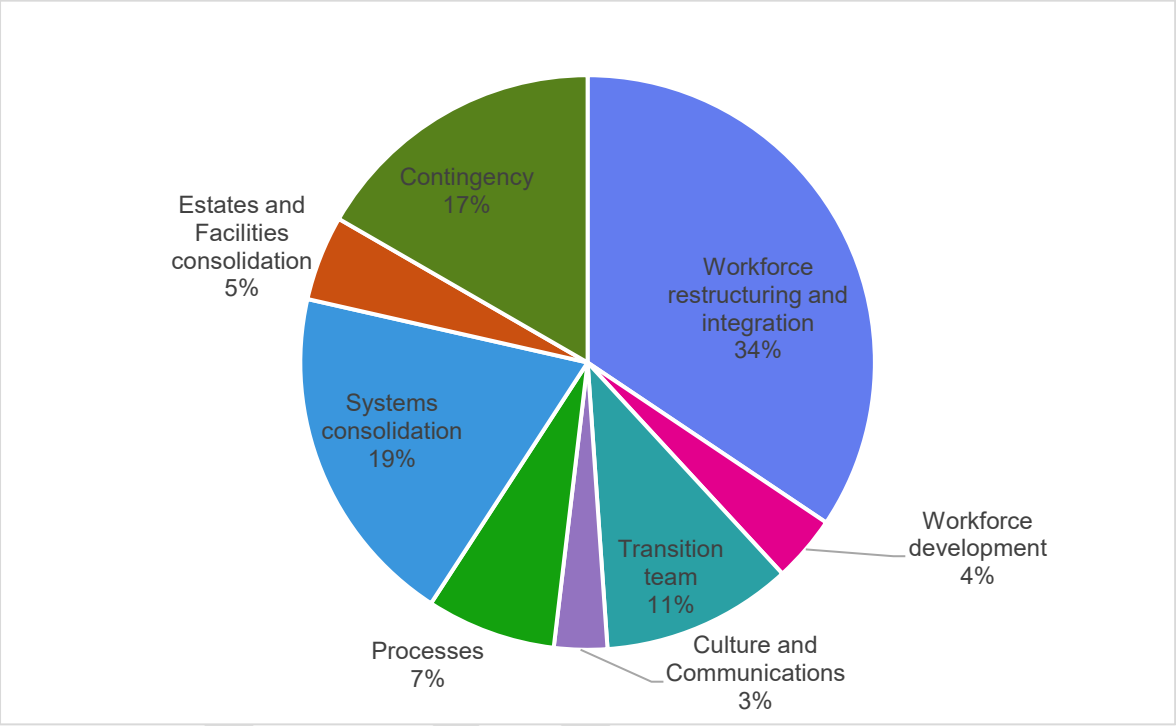
As part of implementation cost benchmarking, categories of implementation costs have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of costs, for any of the LGR options.

***Table 30:*** *Implementation cost categories*

| Implementation cost category | Description |
|---|---|
| **Workforce restructuring and integration** | Costs associated with delivering TUPE and salary harmonisation processes. Compensation paid to employees as a result of any redundancies and pension strain. ***Note: no decisions have been made regarding the size of the future workforce and the potential need for redundancies. A significant proportion of staff reductions could be delivered through staff naturally leaving the organisations.*** |
| **Workforce development** | Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities. |
| **Transition team** | Transition and implementation programme teams including programme management, legal, finance, contract management, finance and other specialist support. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Culture and Communications** | Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. |
| **Processes** | Harmonising processes and facilitating effective service transition, including specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition and new policies and procedures. |
| **Systems consolidation** | Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration and cyber security. |
| **Estates and Facilities consolidation** | Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases. |
| **Contingency** | Additional 20% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates. |

***Figure 21:*** *Implementation cost distribution*




## Phasing of implementation costs

One-off implementation costs have been assumed to start ramping-up from the shadow year and build up by Year 4. The majority of costs are incurred in year 2 and year 3, where the most staff exit costs are expected to be incurred. The phasing of the contingency reflected the overall phasing of costs.

***Table 31:*** *Implementation cost summary*

| Implementation cost category | Shadow Year (FY27/28) | Year 1 (FY28/29) | Year 2 (FY29/30) | Year 3 (FY30/31) | Year 4 (FY31/32) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Workforce restructuring and integration** | 5% | 15% | 20% | 60% | - |
| **Workforce development** | 10% | 50% | 40% | - | - |
| **Transition team** | 25% | 30% | 30% | 15% | - |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Culture and Communications** | 20% | 50% | 30% | - | - |
| **Processes** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 30% | 20% |
| **Systems consolidation** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 30% | 20% |
| **Estates and Facilities consolidation** | - | 5% | 25% | 30% | 40% |
| **Contingency** | 10% | 25% | 30% | 25% | 10% |

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# Reorganisation savings

**Reorganisation savings (gross) definition:** The estimated annual savings from efficiencies achieved through reorganisation, moving from two tiers to one tier of local government, by removing duplication, consolidating services and operating at greater scale.

**Method of calculation:**

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of savings per capita achievable through LGR.
- Multiplied the benchmarked savings per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total saving for per unitary model.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. This included a reduction in the total savings achievable and contingency being added to the model.
- Applied a dilution of savings for the number of unitary authorities being created, due to reduced ability to operate at scale.

### Reorganisation savings

***Table 32:*** *Reorganisation savings summary*

| Option | Gross reorganisation savings (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **3A** | 69.4 | Marginally, the highest level of gross savings of the options modelled due to greater opportunity for economies of scale. |

### Categories of reorganisation saving

As part of benchmarking LGR revenue savings, categories of savings have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of savings.

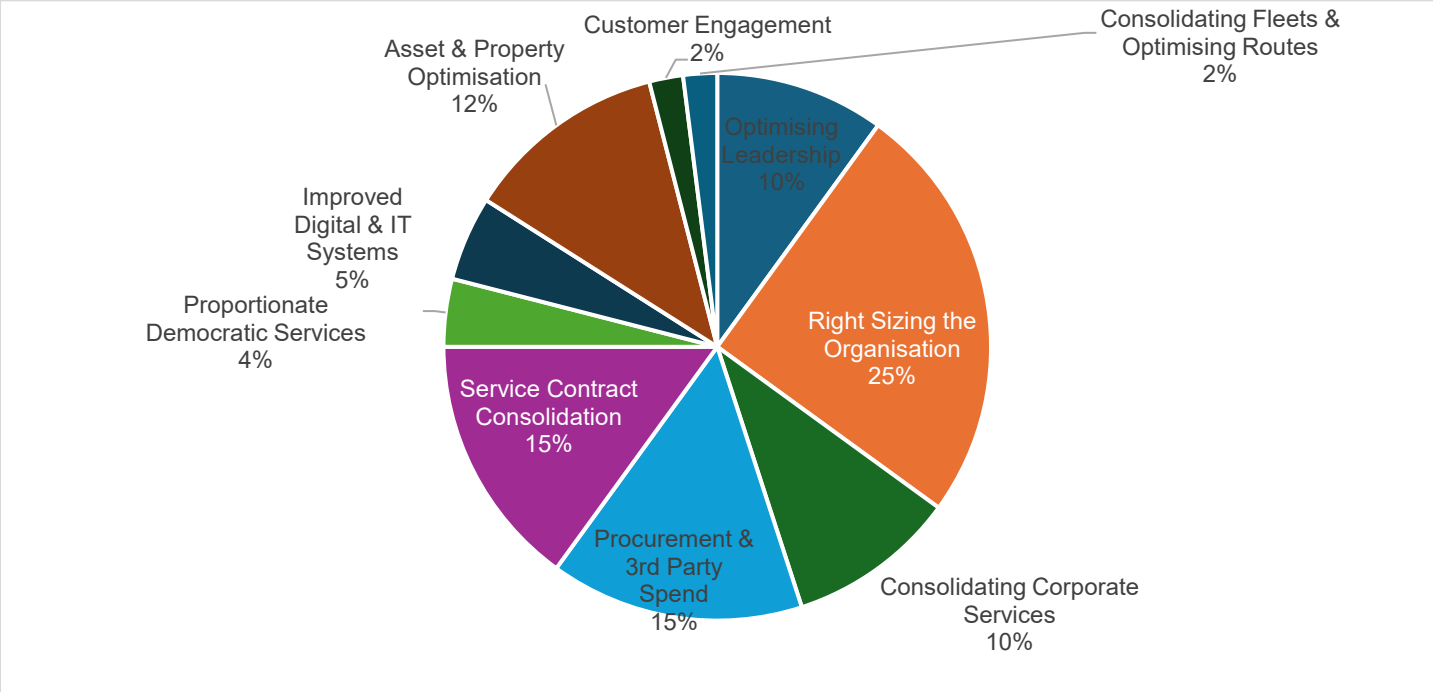
***Table 33:*** *Savings categories*

| Savings category | Description |
|---|---|
| **Optimising Leadership** | Reducing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication by merging similar responsibilities into fewer positions. |
| **Right Sizing the Organisation** | Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation. |
| **Consolidating Corporate Services** | Consolidating back-office functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT). |
| **Service Contract Consolidation** | Implementing new sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced, potentially leading to financial and operational efficiency. |
| **Procurement & 3rd Party Spend** | Centralising procurement, leading to an increase in relative purchasing power and renegotiating terms with suppliers. |
| **Democratic Services** | Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (eg committees, elections). |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Improved Digital & IT Systems** | Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes. |
| **Asset & Property Optimisation** | Reducing asset and property portfolio to align with council needs. |
| **Customer Engagement** | Enhancing customer contact facilities and developing a combined approach to managing customer contact centre, where appropriate including digital self-service. |
| **Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes** | Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs. |
| **Contingency** | 10% contingency applied to reflect risks to savings being achieved. |

The exact proportion of savings may vary by option, and will be considered in greater detail in the next phase of LGR.

***Figure 22:*** *Reorganisation Savings distribution*




*Note: a 10% contingency is also applied but has not been reflected in the graph above*

### Phasing of reorganisation savings

Savings are realised to their entirety by Year 6 and are then ongoing. Most savings are achieved in year 3. A 10% negative contingency has been applied to reflect risk and has been phased in line with when other savings are achieved.

***Table 34:*** *Savings summary*

| Reorganisation savings category | Year 1 (FY28/29) | Year 2 (FY29/30) | Year 3 (FY30/31) | Year 4 (FY31/32) | Year 5 (FY32/33) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Optimising Leadership** | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| **Right Sizing the Organisation** | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| **Consolidating Corporate Services** | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Procurement & 3rd Party Spend** | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |
| **Service Contract Consolidation** | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |
| **Democratic Services** | 80% | 20% | - | - | - |
| **Improved Digital & IT Systems** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 25% | 25% |
| **Asset & Property Optimisation** | 10% | 15% | 25% | 25% | 25% |
| **Customer Engagement** | 20% | 40% | 40% | - | - |
| **Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes** | - | 20% | 45% | 35% | - |
| **Contingency** | 15% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 15% |

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# Disaggregation costs

**Disaggregation costs definition:** The estimated additional recurring expenditure that results from dividing upper tier (i.e. county level) services into multiple new unitary authorities.

### Method of calculation:

- Identified core service categories where disaggregation will drive cost increases as: adult social care, children's services, housing, place services, and corporate and support services.
- Allocated Kent County Council net revenue spend against cost categories defined.
- Applied percentages of additional spend to each cost category to uplift total costs in line with benchmarking from previous LGR cases, to estimate the future level of spend of each cost category.
- Applied an additional uplift to the level of disaggregation costs for each additional unitary being proposed.

### Disaggregation costs

Disaggregation costs are the most significant differentiator between financial model outputs for each option. For each additional council proposed there are assumed to be additional costs, including those associated with management, commissioning and corporate services.

Whilst the costs are significant, it is important to view these within the context of the overall cost of delivering these services. The Kent County Council net revenue expenditure is budgeted to be£1,699m, including £722m for adult social care and £280m for children's services[44].

***Table 35:*** *Disaggregation costs*

| Option | Disaggregation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **3A** | (19.7) - (29.2) | One additional set of 'upper tier' services means the lowest disaggregation costs of the options modelled. |

### Categories of disaggregation costs

As part of calculating disaggregation costs, costs increase by category of spend have been calculated, as summarised below.

A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.

***Table 36****: Disaggregation cost categories and uplift percentages*

| Disaggregation cost category | Description | Disaggregation cost uplift (one additional upper tier authority) % |
|---|---|---|

[44] 2025/26 RA return and Financial returns submitted by Kent County Council

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Adult social care | Duplication of some current adult social care management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend. | 0.7% - 1.8% |
| Children's services | Duplication of some current children's services management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend. | 2.5% - 3% |
| Place services | Duplication of some current place services including management and staffing costs, and additional costs of commissioned spend. | 3.5% |
| Corporate and support services | Duplication of corporate & support services management, staffing and systems. | 3.8% |

### Phasing of disaggregation costs

All disaggregation costs are assumed to be incurred annually from Day 1 of the new authorities.

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# Phasing and payback period

**Payback period definition:** the period taken to reach a net positive financial impact of LGR, once all one-off and recurring savings have been considered.

### Cumulative financial benefit and payback period

Set out below is the year-by-year breakdown of the financial impact of LGR, considering both one-off costs and recurring benefits / costs.

The payback period is driven by the outputs of the three calculators (reorganisation savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs), and the phasing assumptions explained earlier in this Appendix.

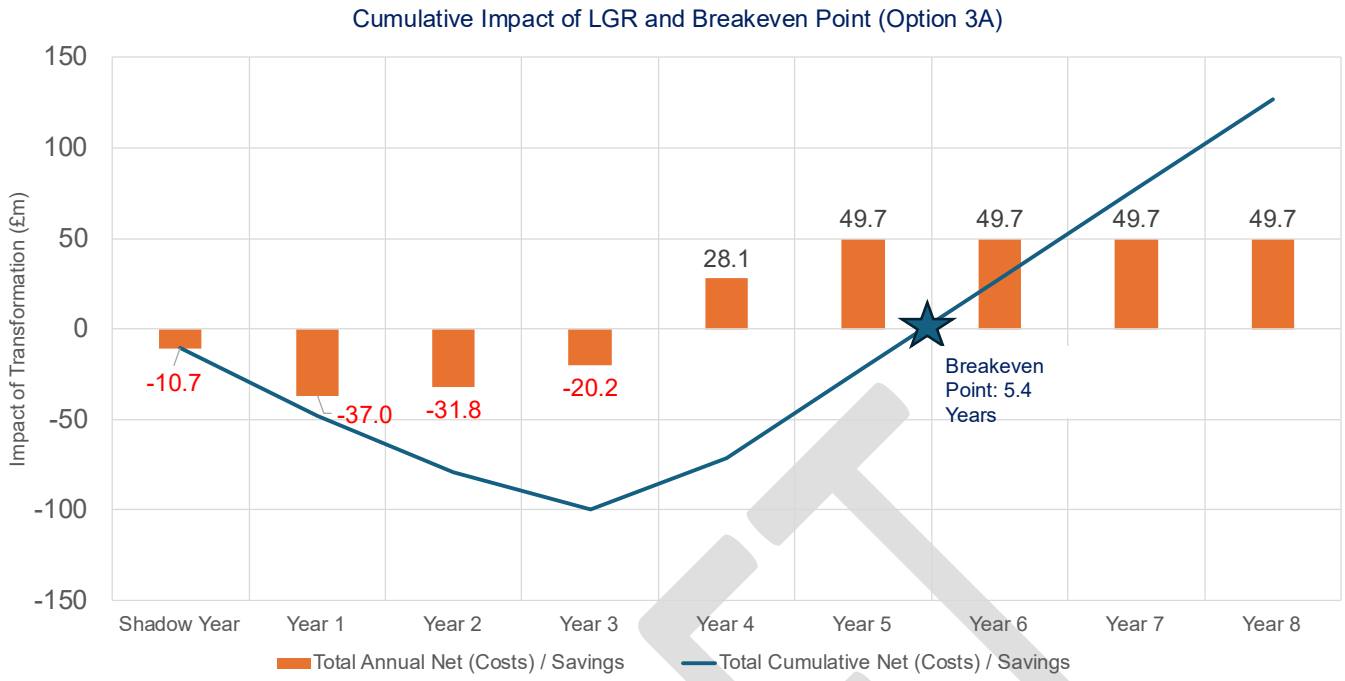
***Table 37:*** *Payback period summary*

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m) | Estimated payback period | Commentary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3A** | (127.8) | 40.2 – 49.7 | 5.4 – 6.7 years | Implementation complexity and costs are relatively high due to need to integrate and disaggregate to form three authorities, but lower than other models |

### Payback period shown over an 8-year period

Set out in the figure below is the estimated cumulative financial impact of LGR for the three-unitary council model.

***Figure 23:*** *Payback over an 8-year period*




*The chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest point in the range.

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# Appendix 3: Key data sources



Figure 8.1 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Economy and Demographics

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Population Size (mid-2024)[45] | 1,931,684 | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 | 528,337 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 | 615,931 | 374,269 | 523,642 | 417,842 | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024)[46] | 3,739.2 | 738.9 | 1,335.1 | 1,665.3 | 365.4 | 1,335.1 | 727.7 | 1,311.0 | 648.6 | 881.7 | 1,020.6 | 1,188.4 | 286.9 | 1,268.0 | 502.3 | 429.2 | 1,252.9 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 516.6 | 929.4 | 424.7 | 407.1 | 1445.8 | 424.7 | 583.4 | 314.1 | 949.7 | 424.5 | 513.1 | 351.6 | 1152.1 | 429.7 | 682.7 | 792.9 | 297.8 |
| 65+ Population (mid-2024)[45] | 384,033 | 113,951 | 113,406 | 156,676 | 83,544 | 113,406 | 99,972 | 87,111 | 102,437 | 74,636 | 123,715 | 83,245 | 52,329 | 108,477 | 77,559 | 59,227 | 86,440 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023)[47] | 54,965 | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 | 14,206 | 20,168 | 10,217 | 10,374 | 16,011 | 13,924 | 12,634 | 12,396 | 9,373 | 19,244 | 7,815 | 8,515 | 10,018 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023)[47] | 28,454 | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 | 26,888 | 35,566 | 24,065 | 25,196 | 25,995 | 37,204 | 24,127 | 29,666 | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |
| Unemployment Rate (%) Apr 24-March 25[48] | 3.7% | 4.0% | 3.0% | 4.0% | 3.8% | 3.0% | 4.3% | 4.0% | 3.5% | 2.5% | 4.2% | 3.5% | 3.9% | 3.1% | 4.7% | 4.0% | 3.5% |

Figure 8.2 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Financials

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |

[45] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales
[46] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
[47] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities
[48] LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (FY28/29)[49] | 703,525 | 225,749 | 231,972 | 245,804 | 173,700 | 231,972 | 151,628 | 146,225 | 202,762 | 156,102 | 187,882 | 156,779 | 111,995 | 222,260 | 120,136 | 110,931 | 138,203 |
| Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes)[49] | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,812 | 1,907 |
| General Fund Borrowing (FY26/27) (£m)[49] | 1,730.4 | 812.0 | 289.1 | 629.2 | 740.3 | 289.1 | 387.0 | 314.0 | 761.3 | 175.9 | 460.0 | 333.1 | 336.8 | 278.4 | 257.2 | 468.7 | 389.3 |
| Financing Costs (Q2 FY26/27) (£m)[49] | 123.6 | 56.1 | 29.2 | 38.3 | 46.7 | 29.2 | 24.8 | 22.9 | 51.8 | 18.0 | 31.0 | 22.8 | 22.4 | 28.1 | 20.6 | 32.5 | 19.9 |
| Net Revenue (Q2 FY26/27) (£m)[49] | 2,313.4 | 1,104.6 | 548.2 | 660.5 | 947.7 | 548.2 | 415.2 | 402.3 | 1,024.7 | 376.0 | 521.9 | 390.8 | 432.7 | 526.6 | 338.0 | 655.7 | 360.4 |
| Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream %[49] | 5.3% | 5.1% | 5.3% | 5.8% | 4.9% | 5.3% | 6.0% | 5.7% | 5.1% | 4.8% | 5.9% | 5.8% | 5.2% | 5.3% | 6.1% | 5.0% | 5.5% |
| Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£m)[49] | 138.2 | 84.9 | 25.8 | 27.5 | 76.6 | 25.8 | 18.6 | 17.2 | 79.4 | 23.3 | 23.1 | 12.5 | 30.6 | 25.0 | 13.3 | 53.1 | 16.2 |
| Total Usable Reserves (FY28/29) (£m)[49] | 959.7 | 394.2 | 258.9 | 306.6 | 338.4 | 258.9 | 175.2 | 187.2 | 359.1 | 178.2 | 215.0 | 207.5 | 189.0 | 247.8 | 137.3 | 202.8 | 182.8 |
| General fund balance (FY28/29) (£m)[49] | 186.4 | 68.7 | 59.8 | 58.0 | 58.3 | 59.8 | 33.5 | 34.8 | 63.1 | 31.7 | 43.0 | 48.6 | 30.6 | 58.0 | 26.6 | 37.4 | 33.8 |
| Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[50] | 364.6 | 137.7 | 113.2 | 113.7 | 108.1 | 113.2 | 70.1 | 73.3 | 121.3 | 79.4 | 85.4 | 78.5 | 74.3 | 109.5 | 51.7 | 60.0 | 69.1 |
| Net revenue expenditure (£m)[49] | 2,273.8 | 833.2 | 651.0 | 789.6 | 645.8 | 651.0 | 494.3 | 482.7 | 748.0 | 432.1 | 609.8 | 483.8 | 397.2 | 625.4 | 405.2 | 416.4 | 429.5 |

[49] Financial data return submitted by councils

[50] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK

Figure 8.3 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Housing and Homelessness



| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Income deprivation rate (2019)[51] | 0.12 | 0.13 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.12 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.14 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.13 |
| Homelessness Rate per 1,000 Households (Jan-Mar 2025)[52] | 1.5 | 6.6 | 4.1 | 8.4 | 5.3 | 4.1 | 5.5 | 4.2 | 5.8 | 2.4 | 6.5 | 4.3 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 2.4 | 4.4 |
| Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement %[53] | 87.2% | 84.4% | 91.9% | 86.2% | 73.8% | 91.9% | 76.2% | 109.9% | 83.3% | 67.6% | 79.3% | 120.4% | 72.9% | 93.9% | 72.6% | 89.5% | 103.8% |
| Number of Households in TA per 1,000 (Jan-Mar 25)[54] | 3.9 | 22.6 | 9.2 | 18.0 | 18.0 | 9.2 | 11.9 | 10.8 | 29.0 | 23.0 | 18.0 | 17.1 | 19.3 | 9.2 | 10.9 | 9.6 | 11.7 |
| Area of land that is protected, including land designated as Green Belt (%)[55] | 47.9% | 41.0% | 67.0% | 35.7% | 46.3% | 67.0% | 27.0% | 40.5% | 40.8% | 82.7% | 32.8% | 38.9% | 68.0% | 65.5% | 29.1% | 32.3% | 38.3% |

Figure 8.4 – Children's Services and Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Number of children in children's social care as % total population (2023-2024)[56] | 0.40% | 0.50% | 0.18% | 0.47% | 0.49% | 0.18% | 0.50% | 0.48% | 0.44% | 0.18% | 0.52% | 0.28% | 0.37% | 0.18% | 0.52% | 0.61% | 0.44% |
| Children's services total spend (£m)[57] | 298.1 | 152.4 | 43.8 | 101.8 | 124.3 | 43.8 | 64.1 | 65.8 | 140.3 | 31.2 | 82.3 | 44.3 | 55.4 | 42.3 | 56.6 | 91.8 | 51.9 |
| Number of registered pupils with SEND as % total population (2023-2024)[58] | 5.0% | 5.0% | 4.3% | 5.7% | 4.3% | 4.3% | 6.0% | 6.2% | 4.9% | 4.2% | 6.0% | 4.8% | 4.4% | 4.3% | 6.1% | 5.3% | 5.5% |

[51] Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics
[52] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[53] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK
[54] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[55] Local authority green belt statistics for England: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK
[56] KCC analysis (districts) & ONS data (Medway) - https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2024
[57] Data from individual councils
[58] KCC analysis (districts) & LG inform data (Medway) - https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/search/26797?text=Number+of+total+EHCP

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Proportion of children in relative low-income families (under 16s) (FYE24) (%)[59] | 17.8% | 18.7% | 13.2% | 21.1% | 18.4% | 13.2% | 22.3% | 19.4% | 18.7% | 12.6% | 22.2% | 16.4% | 17.3% | 13.3% | 21.7% | 19.5% | 20.5% |
| Proportion of children in absolute low-income families (under 16s) (FYE24) (%)[59] | 15.1% | 15.8% | 11.3% | 17.9% | 15.7% | 11.3% | 18.9% | 16.4% | 15.9% | 10.8% | 18.7% | 14.0% | 14.8% | 11.3% | 18.3% | 16.4% | 17.4% |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received (2024/2025)[57] | 24,750 | 7,619 | 6,353 | 10,778 | 5,886 | 6,353 | 7,275 | 5,236 | 6,833 | 3,830 | 8,918 | 5,169 | 3,680 | 6,102 | 5,374 | 3,772 | 5,821 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received Per 100,000 Population (2024/2025)[57] | 261 | 1,452 | 1,444 | 1,985 | 1,467 | 1,444 | 2,129 | 1,613 | 1,452 | 1,326 | 2,117 | 1,581 | 1,471 | 1,443 | 1,953 | 1,440 | 1,957 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced (2024/2025)[57] | 8,470 | 2,505 | 2,254 | 3,711 | 1,849 | 2,254 | 2,516 | 1,851 | 2,210 | 1,423 | 3,189 | 1,648 | 1,304 | 2,160 | 1,789 | 1,136 | 2,080 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced Per 100,000 Population (2024/25)[57] | 562 | 478 | 512 | 683 | 461 | 512 | 736 | 570 | 470 | 493 | 757 | 504 | 521 | 511 | 650 | 434 | 699 |
| Active Education, Health and Care plan (EHCPs) by Home District (As of Jan 2025)[57] | 20,687 | 5,951 | 6,005 | 8,731 | 2,949 | 6,005 | 5,715 | 6,018 | 4,938 | 3,847 | 7,054 | 4,849 | 3,199 | 5,755 | 4,871 | 2,279 | 4,583 |
| Active EHCPs by Home District rate per 10,000 (mid-2024)[57] | 360 | 277 | 361 | 451 | 176 | 361 | 464 | 511 | 257 | 347 | 470 | 399 | 303 | 360 | 474 | 219 | 448 |
| Active EHCPs by School District (as of Oct 2025)[57] | 22,247 | 8,169 | 5,641 | 8,437 | 6,155 | 5,641 | 6,021 | 4,430 | 7,404 | 3,396 | 6,967 | 4,480 | 3,293 | 5,446 | 5,222 | 4,586 | 3,700 |
| Active EHCPs by School District rate per 10,000 (as of Oct 2025)[57] | 387 | 381 | 339 | 436 | 368 | 339 | 488 | 376 | 385 | 306 | 465 | 369 | 312 | 341 | 508 | 441 | 362 |
| No. of Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) Y12&Y13 (2024)[57] | 1,689 | 658 | 420 | 611 | 476 | 420 | 447 | 346 | 590 | 245 | 521 | 333 | 279 | 405 | 357 | 350 | 298 |
| NEET Rate per 10,000[57] | 348 | 385 | 283 | 370 | 360 | 283 | 425 | 351 | 385 | 237 | 404 | 335 | 329 | 285 | 415 | 422 | 337 |
| Child in Need Plans (Mar 2025)[57] | 3,706 | 1,487 | 820 | 1,399 | 1,195 | 820 | 865 | 826 | 1,347 | 534 | 1,052 | 773 | 659 | 793 | 675 | 784 | 794 |

293

[59] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2024

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child in Need Plans Rate per 10,000[57] | 87 | 92 | 65 | 104 | 94 | 65 | 104 | 95 | 93 | 62 | 103 | 85 | 82 | 65 | 100 | 100 | 105 |
| Child Protection Plans (Mar 2025)[57] | 1,428 | 582 | 324 | 522 | 465 | 324 | 333 | 306 | 531 | 190 | 427 | 280 | 247 | 317 | 259 | 314 | 291 |
| Child Protection Plans Rate per 10,000[57] | 34 | 36 | 25 | 39 | 37 | 25 | 40 | 35 | 37 | 22 | 42 | 31 | 31 | 26 | 38 | 40 | 38 |
| Looked After Children (LAC) by placement address (Mar 2025)[57] | 1,967 | 838 | 228 | 901 | 658 | 228 | 631 | 450 | 768 | 155 | 755 | 289 | 294 | 219 | 533 | 509 | 411 |
| LAC by placement address - Rate per 10,000[57] | 46 | 65 | 22 | 82 | 65 | 22 | 94 | 64 | 66 | 22 | 91 | 39 | 46 | 22 | 97 | 81 | 67 |
| Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) looked after (Mar 2025)[57] | 328 | 114 | 30 | 184 | 92 | 30 | 119 | 87 | 100 | 25 | 141 | 61 | 62 | 30 | 103 | 47 | 86 |
| UASC looked after - Rate per 10,000[57] | 8 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 14 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 15 | 6 | 11 |
| Kent LAC Starts (2024/25)[57] | 745 | 353 | 93 | 299 | 271 | 93 | 205 | 176 | 320 | 77 | 245 | 103 | 131 | 90 | 156 | 205 | 163 |
| Kent LAC Starts Rate per 10,000[57] | 22 | 27 | 9 | 27 | 27 | 9 | 30 | 25 | 28 | 11 | 29 | 14 | 21 | 9 | 28 | 33 | 27 |
| Other Local Authority Looked After Children (OLA LAC) placed in Kent (Mar 2025)[57] | 1,611 | 799 | 219 | 593 | 603 | 219 | 424 | 365 | 717 | 162 | 501 | 231 | 315 | 206 | 358 | 449 | 282 |
| OLA LAC placed in Kent Rate per 10,000[57] | 38 | 62 | 21 | 54 | 60 | 21 | 63 | 52 | 62 | 23 | 60 | 32 | 49 | 21 | 65 | 72 | 46 |

Figure 8.5 – Adult Services

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of older adults in adult social care as % total population (2023-2024)[60] | 0.90% | 0.68% | 0.73% | 1.17% | 0.64% | 0.73% | 1.14% | 1.06% | 0.73% | 0.65% | 1.21% | 0.91% | 0.63% | 0.74% | 1.12% | 0.70% | 1.18% |
| Number of adults in adult social care as % total population (2023-2024)[60] | 2.60% | 2.41% | 2.27% | 2.98% | 2.36% | 2.27% | 3.06% | 2.73% | 2.14% | 2.28% | 3.03% | 1.49% | 2.68% | 2.29% | 2.93% | 2.12% | 2.99% |
| Adult social care total spend (£m)[61] | 634 | 202.8 | 162.3 | 268.9 | 159.7 | 162.3 | 162.9 | 149.2 | 185.6 | 109.1 | 214.8 | 124.5 | 83.6 | 155.3 | 117.4 | 115.7 | 162 |
| No. of people aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year (2024-2025)[61] | 405 | 92 | 81 | 232 | 47 | 81 | 157 | 120 | 77 | 41 | 197 | 91 | 47 | 81 | 109 | 34 | 134 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year - rate per 100,000 population (2024-2025)[61] | 27 | 18 | 18 | 43 | 12 | 18 | 46 | 37 | 16 | 14 | 47 | 28 | 19 | 19 | 40 | 13 | 45 |
| No. of people aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year (2024-2025)[61] | 4,212 | 1,369 | 922 | 1,921 | 1,053 | 922 | 1,184 | 1,053 | 1,251 | 565 | 1,540 | 856 | 529 | 896 | 870 | 790 | 1,127 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year - rate per 100,000 population (2024-2025)[61] | 279 | 261 | 210 | 354 | 262 | 210 | 346 | 324 | 266 | 196 | 366 | 262 | 211 | 212 | 316 | 301 | 379 |
| Number of people accessing short term support during the year (18-64) (2024-2025)[61] | 4,363 | 1,111 | 993 | 2,259 | 674 | 993 | 1,490 | 1,206 | 947 | 663 | 1,827 | 926 | 605 | 958 | 1,114 | 436 | 1,250 |

[60] KCC analysis (districts) & LG inform data (Medway) - https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=23182&mod-area=E06000035&mod-group=AllUnitaryLaInCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup

[61] Data from individual councils

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| People accessing short term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-2025)[61] | 46 | 27 | 30 | 58 | 21 | 30 | 62 | 51 | 19 | 6 | 61 | 38 | 31 | 31 | 56 | 21 | 59 |
| Number of people accessing short term support during the year (65+) (2024/2025)[61] | 13,876 | 3,883 | 3,724 | 6,269 | 2,739 | 3,724 | 4,055 | 3,358 | 3,423 | 2,459 | 5,058 | 2,936 | 1,979 | 3,565 | 3,126 | 1,787 | 3,419 |
| People accessing short term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (65+) (2024/2025)[61] | 413 | 341 | 328 | 400 | 328 | 328 | 406 | 385 | 334 | 329 | 409 | 353 | 378 | 329 | 403 | 302 | 396 |
| Number of people accessing long term support during the year (18-64) (2024/2025)[61] | 8,750 | 2,947 | 1,955 | 3,848 | 2,298 | 1,955 | 2,375 | 2,122 | 2,683 | 1,196 | 3,060 | 1,810 | 1,210 | 1,901 | 1,863 | 1,635 | 2,141 |
| People accessing long term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-2025)[61] | 92 | 56 | 44 | 71 | 57 | 44 | 70 | 65 | 57 | 41 | 73 | 55 | 48 | 45 | 68 | 62 | 72 |
| Number of people accessing long term support during the year (65+) (2024/2025)[61] | 14,833 | 4,995 | 3,693 | 6,145 | 3,876 | 3,693 | 3,929 | 3,335 | 4,489 | 2,469 | 4,887 | 2,988 | 2,283 | 3,549 | 3,041 | 2,586 | 3,373 |
| People accessing long term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (65+) (2024-2025)[61] | 442 | 438 | 326 | 392 | 464 | 326 | 393 | 383 | 438 | 331 | 395 | 359 | 436 | 327 | 392 | 437 | 390 |

Figure 8.6 – Democratic

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Size of electorate[62] | 1,348,857 | 477,468 | 407,167 | 464,222 | 367,424 | 407,167 | 298,941 | 275,325 | 428,883 | 269,662 | 362,685 | 287,626 | 228,839 | 390,803 | 238,205 | 238,491 | 252,519 |
| Councillor numbers | 658 | 205 | 214 | 239 | 151 | 214 | 149 | 144 | 180 | 154 | 181 | 143 | 118 | 203 | 123 | 85 | 129 |

[62] Publicly available data

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (including District and County)[62] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Councillor to electorate ratio (current)[62] | 2,043 | 2,329 | 1,903 | 1,942 | 2,433 | 1,903 | 2,006 | 1,912 | 2,385 | 1,755 | 2,001 | 2,008 | 1,947 | 1,924 | 1,937 | 2,794 | 1,958 |
| Level of civic participation (2023-2024) (%)[63] | 40.6% | 35.6% | 43.9% | 42.1% | 20.4% | 25.1% | 24.0% | 26.4% | 21.2% | 27.5% | 25.2% | 22.6% | 24.0% | 25.0% | 22.1% | 19.0% | 28.1% |

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[63] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202324-annual-publication

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# Kent LGR Business Case: Option 4B

# V2.0

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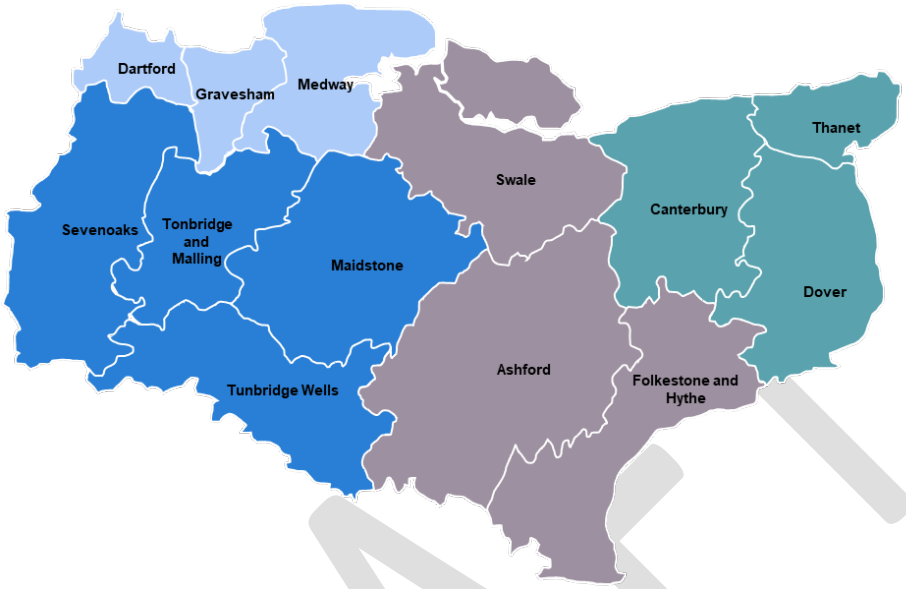
# Foreword (placeholder)

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# Executive summary

### Introducing Option 4B

Supported by the district and borough councils of **[Councils to be inserted],** the Option 4B business case sets out a four-unitary model that balances local identity with strategic capacity.




| | North Kent | West Kent | Mid Kent | East Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 528,337 | 567,062 | 411,746 | 424,559 |
| Current council areas | • Dartford<br>• Gravesham<br>• Medway | • Maidstone<br>• Sevenoaks<br>• Tonbridge & Malling<br>• Tunbridge Wells | • Swale<br>• Ashford<br>• Folkestone & Hythe | • Canterbury<br>• Dover<br>• Thanet |
| | North Kent is a nationally significant growth area within the Thames Estuary corridor. It hosts major infrastructure assets including the Dartford Crossing, Ebbsfleet International Station, and the planned Lower Thames Crossing, supporting high commuter flows, logistics, and cross-regional connectivity. Key urban centres like Medway (Kent's | West Kent combines a high-quality natural environment with excellent connectivity and a skilled workforce. It is a hub for professional services, life sciences, and creative industries. Districts such as Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells, and Maidstone offer strong residential markets, high levels of knowledge-based | Mid Kent includes Ashford, Swale, and Folkestone & Hythe, areas combining fast-growing urban centres with rural and coastal assets. Ashford benefits from high-speed rail and international connectivity, while Swale's Port of Sheerness plays a vital logistics role. Folkestone & Hythe leverages its coastal position and Eurotunnel access | East Kent is defined by its international gateways, strong cultural heritage, and growing sectors in health, life sciences, and the creative economy. Canterbury leads as an education and cultural centre, while Dover and Ramsgate support major trade and port activity. Thanet and surrounding coastal towns offer regeneration |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | largest urban area), Dartford, and Gravesham are driving growth in housing, commercial development, and sectors such as creative industries, engineering, and higher education. The area is well-positioned for clean growth, benefitting from strong transport infrastructure and strategic proximity to London and Europe. | employment, and vibrant town centres. The area's green infrastructure and heritage assets make it attractive for investment and lifestyle-focused development. | for economic growth. The sub-region is well-suited for infrastructure-led development, renewable energy, and resilience-focused investment. | potential and tourism appeal, supported by lower land values and strategic transport links, including High Speed 1. |

## **Purpose and approach** (see section 1)

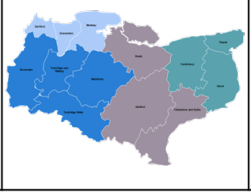
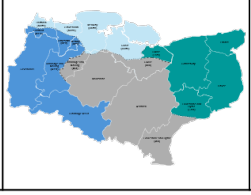
The reorganisation of local government presents a valuable opportunity to redesign a system that better serves the diverse needs of Kent and Medway's residents.

The 14 councils of Kent have collaborated to develop a model reflecting established population and economic centres as well as community and workplace patterns.

Through this joint effort, the councils have developed five business cases addressing the government's six reform criteria, proposing to replace the current two-tier system with more efficient and resilient unitary authorities.

These authorities aim to support devolution, enhance service delivery and strengthen community engagement.

Each proposal is underpinned by a shared evidence base, robust governance, transparent appraisal and extensive stakeholder and public consultation to form a united and evidence-led vision for the future of local government in Kent and Medway.

| | Option 1a | Option 3a | Option 4b | Option 4d | Option 5a |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Approach to drafting** | Kent County Council leading with some shared input around finance and services. | Common approach to drafting with input from councils. | | | |
| **Structure, formatting and branding** | Separate structure, formatting and branding. | Single approach to structure, formatting and branding across four business cases. A significant proportion of content across the four cases will be shared and clearly highlighted within the cases. | | | |

## **The Kent context** (see section 2)

Kent, located in the south east of England, is a geographically diverse and economically important area.

Known as the Garden of England and the UK's Gateway to Europe, it covers 3,739 sq. km with a population of about 1.93 million.

The county combines densely populated urban centres with extensive rural areas.

Its landscape includes the North Downs, The Weald, and a long coastline featuring the White Cliffs of Dover. Rivers like the Thames, Medway and Stour support trade and settlement.

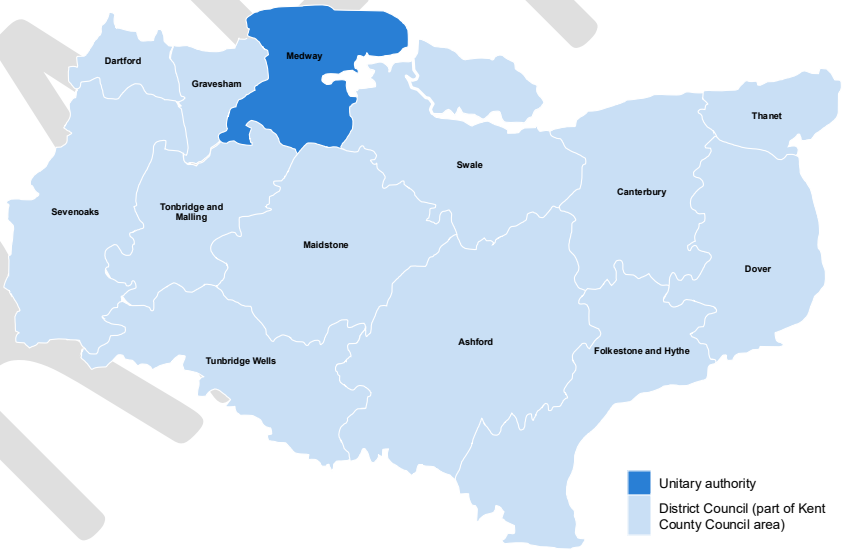
Economically, Kent has evolved from its agricultural roots into a modern, mixed economy encompassing manufacturing, logistics, life sciences, tourism and digital industries.

Major assets include the Port of Dover, the Discovery Park science and technology hub and excellent transport links.

Kent's strategic location, skilled workforce and innovation hubs drive regional growth and support its case for devolution and local government reform.

Kent currently has a two-tier local government system.

At the upper tier is Kent County Council, while the lower tier consists of 12 district and borough councils.




Medway Council functions separately as a unitary authority.

In addition, there are more than 300 town and parish councils handling local-level services.

The current mixed model of service delivery creates complexity and all 14 councils recognise the potential benefits of moving towards a single-tier system with fewer organisations and a more unified governance structure.

**Challenges and opportunities** (see section 3)

Councils across the county face financial pressures and rising demand.

In Kent, key pressures include:

- uneven funding and tax bases
- escalating social care and border-related costs
- workforce shortages and morale issues
- fragmented governance across the two-tier system

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) offers a unique opportunity to create a more efficient, resilient and sustainable model.

By simplifying structures and pursuing devolution, Kent can streamline service delivery, strengthen financial stability, enhance collaboration across sectors, attract investment and build a greater sense of place to ensure more cohesive, accountable and community focused local government services.

**Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation** (see section 4)

Our vision for local government in Kent is:

**Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially-sustainable and accountable local public services delivered in partnership with communities**.

LGR is the catalyst for transformation and reform, creating resilient, digitally-enabled councils rooted in local identity and strong partnerships.

It is crucial that devolution and LGR are linked: structural reform unlocks the powers, funding and flexibility needed to make decisions locally and drive growth.

Kent's ambition is to deliver better outcomes for all residents through sustainable, accountable and community-focused public services.

All councils in Kent are united in their support for devolving powers to a single strategic authority.

This will ensure decisions about Kent are made in Kent, by those who know its communities best.

LGR and devolution are intrinsically linked. To fully realise our vision, we need the powers, funding and countywide collaboration that only a devolution deal and a new strategic Kent authority can provide.

We are committed to securing a devolution deal for Kent at the earliest possible opportunity.

Option 4B offers a future-ready model for Kent's local government, one that combines the scale needed to deliver efficient, resilient services with a deep respect for local identity, community voice and historical continuity.

By creating four strategically-aligned unitary authorities, Option 4B enables transformation across public services, supports financial sustainability through coherent economic geographies and tax bases and unlocks opportunities for Kent-wide collaboration where it adds value.

It reflects the shared ambition of Kent's leaders to build a system that is inclusive, place-sensitive, and capable of delivering better outcomes for residents, while positioning the county to secure devolution powers and drive long-term growth.

**The case for Option 4B** (see section 5)

Option 4B offers a balanced and locally-responsive model for the future of local government in Kent.
By creating four unitary authorities, this approach ensures structures are:

- large enough to deliver efficient, high-quality public services at scale
- small enough to preserve local identity, reflect historic and cultural geographies, and maintain close connections with the communities they serve

This model is rooted in Kent's economic and demographic realities.

It supports long-term financial sustainability by creating authorities with balanced GVA and tax bases, while enabling strategic collaboration across the county to address shared challenges and unlock future growth.

Key strengths include:

- its alignment with government guidelines by ensuring no single authority is disproportionately large, avoiding scenarios where one unit is nearly double the size of another
- it accommodates planned and projected population growth across the region, with each new authority expected to exceed 500,000 residents during the lifetime of their Local Plans
- it ensures a fair distribution of key economic indicators such as GVA and levels of deprivation, fostering the conditions for sustained economic development in all four authorities
- supports councillor-to-electorate ratios within accepted ranges, enabling strong local governance and effective democratic representation in each area

Summarised below are the key arguments for why the four-unitary model is best for Kent.

| Key theme | Arguments | Government Criteria |
|---|---|---|
| **Economic viability and balanced growth** | • Four councils have balanced economic strength, tax bases, and Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita, supporting sustainable growth and resilience.<br>• Each unitary has a recognised economic centre and international ports/airports, providing gateways to trade and economic growth.<br>• Business rates tax bases strong (£70m–£113m retained), enabling financial independence.<br>• Localised economic strategies possible while aligning with wider Kent ambitions.<br>• Council tax bases are sufficient and differences modest, reducing disruption and complexity.<br>• Alignment with Travel to Work Areas supports coherent economic geographies for housing, infrastructure, and labour markets. | Criteria 1, 2, 5 |
| **Balanced population and service delivery** | • Balanced population sizes (411k–567k) enable economies of scale and resilience in service delivery.<br>• Population densities vary logically (urban vs rural), allowing tailored service priorities (eg, urban regeneration vs green infrastructure).<br>• Balanced deprivation and social care caseloads promote equitable service distribution. | Criteria 1, 2, 3, 6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Model supports localised reform while maintaining efficiency and scale.<br>• Existing partnerships and shared services enhance capacity and reduce fragmentation.<br>• Councillor-to-electorate ratios manageable, with structural/community engagement measures proposed. | |
| **Financial resilience and efficiency** | • Healthy financial metrics with balanced reserves, manageable transition costs (£130.9m implementation, payback 10+ years).<br>• Economies of scale in procurement, staffing, IT, HR, and infrastructure reduce duplication.<br>• Simplified governance improves financial oversight and transparency, reducing risk of inefficiency.<br>• Transformation and digital investment enabled by scale and capacity.<br>• Avoids boundary changes, limiting disruption and extra costs.<br>• Invest-to-save principles and joint transition planning minimise financial burden.<br>• Scale supports resilience to absorb shocks in high-pressure services. | Criteria 2, 3, 5 |
| **Local identity and community cohesion** | • Boundaries align with historic, cultural, and service geographies, preserving local identity and social cohesion.<br>• Recognisable community ties maintained (e.g., coastal towns, market towns).<br>• Supports continuation of local traditions, civic institutions, and community networks.<br>• Collaboration across boundaries remains possible for strategic issues.<br>• Each unitary has a clear identity aligned with Travel to Work Areas and education boundaries. | Criteria 1, 4, 6 |
| **Governance and democratic accountability** | • Four councils create a more efficient democratic model, reducing duplication and simplifying decision-making.<br>• Balanced councillor-to-elector ratios enable strong local representation and manageable workloads.<br>• Structural/community engagement measures (parish councils, committees) enhance neighbourhood involvement.<br>• The model supports place-sensitive governance balancing local responsiveness with regional coordination.<br>• Clear leadership and governance frameworks strengthen transparency and accountability. | Criteria 1, 5, 6 |
| **Strategic devolution and regional priorities** | • Four unitary authorities with proportionate population sizes support equitable representation and strong regional partnerships.<br>• Streamlined governance better positioned for engagement with central government and regional bodies.<br>• Aligns with functional economic areas and transport corridors enhancing coordination.<br>• Supports Kent-wide strategic planning (housing, infrastructure, economic development). | Criteria 5 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Collective commitment across councils strengthens the governance case for devolution.<br>• Balances opportunity and risk across authorities, ensuring no one authority is overburdened. | |
| **Transformation and innovation** | • Scale and capacity to deliver complex reforms in social care and invest in digital/data-driven services.<br>• Supports integrated service delivery and breaks down silos.<br>• Builds on existing footprints, minimising disruption and fostering collaboration with NHS, Police, and other partners.<br>• Enables flexible, agile responses to emerging challenges.<br>• Shared transition planning accelerates quick wins and coordinated transformation.<br>• Supports joint approaches to prevention and integrated care. | Criteria 2, 3, 6 |

**Implementation plan** (see section 6)

Kent's LGR implementation plan aims to follow a phased and collaborative approach across all councils, leveraging a well-established shared programme with strong governance and joint planning.

The process is structured into preparation, foundational, shadow authority, officer leadership and go-live phases, each with clear priorities to ensure a smooth transition while driving ambitious public service reform alongside devolution.

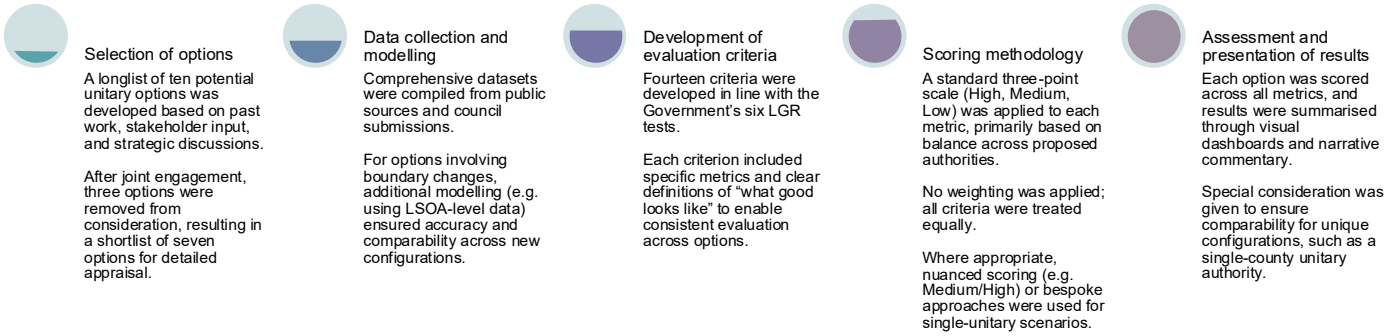
The programme builds on Kent's history of joint working and lessons from previous LGR efforts, supported by targeted governance, workstreams and stakeholder engagement to mitigate risks related to service disaggregation, aggregation, ICT and working together, aiming for a seamless, efficient transition that benefits residents and public services over the long-term.

**Options appraisal** (see Appendix 1)

A rigorous and collaborative process undertaken by the 14 Kent local authorities to appraise potential council governance options. The aim was to provide a robust, consistent, and evidence-based foundation to support local decision-making on which options should advance to full business case development.

The appraisal followed national guidance and was aligned with the Government's six criteria for local government reorganisation, as set out in correspondence from the Secretary of State in February and June 2025. Importantly, the process did not rank or recommend any preferred option but provided a shared evidence base to inform council decisions.

**Key stages of the appraisal process:**




Council Leaders reviewed the appraisal findings, supported by resident and stakeholder views. While the appraisal did not determine a preferred option, it served as an objective and structured basis for informed political judgement and democratic decision-making on which options should proceed to business case development.

**Financial modelling** (see Appendix 2)

Finance officers across all 14 Kent councils have reviewed and adjusted the financial modelling in order to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to government.

The key driver of difference between options are the number of councils being proposed.

Due to the assumptions applied within the modelling, implementation costs and recurring costs of disaggregation increase as the number of councils proposed increases.

The headline numbers for Option 4B are set out below:

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4b** | (130.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) - (48.6) | 18.9 – 34.6 | 7.8 – 14.3 years |

**Data sources** (see Appendix 3)

A common data set was used for all analyses presented in this case.

Details of the data set including its source, structure and variables, are provided in Appendix 3.

# Section 1: Purpose and approach

This section includes:


## Purpose of the business case

## A collaborative approach across all Kent councils


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# Purpose of the business case

## Responding to the Government's request

On 5 February, the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, wrote to all leaders within Kent inviting them to submit options for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The letter reiterated the government's ambition to see the current two-tier system replaced with larger unitary authorities that are better able to deliver services, support economic growth and operate effectively within a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).

The government's letter set out six criteria for successful LGR which informs the structure and content of business cases submitted by Kent councils.

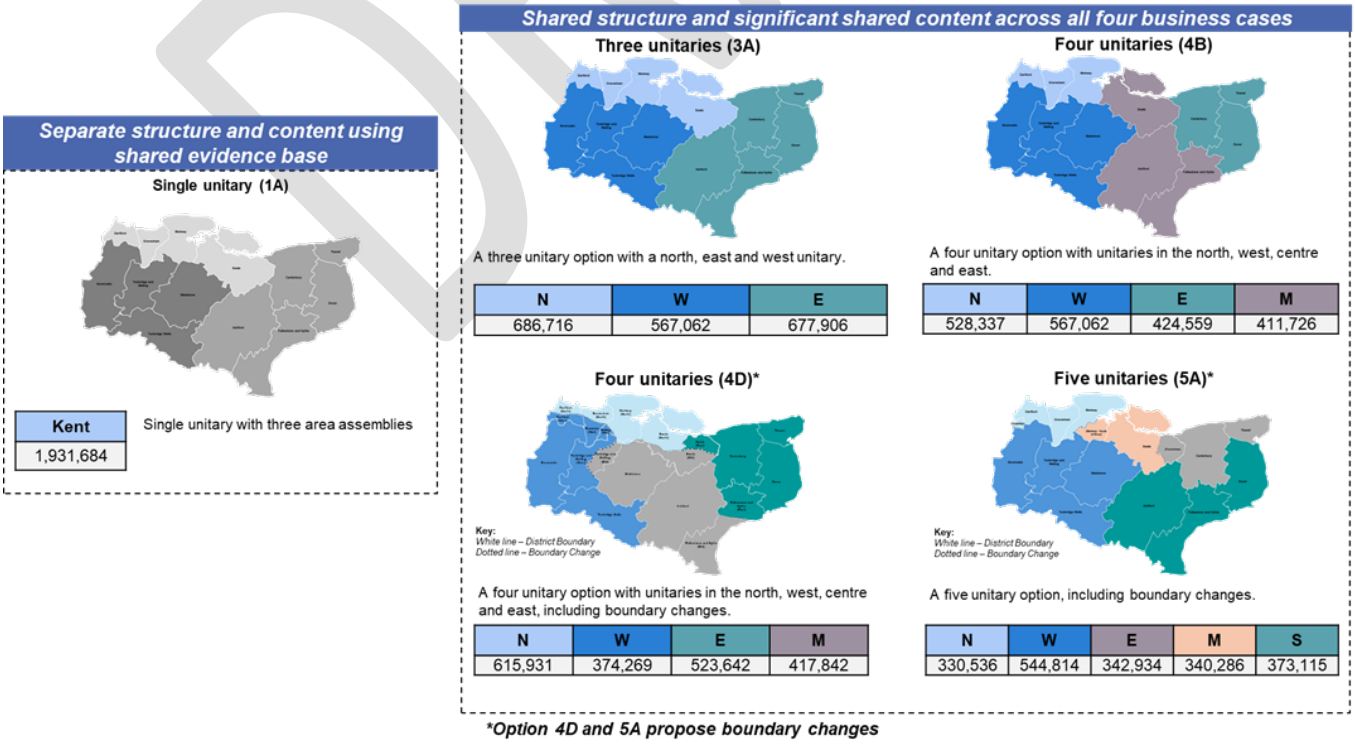
1. Establishing a single tier of local government
2. Efficiency, capacity and resilience to shocks
3. High-quality, sustainable public services
4. Collaboration to meet local needs
5. Enabling devolution
6. Strengthening community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

## Five business cases across Kent

This document is one of five business cases developed across Kent as part of a coordinated programme involving the 14 local councils.

Each business case draws on a shared evidence base, ensuring consistency and a common understanding of the context, challenges and opportunities for public sector reform.

***Figure 1:*** *The five business cases*



Option 1A has been developed by Kent County Council with a structure which varies from the other four cases.

The narrative for the 1A case has not been shared here but the supporting evidence base used is the same.

The other four business cases follow a standard structure aligned with government criteria.

Each document contains a significant amount of shared content as well as option-specific elements. That shared content is clearly marked throughout the documents.

Content that is all or primarily shared across the four cases includes:

- **Section 1:** Purpose and approach
- **Section 2:** The Kent context
- **Section 3:** Challenges and opportunities
- **Section 4:** Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation
- **Section 5:** Case for change
  - **Criteria 5:** Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities
  - **Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement
- **Section 6:** Implementation plan
- **Appendix 1:** Options appraisal
- **Appendix 2:** Financial modelling
- **Appendix 3:** Key data sources

The case for change (section 5) makes up a significant proportion of the proposal.

Within this section the majority of content is option specific, with some shared elements.

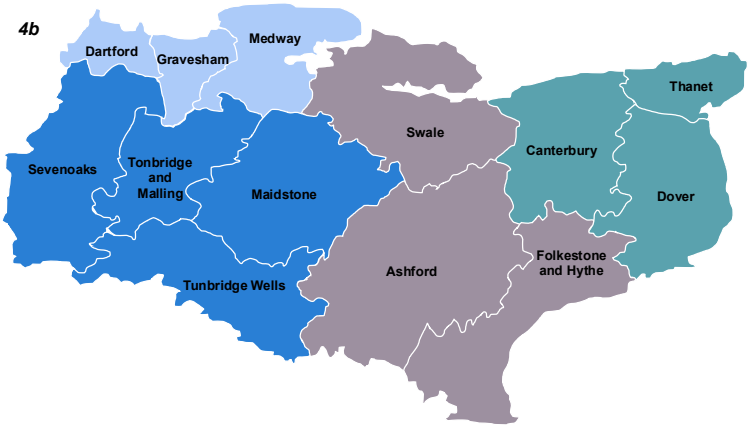
The case for change provides a clear and evidence-based narrative for why the proposed model is the most effective option for LGR in Kent.

**Business case for Option 4B**

This proposal presents a recommended four-unitary model (Option 4B) for the future of local government in Kent.

In response to the Government's letter and subsequent feedback, it sets out a clear case for why this model is best aligned with the Government's six criteria for reform.

***Figure 2:*** *Population across Option 4B*




| Unitary | Areas | Population |
|---|---|---|
| *North* | Dartford, Gravesham, Medway | 528,337 |
| *West* | Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone | 567,062 |
| *East* | Canterbury, Dover, Thanet | 424,559 |
| *Mid* | Swale, Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe | 411,726 |

This option has the support of **[Councils to be inserted]**.

Key factors for putting forward this specific geography are:

- maintains a balanced population range in line with government guideline and avoids creating one authority which is almost double the size of another
- allows for planned and projected growth across the region, which will bring all authorities to above 500,000 populations during the life of their Local Plans
- maintains a balance of key metrics such as GVA and deprivation, supporting the economic growth potential of each new unitary area
- allows for strong representation with numbers of councillors within acceptable ranges of councillor to electorate ratio, enabling strong governance in each unitary.
- avoids the structural and financial complexity of administering boundary changes to existing arrangements.

*Note: For the purposes of proposals to government, future council names are referred to geographically (e.g. as 'East Kent'). These are holding names which are subject to change following confirmation of the option to be implemented.*

# A collaborative approach across all Kent councils

**All Kent councils have prioritised working together, sharing information and full transparency throughout the LGR process. While five business cases are being submitted, we have minimised duplication and continually emphasised what we agree on over our differing views on specific council geographies.**

## Building on strong relationships

The Kent LGR governance framework is firmly rooted in established joint working among the 14 councils across Kent.

This longstanding tradition of partnership underpins every stage of the LGR process, ensuring inclusive and coordinated decision-making.

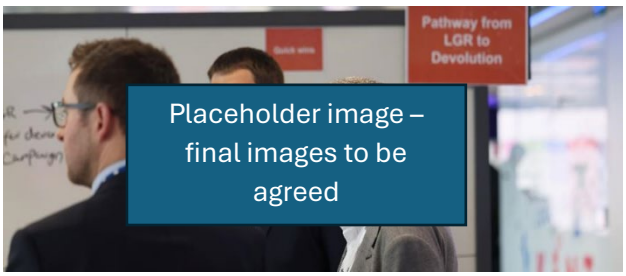
Our governance structure includes several key components:

- **Programme Board:** comprising the 14 Chief Executives, this board meets weekly to oversee progress, maintain strategic alignment and address emerging challenges across all councils.
- **Steering Group:** a smaller group of Chief Executives, Directors and Finance officers convene weekly to provide focused guidance on the development of the business cases, ensuring thorough evaluation and robust planning for reorganisation.
- **Leaders' meetings:** Held monthly, these sessions bring together Council Leaders to discuss and reach consensus on decisions, represent the voices of their communities and ensure residents' interests remain central throughout the process.
- **Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG):** All 14 Kent Finance Officers (S151s) across Kent have held regular meetings and worked together on all LGR related matters, including meeting on a weekly basis to review and challenge financial modelling.

We take pride in the collaborative spirit that has been sustained throughout the options appraisal and the development of multiple business cases.

This collective approach not only strengthens governance but also builds confidence among all stakeholders that decisions are made with shared commitment and mutual respect.

Importantly, this strong foundation will continue to serve us well beyond the decision point and the making of the Structural Changes Order, preparation for the shadow authorities and into the establishment of the successor authorities.






## Options appraisal process

The options appraisal was designed to provide a structured, evidence-based assessment of potential unitary options for Kent, helping to identify the options that should proceed to full business case development.

The approach included the following key steps:

1. **Option selection**: an initial longlist of 10 options was developed based on previous analysis submitted to government and local discussions regarding potential options. Through political engagement across Council Leaders, this was refined to a shortlist of seven options for full appraisal.

2. **Data collection and modelling**: data was gathered from publicly-available sources and direct council submissions which was used to model the potential structure and characteristics of each option, including assumptions where boundary changes were involved.

3. **Evaluation framework**: 14 evaluation criteria were developed, aligned to the government's six LGR criteria. For each criterion, specific metrics and definitions of "what good looks like" were agreed to enable consistent assessment.

4. **Scoring methodology**: each metric was assessed using a three-point scale (high, medium, low), based primarily on balance or distribution across proposed new councils. Additional guidance was applied where balance was not a relevant factor.

5. **Assessment process**: all options were scored against all metrics with results presented in dashboards and supported by narrative commentary. The output was comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad. No weighting was applied and the appraisal did not rank or recommend a preferred option.

Following the completion of the appraisal, Council Leaders met to consider the results alongside the views of their own councils and communities.

At this meeting, they agreed on a set of preferred options to proceed to the next stage, recognising both the evidence from the appraisal and the broader political and public context.

This consistent and transparent methodology ensured a shared evidence base to inform this proposal.

**Appendix 1** of this document outlines the step-by-step process, evaluation criteria and scoring methodology in detail for the options appraisal exercise.

## Stakeholder and public engagement

To ensure local voices have been central to the process, a coordinated, countywide programme of public and stakeholder engagement was carried out between 8 September and 6 October 2025.

This proactive engagement aligned with MHCLG guidance and reflected Kent's political commitment to meaningful community involvement.

A standardised resident survey, agreed across all 14 councils, captured views on local identity, service expectations and future priorities.

Alongside this, a joint stakeholder programme involved talking to key organisations across sectors, with each council engaging its local networks including residents, town and parish councils, voluntary groups and businesses.

Insights from both the survey and stakeholder discussions have directly informed the development of the business case and continue to guide local decision-making. Further details can be found in **Section 5, Criteria 4**.

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# Section 2: The Kent context

This section includes:

**Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy**

**Existing local government structures**

**Partnership landscape**

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# Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy context

**Kent is a diverse and strategically-located county in the south east of England and serves as the UK's gateway to continental Europe. 'Kent' is used to describe the geographical area covered by Kent County Council, Medway Unitary Council and all 12 district councils. The county features a mix of urban and rural settlements such as the Weald and Romney Marsh spread across a large geographic expanse. Kent has a population of approximately 1.9 million with a varied demographic profile. The economy includes key sectors such as construction, life sciences, agriculture, manufacturing, logistics and tourism, supported by major transport links including ports, motorways and railways with high-speed routes into London. The county's geography encompasses coastline, countryside, including national landscapes, and historic towns and villages, contributing to its unique regional identity.**

***Figure 3:*** *Map of Kent*




## Kent geography

Kent is a geographically diverse and economically significant county in the south east corner of England, often referred to as the UK's gateway to continental Europe.

It borders Greater London to the north west, Surrey and East Sussex to the west and south west, and is flanked by the Thames Estuary, the North Sea, the Strait of Dover and the English Channel.

This strategic location, coupled with major transport infrastructure, positions Kent as a vital hub for national and international trade and connectivity.

Covering approximately 3,739 sq. km, the county is home to around 1.93 million people, distributed across a varied landscape of urban and rural settlements.

High-density urban centres such as Medway, Dartford and Thanet (with more than 1,300 people per sq. km) contrast with more sparsely populated, rural districts like Sevenoaks and Ashford, reflecting a population profile in which 73.9% live in urban areas and 26.1% in rural communities.

The county's physical geography is marked by several distinct features.

The North Downs, a prominent chalk ridge, runs west to east through the county.

To the south, The Weald offers rolling, wooded terrain shaped by clay and sandstone.

Kent's extensive and evolving coastline, from the iconic white cliffs of Dover and Thanet to the low-lying landscapes of Romney Marsh and the shingle headland of Dungeness, continues to be shaped by erosion, sedimentation and land reclamation.

Situated in north Kent, Medway forms one of the county's most significant urban areas defined by its estuarine setting and close proximity to London.

Principal rivers such as the Medway and the Stour help define the county's natural geography.

The Medway, in particular, has long served as a vital route for trade and transport, linking inland settlements with the Thames and the North Sea.

Economically, Kent balances its rural heritage with increasing urbanisation and diversification.

Historically celebrated as the Garden of England for its orchards, hop gardens and fertile farmland, agriculture remains a cultural hallmark even as its economic influence has declined.

The region's rich heritage is a significant asset, reflected in its array of listed buildings, historic landmarks and world-renowned sites such as Canterbury Cathedral, Dover Castle, The Historic Dockyard Chatham and the Archbishop's Palace in Maidstone.

These heritage features not only reinforce the county's cultural identity but also enhance its attractiveness as a destination for visitors and investment.

In recent decades, the county's economy has shifted towards manufacturing, logistics, retail, tourism and life sciences, anchored by major hubs such as Discovery Park, Kent Science Park, and the North Kent Enterprise Zone.

This expanding economic base is supported by strong transport links including the ports of Dover and Sheerness, the M2 and M20 motorways and international high-speed rail connections.

This combination of rich natural assets, historic identity and modern infrastructure underpins Kent's evolving role and capacity to deliver sustainable growth within the regional and national economy.

***Table 1:*** *Population and geography data for Kent*

| Council area | Population (mid-2024)[1] | Geography (sq.km)[2] | Population density[3] |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Medway*** | 292,655 | 193.7 | 1,510.7 |
| ***Ashford*** | 140,936 | 580.6 | 242.7 |
| ***Canterbury*** | 162,100 | 308.7 | 525.0 |
| ***Dartford*** | 125,011 | 72.7 | 1,718.8 |
| ***Dover*** | 119,768 | 315.4 | 379.8 |
| ***Folkestone and Hythe*** | 112,411 | 356.9 | 315.0 |
| ***Gravesham*** | 110,671 | 99.0 | 1,118.0 |
| ***Maidstone*** | 187,767 | 393.3 | 477.4 |
| ***Sevenoaks*** | 122,748 | 370.3 | 331.5 |
| ***Swale*** | 158,379 | 373.4 | 424.1 |
| ***Thanet*** | 142,691 | 103.6 | 1,377.2 |
| ***Tonbridge and Malling*** | 136,853 | 240.1 | 569.9 |
| ***Tunbridge Wells*** | 119,694 | 331.3 | 361.3 |
| ***Total*** | **1,931,684** | 3,739.2 | 516.6 |

## Kent population

Kent has a population of approximately 1.9 million, making it one of the largest counties in England by population.

The demographic profile of the county is varied and reflects significant differences in age structure, ethnicity and population growth trends across its 13 council areas.

Kent's population includes a balanced mix of age groups but with distinct patterns across the county.[4]

- Children and young people (0–19 years) make up around 22% of the population. The largest numbers are found in Medway (75,236), Swale (38,217), and Maidstone (44,943).

- Working-age adults (20–64 years) represent the majority of the population at around 59%. Medway (169,350), Maidstone (107,212), and Canterbury (88,840) have the largest working-age populations, reflecting their roles as employment and commuter hubs.

- Older people (65+ years) comprise approximately 19% of Kent's population. Coastal and rural districts such as Canterbury (36,194), Dover (29,736), and Folkestone & Hythe (28,903) have proportionately larger older populations, highlighting the appeal of these areas for retirement and the resulting demand for health and social care services.

Compared to the national average, Kent has a slightly higher proportion of older residents, particularly in its coastal communities, while areas closer to London, such as Dartford and

[1] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[2] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about

[3] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[4] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

Gravesham, are experiencing population growth among younger and working-age adults due to ongoing housing development and improved transport links.

Kent continues to see strong population growth, driven by both internal migration from other parts of the UK and international migration.

The availability of more affordable housing, good transport connectivity and lifestyle factors attract young families, professionals and retirees alike.

Inland districts such as Ashford and Maidstone have experienced significant growth through planned housing developments, while urban centres such as Gravesham and Dartford are seeing demographic change shaped by proximity to London and regeneration schemes.

Kent remains a predominantly White British county with 83.2% of residents identifying as such.

However, the population is becoming increasingly diverse.

Minority ethnic groups now represent 16.8% of the total population with Asian communities being the largest minority group making up 4.4% of the population.

Ethnic diversity is most pronounced in urban areas and towns close to London.[5]

Gravesham has nearly one in three residents identifying as non-White British and is home to one of Europe's largest Sikh Gurdwaras.

In Dartford, 52% of school-age children are now classified as non-White British, highlighting generational change.

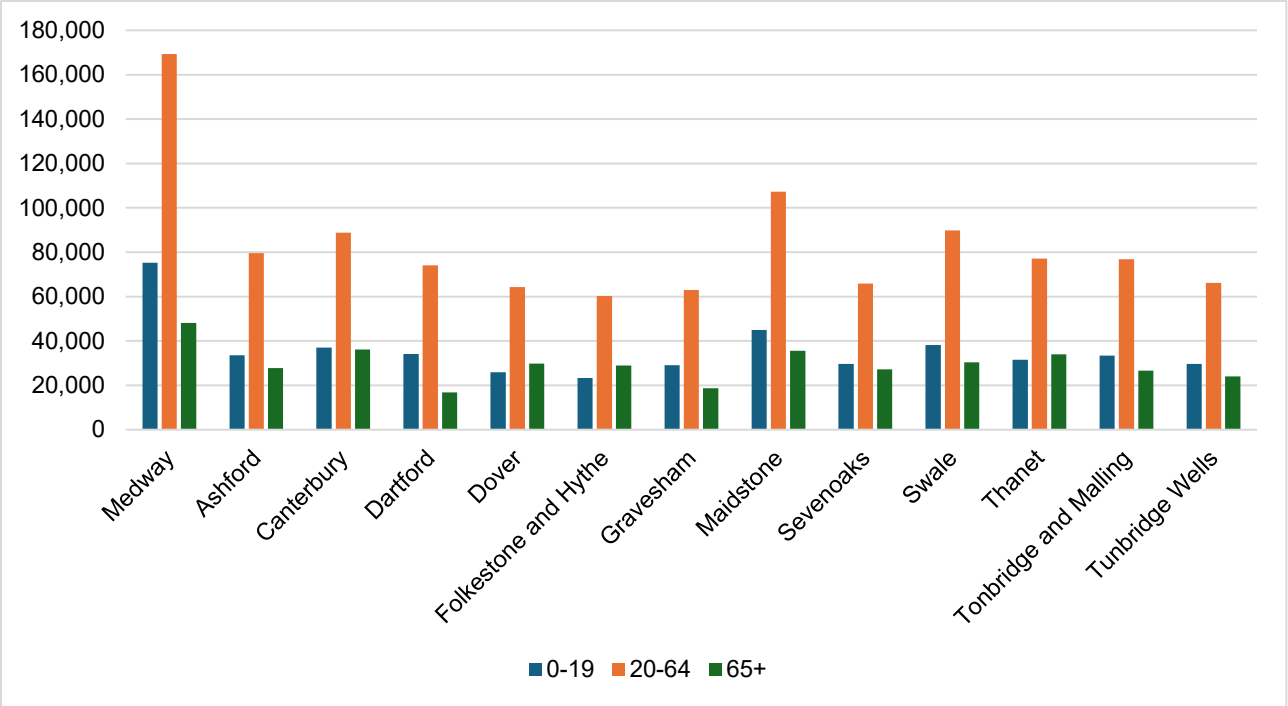
Elsewhere, local factors shape distinct community profiles: Maidstone and Folkestone and Hythe have significant Nepalese communities linked to the nearby barracks and the Gurkha regiment, alongside a growing Eastern European population.

Together, these patterns reveal a complex and locally-varied picture of diversity across Kent.

***Figure 4:*** *Population across Kent (mid-2024)*[6]

[5] https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-kent/summary-of-kent-facts-and-figures/people

[6] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales




## Kent economy

Kent is a dynamic and strategically-important region, often referred to as the UK's Gateway to Europe.

Located in the south east and bordering London, it plays a vital role in national trade, economic growth and innovation.

It is home to thriving sectors including agriculture, logistics, advanced manufacturing, food and drink, life sciences, tourism and the creative and digital industries.

Annual trade through the Port of Dover exceeds £122 billion[7], underscoring Kent's importance as a national and international logistics hub.

Kent is also a centre for innovation. Discovery Park in Sandwich, one of the UK's leading science parks, contributes an estimated £324 million[8] annually to the UK economy through its cluster of life sciences and technology businesses.

Other major business clusters include Kent Science Park in Sittingbourne, Kings Hill in West Malling and Innovation Park Medway, each providing high-value jobs and fostering collaboration with universities and research institutions.

The county's growing network of business parks, enterprise zones and research institutions further strengthens its innovation ecosystem.

[7] https://www.locateinkent.com/why-kent/kent-economy/

[8] https://www.insidermedia.com/news/south-east/kents-discovery-park-provides-324m-of-value-to-uk-economy

Kent's economic vibrancy is matched by strong civic leadership. The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) drives the region's long-term growth strategy, focused on infrastructure, innovation, skills, productivity and the ambition for inclusive prosperity.[9]

Housing and construction are fundamental to Kent's economic vitality, not only by generating significant employment within the sector but also by directly contributing to the government's national target of 1.5 million new homes this parliament[10].

This ambition is intrinsically linked to broader economic growth, as new housing and infrastructure projects stimulate productivity and prosperity, aligning with initiatives like the Kent and Medway Growth Deal.

While the industry faces challenges such as skill shortages and past insolvencies, Kent's specific demographic and economic projections underscore the critical need to strategically plan for and support continued growth in housing and infrastructure to meet future demands.

With excellent transport links to London and mainland Europe, a high quality of life and a strong track record in regeneration and investment, Kent continues to attract residents, businesses and investors.

As the UK's primary trade gateway to the continent, Kent is well-positioned to drive forward regional and national economic priorities.

These strengths also make Kent a compelling candidate for a future devolution deal, enabling greater local control to unlock further growth, tailor investment and deliver on long-term ambitions for the region.

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[9] https://www.kmep.org.uk/

[10] https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-07-30/hcws48

# Current local government structures

**All 14 councils across Kent and Medway recognise the opportunities that arise from moving towards a standardised single tier of local government with significantly fewer separate organisations, each with their own elected members, leadership and governance.**

Kent currently operates under a two-tier local government system comprising Kent County Council as the upper-tier authority, 12 district and borough councils and one separate unitary authority, Medway Council, which operates independently of the county structure.

Additionally, more than 300 town and parish councils take responsibility for delivery at a more local level.

***Figure 5:*** *Current boundary lines in Kent*

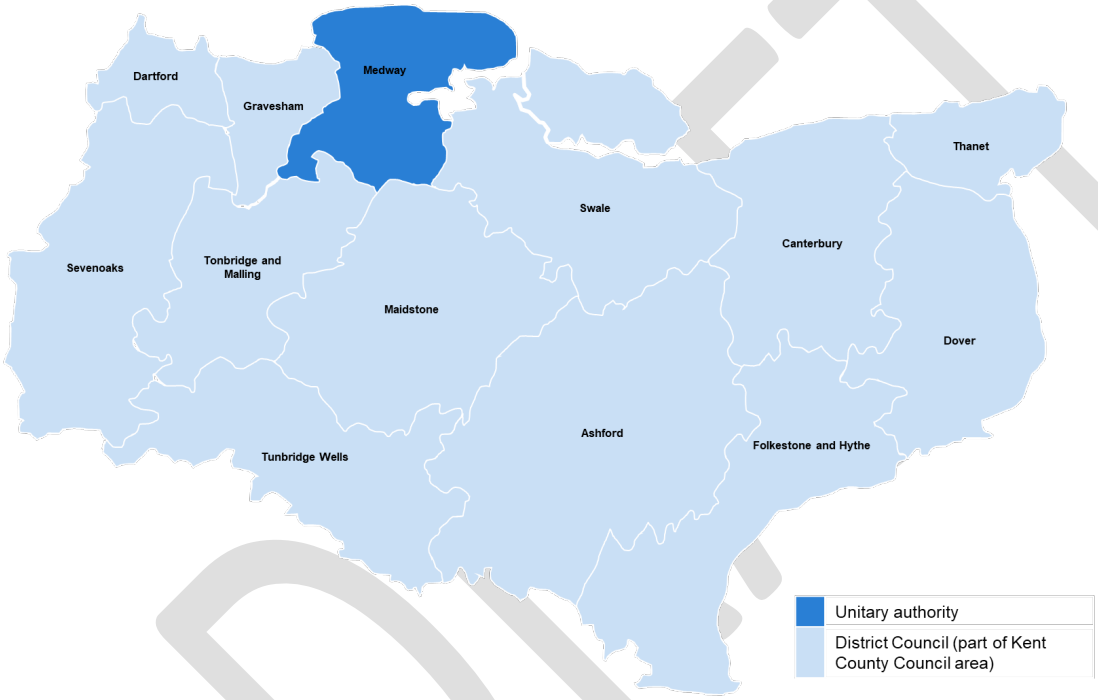



***Table 2:*** *Characteristics of areas in current boundary lines*

| Council | Population (mid-2024)[11] | Geography (sq.km)[12] | Councillors | Net Revenue Budget (£m)[13] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Medway*** | 292,655 | 193.72 | 59 | 346,727 |
| ***Ashford*** | 140,936 | 580.64 | 47 | 26,710 |
| ***Canterbury*** | 162,100 | 308.74 | 39 | 23,580 |
| ***Dartford*** | 125,011 | 72.73 | 42 | 29,009 |
| ***Dover*** | 119,768 | 315.35 | 32 | 28,274 |
| ***Folkestone and Hythe*** | 112,411 | 356.91 | 30 | 22,886 |
| ***Gravesham*** | 110,671 | 98.99 | 39 | 17,943 |

[11] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[12] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about

[13] FY2025/26 data received from KFOG

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Maidstone*** | 187,767 | 393.34 | 49 | 28,323 |
| ***Sevenoaks*** | 122,748 | 370.34 | 54 | 21,978 |
| ***Swale*** | 158,379 | 373.44 | 47 | 30,335 |
| ***Thanet*** | 142,691 | 103.61 | 56 | 21,979 |
| ***Tonbridge and Malling*** | 136,853 | 240.12 | 44 | 22,521 |
| ***Tunbridge Wells*** | 119,694 | 331.29 | 39 | 17,909 |
| ***Kent County Council*** | 1,931,684 | 3,739.22 | 81 | 1,698,857 |
| ***Total*** | **1,931,684** | **3,739.22** | **658** | **2,337,031** |

The current mixed model of service delivery presents ongoing challenges for strategic coordination, financial sustainability and service reform.

In two-tier areas, district councils are responsible for services such as planning, housing, waste collection and leisure while Kent County Council oversees county-wide functions including adult social care, children's services, public health, education, highways, waste disposal and libraries.

By contrast, Medway Council, as a unitary authority, delivers the full range of local government services directly.

The complexity of this system can result in lack of alignment, duplication, inefficiencies and inconsistencies in service provision, making it harder to respond effectively to cross-cutting challenges and to plan strategically at scale.

All 14 councils across Kent recognise the opportunities that arise from moving towards a standardised single tier of local government with significantly fewer separate organisations, each with their own elected members, leadership and governance.

Further details on challenges and opportunities can be found in **Section 3.**

The councils also recognise the need for a strategic authority to enable effective planning for sustainable economic growth.

It is essential preparations for this are dovetailed with the preparations and implementation of unitary local government across the Kent geography to avoid the need and additional cost and complexity of two phases of organisational change.

# Partnership landscape

**Local Government Reorganisation presents an opportunity to further strengthen joint working across the public sector and support partners in addressing long-standing challenges more effectively.**

Across Kent, there is an established culture of joint working between Councils and a wide range of public sector organisations including Kent Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the NHS and colleges and universities.

These partnerships provide a strong foundation for taking forward a more integrated and system-wide approach to service delivery.

There is a complete, coterminous boundary for all public sector bodies within the Kent and Medway area, the importance of which is set out in the government's white paper on devolution.

***Table 3:*** *Key partners across Kent*

| Key partners | Description |
|---|---|
| **NHS Kent and Medway** | Provides healthcare services across Kent and Medway. It oversees hospitals, GP practices, community and mental health support as well as and public health programs for the region's 1.9 million residents, ensuring accessible and high-quality care throughout both urban and rural communities. Sub county collaboration is achieved through distinct Health and Care Partnerships the geography of which is broadly reflective of local health economies. |
| **Kent Fire and Rescue Services** | Operates across Kent and Medway, delivering emergency response, fire prevention, and safety education. The service protects people, property and the environment by responding to fires, road traffic collisions, rescues and other critical incidents while promoting safety through community outreach. |
| **Kent Police and PCC** | Responsible for law enforcement and public safety across Kent and Medway. Kent Police handle crime prevention, investigation and emergency response while the PCC sets policing priorities, manages budgets and ensures the force remains accountable to the public. Service delivery comprises both pan Kent (and Essex) specialist activities with operational policing based on local divisions. Borough commands collaborate with partners in community safety partnerships to address crime and disorder challenge aligned to local needs and priorities. |

Through early engagement with partners during the interim submission phase, a number of consistent themes emerged.

Stakeholders expressed a clear desire to be involved meaningfully in shaping the future of local government and recognised the potential of reorganisation to enable improvements in service

quality and outcomes for the public including through greater alignment of public services, driving efficiency and enhancing preventative approaches.

Partners emphasised the importance of maintaining stability in frontline services, particularly in health and social care, through any period of transition.

Our Kent partners have also consistently supported devolution for Kent and recognise the importance of securing a devolution deal alongside and at the same time as delivering LGR.

Feedback gathered through a range of existing forums, including strategic partnerships, parish networks, business improvement districts (BIDs) and sector-specific meetings, highlighted the need to ensure any future model supports delivery at the right geographic level.

The importance of sustaining local identity, improving responsiveness to community needs and maximising public sector investment were also key messages.

Engagement with staff and elected members across Kent councils has highlighted several practical considerations including concerns about uncertainty, capacity and skills shortages, challenges that LGR could help to address through more streamlined structures and clearer career pathways.

Nonetheless, careful change management will be essential to support staff through any transition.

The feedback from the interim engagement phase has directly informed the development of LGR proposals.

All models seek to build on existing partnerships, promote more joined-up decision-making and integrated service delivery, reduce silo working and ensure future structures are fit for purpose, both in meeting local needs and supporting strategic collaboration across the public sector.

They also provide a strong foundation for potential devolution arrangements, including the opportunity to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority where appropriate, aligning local governance with long-term ambitions for greater powers and funding.

# **Section 3:** Challenges and opportunities

This section includes:

**Key challenges to be addressed by Kent Councils**

**Opportunities through local government reorganisation**

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# Key challenges to be addressed by councils across Kent

**The government's White Paper highlights the challenges facing local government – challenges that are strongly felt in Kent. Maintaining the status quo is not a viable option and has been discounted due to the urgency and scale of the pressures on the current system and the need for structural reform to enable long-term sustainability.**

Local government in Kent is under growing pressure from financial constraints and rising demand for services. There is also a need for structural reform: the current two-tier system, comprising Kent County Council, Medway Council and 12 district councils has inbuilt duplication and inefficiency impacting service delivery, governance, workforce stability and community representation.

These issues are compounded by the county's unique geographic and demographic context.

Kent's financial landscape mirrors national challenges but is intensified by its strategic position and diverse councils.

Wide variation in council debt levels, taxbase strength and income capacity creates uneven financial baselines and sustainability risks.

Higher border-related costs present operational challenges to the county further straining the system.

Protecting existing government investment and identifying a more resilient model is essential.

Below is a summary of the key challenges for Kent, relevant to any future model.

***Table 4:*** *Challenges for Kent*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Funding & financial** | • Persistent financial constraints and the challenge of fair funding, especially when all councils are seeking additional resources.<br>• Rising social care costs, which threaten to consume budgets at the expense of other vital services.<br>• Managing the distribution of debt and services during disaggregation.<br>• Equalising tax bases and service levels across diverse areas ("levelling up, not down").<br>• Ensuring financial resilience in the face of uncertainty and change.<br>• Significant variation in financial viability across councils.<br>• Risk of councils being unable to meet rising demand in adult social care, children's services, school transport, homelessness and contract inflation.<br>• High and unpredictable costs linked to Kent's role in managing border and asylum-related responsibilities.<br>• Unequal Council Tax rates, taxbase strength and income-generating capacity across councils. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Risk of losing central government investment in coastal regeneration, public health, infrastructure and border-related services during transition. |
| **Workforce** | • Recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly for social care roles and in areas close to London.<br>• An ageing workforce with the risk of significant staff losses.<br>• Uncertainty and anxiety among staff during restructuring and transition.<br>• Cultural differences between councils, making it hard to realise opportunities and harmonise working practices.<br>• Staff morale and concerns about job security. |
| **Structure & governance** | • Fragmentation and disaggregation of services leading to inefficiencies and duplication.<br>• Siloed approaches between upper and lower tiers of government.<br>• Strategic misalignment and lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, both internally and for residents.<br>• Loss of identity for town and parish councils and the erosion of local democracy due to fewer councillors.<br>• Branding and image challenges for local government.<br>• Systemic complexity, overlapping responsibilities and inconsistent service delivery across Kent's 14 councils. |
| **Community & identity** | • Maintaining local character and identity amid large-scale restructuring and in future geographies for successor authorities.<br>• Ensuring continuity and quality of services for diverse and geographically dispersed communities.<br>• Meeting the needs of communities with different priorities and expectations.<br>• Addressing the risk that smaller voluntary and community sector organisations may not survive the transition.<br>• Variation in identity, demographics and economic conditions making consistent representation and service access more difficult. |
| **Service delivery** | • Protecting and enhancing key services (adults, children, SEND, homelessness) while managing demand and costs.<br>• Ensuring continuity of services during and after organisational change.<br>• Establishing the culture of the successor councils.<br>• Overcoming skill shortages and ensuring the right talent is in place.<br>• Managing the complexity of integrating services and delivering holistic support.<br>• Challenges arising from Kent's role as a gateway to Europe, including managing transport, borders and asylum-related services across multiple tiers.<br>• Lack of coordinated response for critical functions such as small boat arrivals and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Inconsistent stages of Local Plan development leading to disjointed housing delivery and varied approaches to shared planning challenges.<br>• Fragmentation of Housing Revenue Accounts across councils raising concerns about tenant equity and service consistency. |
| **Change & devolution** | • Managing the pace and uncertainty of change including delays in achieving devolution agreements.<br>• Achieving timely and effective restructuring without losing momentum.<br>• Navigating different cultures and leadership styles across councils and creating new cultural norms.<br>• Ensuring that future devolution delivers real benefits and is not just a structural change. |

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# Opportunities through local government reorganisation

**Regardless of the model selected by government, all future Kent councils will work together to maximise the opportunities arising from the simplification of local government structures and the devolution of powers and funding to a new strategic authority.**

Kent faces a pivotal moment to reshape its future through structural reorganisation.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) presents a strategic opportunity to streamline governance, tackle long-standing inefficiencies and build a more resilient, effective and financially sustainable system.

By moving toward a more unified model, Kent can unlock greater accountability, improve service delivery and position itself to fully capitalise on future opportunities for sustainable growth, investment and devolution.

Below is a summary of the key opportunities for Kent. These are discussed in relation to the proposed model.

***Table 5:*** *Opportunities for Kent*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Public service reform** | • Implementing whole-system approaches to public service reform (e.g. better integration with partners in health) and a more joined-up approach to council services (e.g. integrating adult social care with housing, children's services with cultural services, public health with wellbeing and housing, placemaking and custodianship services including highways maintenance and street cleansing and spatial planning with transport strategy.<br>• Streamlining and digitising processes across currently separated services, including AI, and creating data and evidence hubs to improve efficiency and support collaboration with partners.<br>• Aggregating services to build resilience and enable more holistic strategies across education, housing, skills and job creation.<br>• Creating a single front door for residents to access services, improving accessibility and user experience.<br>• Delivering structural reform that improves financial sustainability through economies of scale, streamlined service delivery and harmonised tax and income strategies. |
| **Growth and devolution** | • Securing devolution deals to unlock new powers and funding, enabling councils to drive growth and shape their own destinies.<br>• Developing a compelling sustainable growth narrative and pipeline to attract investment.<br>• Planning for growth in key areas such as ports, distribution depots, the Thames Estuary and leveraging proximity to London.<br>• Leveraging structural reorganisation as a platform for a more ambitious devolution deal. A strategically-aligned unitary structure would support the establishment of a Strategic Authority, enhancing control over inward investment, tourism and |

| | |
|---|---|
| | infrastructure planning, providing successor arrangements to Visit Kent and Locate in Kent which are now in administration. |
| **Workforce and culture** | • Attracting and retaining top talent, especially in competitive areas near London and Essex.<br>• Succession planning and supporting staff development to address an ageing workforce.<br>• Empowering staff and fostering a positive, proactive culture.<br>• Supporting staff through change, enabling career development and building resilience in the face of organisational restructuring.<br>• Taking the opportunity for a strategic cultural reset to focus more on prevention and the transformation opportunities that come with partner alignment and systems working. |
| **Community and place** | • Focusing on resident-centred approaches including early intervention and impactful prevention.<br>• Enhancing place-shaping by planning places, infrastructure and services more holistically.<br>• Redesigning the sense of place and local identity, reconnecting people with their councils.<br>• Improving accessibility to councils and services for all communities, including those in larger or more diverse geographies.<br>• Designing governance arrangements that better reflect Kent's diverse communities, strengthening local accountability and enhancing trust between residents and local government. |
| **Collaboration and integration** | • Building wider partnerships across health, housing, policing, education and the voluntary/community and faith sector (VCFS).<br>• Sharing knowledge and best practice across Kent and beyond.<br>• Integrating services to deliver more holistic support and strategy.<br>• Creating a one-team culture around place, breaking down silos and enabling more inclusive, joined-up working.<br>• Enabling more cohesive sustainable economic development through unified Local Planning Authorities, ensuring continuity for major projects such as Otterpool Park near Folkestone and Heathlands near Maidstone, while improving cross-boundary management of shared constraints like nutrient neutrality and infrastructure viability. |
| **Trust and engagement** | • Re-establishing trust and confidence in local government.<br>• Improving engagement with politics and public perception of councils.<br>• Adopting fair funding models and ensuring best practice is shared and implemented.<br>• Enhancing local accountability and trust by designing governance arrangements that are more representative of Kent's diverse communities. |

# **Section 4:** Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation

This section includes:

**A shared vision for future local government in Kent**

**Design principles for reorganisation**

**How the vision and principles were co-developed**

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# A shared vision for future local government in Kent

**Our shared vision for Kent is:**

**Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially-sustainable and accountable public services delivered in partnership with communities.**

All Leaders recognise that LGR in itself will not deliver the change required. It must be the catalyst for fundamental reform in how we deliver our services, how we work with our partners and how we deliver for all communities across Kent.

Our ambition for Kent's future is bold and resident-focused. We will deliver local government that is financially resilient, community-rooted and digitally enabled, delivering services that are simpler, smarter and more joined up.

Over the next five years, our shared aspiration for Kent is to:

1 **Strengthen identity** and maintain a deep sense of place and belonging.

2 **Build trusted, transparent relationships** with residents through open communication and active engagement.

3 Provide **seamless, resident-first experience** with easy, secure access to services.

4 Deliver **place-based, people-centred services**, focused on early intervention, prevention and improving life chances.

5 **Use data and technology smartly** to personalise support, anticipate needs and improve outcomes.

6 **Work in strong partnership** with statutory partners including health, education and the police as well as community organisations to meet residents' needs.

7 **Build community resilience** to social, economic and environmental challenges through inclusive, forward-thinking services.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment to residents, staff and place, balancing ambition with stability, innovation with identity and change with care.

**LGR and devolution**

All of the councils in Kent are supportive of devolving powers to a strategic authority to ensure decisions about the county are made in the county.

We do not underestimate the vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport and the benefits it would bring in terms of public service reform.

This is an opportunity to improve life chances for all.

Aligning the timeline of the strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation, by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services or to reaggregate services to go into a strategic authority shortly after.

This approach would require additional cost and create further disruption to staff as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government.

All councils in Kent support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority in April 2028 to operate alongside the future councils.

This will enable a seamless transition, enable synergies in programme management and leadership capacity and provide clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government in Kent will work.

Clarity for partners is critical given our ambitions regarding public service reform.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving service outcomes.

Our ambitions for devolution and the link to LGR is articulated further against Criteria 5.

**Why Option 4B is best placed to deliver on our vision**

Option 4B offers a balanced and future-ready model for Kent's local government, one that combines the scale needed to deliver efficient, resilient services with a deep respect for local identity, community voice, and historical continuity. By creating four strategically aligned unitary authorities, Option 4B enables transformation across public services, supports financial sustainability through coherent economic geographies and tax bases, and unlocks opportunities for Kent-wide collaboration where it adds value. It reflects the shared ambition of Kent's leaders to build a system that is inclusive, place-sensitive, and capable of delivering better outcomes for residents, while positioning the county to secure devolution powers and drive long-term growth.

# Design principles for future Kent Councils

**To achieve our shared vision for Kent, a set of guiding principles have been agreed by its Leaders. While decisions on the detailed design and delivery models of future councils will be a matter for the respective leadership teams, these principles provide a blueprint for future council design.**

***Table 6:*** *Future council design principles*

| Design principles | Description |
|---|---|
| **Service and resident-centric** | • Design services around resident needs with a resident-first mindset.<br>• Maintain strong community identity and accountability.<br>• Ensure equity in service access and outcomes across Kent. |
| **Integrated and joined up** | • Enable seamless, joined-up service delivery across public services.<br>• Build on existing partnerships and promote shared responsibility, and budgets and co-locate where appropriate.<br>• Embed co-production and community-based service design. |
| **Data-driven and digitally enabled** | • Invest in modern digital infrastructure which allows our service delivery and enabling activity to be joined up, and automated where appropriate.<br>• Leverage data and AI to support early intervention, improve decision-making, and target resources effectively.<br>• Ensure transparency and open data to build trust and inform priorities. |
| **Financially resilient and efficient** | • Adopt place-based financial planning and maximise asset efficiency.<br>• Create efficient systems with flexible resource allocation based on demand.<br>• Secure long-term funding and manage transition costs carefully. |
| **Empowered and future-focused workforce** | • Retain and support skilled staff through predictable roles and strong leadership.<br>• Break down silos with collaborative problem-solving structures.<br>• Modernise terms and conditions for a more agile and attractive public service offer. |
| **Clear, consistent and bold leadership** | • Be brave, honest and aspirational in setting direction and expectations.<br>• Deliver clear, shared vision and values, internally and externally.<br>• Ensure messages on devolution, change and local ambition are well understood. |

These principles will be fundamental to navigating the transition, enabling Kent to go beyond safe and legal to deliver world-class public services and a better everyday experience for residents.

## How the vision and principles were developed

The vision for Kent was developed through extensive work with local government leaders, reflecting a shared commitment to addressing key challenges and seizing future opportunities.

On 17 September 2025, Leaders and Chief Executives from across the 14 councils of Kent and Medway came together to co-create a shared vision for the future of local government.

This moment marked a significant step in the LGR journey, recognising LGR and devolution as unique shared opportunities to fundamentally reshape the way local public services are delivered.

The full-day event was carefully designed to help everyone work together, learn from each other and foster strategic thinking among senior leaders.




The aim was to better understand the current landscape of challenges and opportunities, to hear from others who have been through LGR and devolution journeys, and to begin developing a long-term, unifying vision for the future of Kent.

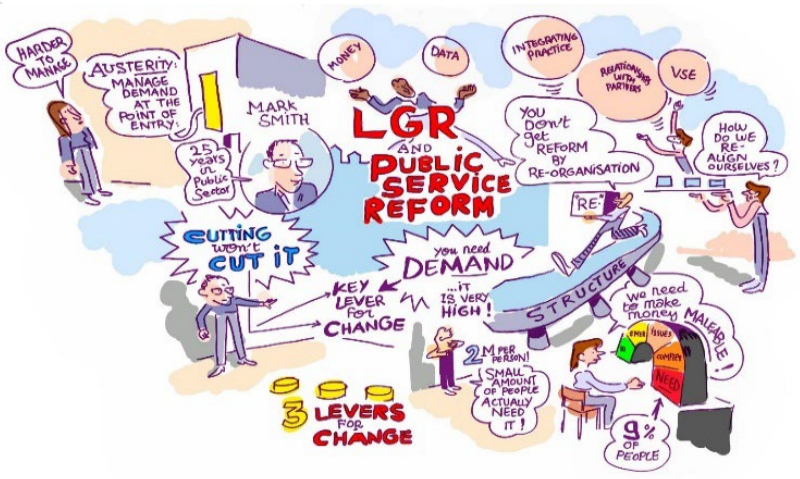
Participants were supported throughout by a facilitation team which guided discussions, captured key insights and ensured all voices were heard.

The vision for Kent emerged through genuine collaboration and a shared desire to improve outcomes for residents regardless of the final council configuration that is chosen for LGR.

The conversations acknowledge ongoing challenges such as financial constraints, workforce uncertainty and service fragmentation, with a shared commitment to tackling these as we progress through LGR.

***Figure 6:*** *Sketches from workshop on 17th September*



## How the vision and design principles will be used

The outputs from the event serve as the foundation for continued work on Kent's LGR journey.

They will inform more detailed design work, engagement with stakeholders and the development of a compelling case for change.

Most importantly, they represent a shared commitment by Kent's leaders to act collectively in the interests of residents, staff, and communities.

This forward-looking framework sets a foundation for a more resilient, responsive and cohesive Kent by 2028.

This vision provides a clear strategic direction for the future of local government in Kent.

It will guide future design discussions, inform service transformation and tie in with the region's approach to devolution.

It will be used to align decision-making, support engagement with residents and partners and ensure implementation remains focused on outcomes for people and communities.



# Section 5: The case for Option 4B

This section includes:


## The summary case for Option 4B

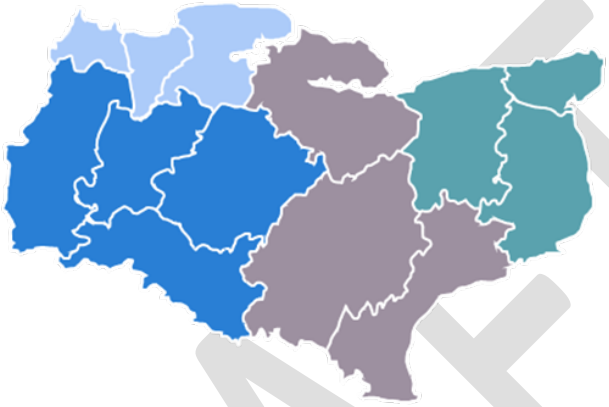
- Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local Government
- Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience
- Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services
- Criteria 4: Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)
- Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities
- Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment


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# The summary case for option 4B

**Option 4B presents a balanced and locally-grounded model for the future of local government in Kent by creating four unitary authorities that are large enough to deliver efficient, high-quality services at scale, yet small enough to preserve local identity, reflect historic and cultural geographies and remain closely connected to the communities they serve. This model aligns with Kent's economic realities, supports long-term financial sustainability through balanced GVA and tax bases, and enables strategic collaboration across the county to meet shared challenges and unlock future growth.**

***Figure 7:*** *Proposed councils (Option 4B) and key metrics by unitary*



| Metric | North | West | East | Mid |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population size (mid-2024) | 528,337 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 366 | 1,334 | 728 | 1,311 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 26,888 | 35,566 | 24,065 | 25,196 |

The summary case for Option 4B, organised by Government's six criteria for LGR, is set out below:

***Table 7:*** **Arguments for the proposed model**

| Government Criteria | The argument for 4B |
|---|---|
| 1 **Establishing a single tier of local government** | • The four councils have balanced economic strength and tax bases, supporting sustainable growth.<br>• Each unitary has a rich and unique industry, thereby supporting economic growth and localism.<br>• The model offers a strong balance in Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita across unitary authorities.<br>• The boundaries reflect both urban and rural communities, preserving local identity.<br>• Councillor-to-electorate ratios ensure strong local representation and manageable workloads.<br>• The model achieves a reasonable and equitable distribution across other key performance indicators. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | **Achieving efficiency, capacity and financial resilience** | • The model facilitates well-balanced population sizes, supporting effective service delivery and building resilience.<br>• Financial metrics (fund balances, debt ratios) are healthy, with significant savings from integration.<br>• Transition costs are moderate, and the structure allows for localised risk management. Provides a balanced population distribution among proposed unitary authorities.<br>• Anticipated transition costs are manageable.<br>• Ensures a stable financial footing with well-balanced reserves.<br>• The model builds on several existing formal and informal partnerships operating at both the political (strategic) and delivery (operational) levels – for example PartnershipOne, a LATCo owned and run by Thanet, Canterbury and Dover councils and the West Kent partnership, a strategic group of senior politicians and officers meeting to work on issues affecting the combined area.<br>• Ashford and Swale have a joint waste collection contract and are part of a shared service for Audit. |
| 3 | **Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services** | • The model maintains existing council boundaries, reducing the risk of fragmentation and ensuring continuity.<br>• Each unitary aligns with health and care geographies, containing at least one acute hospital.<br>• The model supports localised service delivery by strengthening alignment with existing partner organisations.<br>• The model delivers a balanced distribution of deprivation levels and individuals in social care across the new councils. That is, it is expected that there will be balanced caseloads across social care, children's services, and SEND.<br>• Population sizes support localised reform whilst also maintaining economies of scale. |
| 4 | **Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)** | • The structure is aligned with established and recognisable historic, cultural, and service geographies, supporting community identity and social cohesion.<br>• The model fosters alignment with several local identities, including Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) and education boundaries, thereby maintaining community coherence. |
| 5 | **Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities** | • The structure establishes four unitary authorities with proportionate population sizes, supporting equitable representation.<br>• Balanced population ratios across councils enable strong, equal partnership in regional governance and robust decision-making capacity for future strategic authority.<br>• This framework allows the mayoral authority to retain a casting vote, resolving potential split differences of opinion between councils. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | **Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | • The four unitary model promotes balanced civic engagement, as civic participation rates are high and consistent across all councils.<br>• The civic numbers ensure each unitary has enough members to represent their wards, whilst also ensuring there is the right number of members to deliver the strategic functions of the council (without having significant numbers of councillors with no strategic remit)<br>• The model enhances democratic accountability through the creation of smaller unitary authorities with lower councillor-to-elector ratios.<br>• The structure supports tailored strategies for neighbourhood involvement and decision-making. |

## How the case for change is structured against government criteria

What follows is the case for change detail, setting out how the proposed model meets the government's six criteria.

It is a combination of shared content across four options (3A, 4B, 4D and 5A) and content specific to the individual options.

Sections and sub-sections are set out below, including how they align to Government criteria, as stated in the letter dated 5 February 2025.

***Table 8:*** *Structure of case for change and link to government criteria*

| Section headings | Sub-section headings | Govt criteria |
|---|---|---|
| **Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government** | Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base | 1a |
| | Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery | 1b |
| | Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure | 1d |
| **Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience** | Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency | 2a, 2b |
| | Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies | 2c |
| | Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation | 2d |
| | Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government | 2e |
| **Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services** | Improving delivery of key services | 3a, 3c |
| | Public service reform | 3b |
| **Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs** | Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design | 4a, 4c |
| | Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance | 4b |
| **Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities** | Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent | 5a, 5b |
| | Population sizes that support devolution | 5c |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent | 6a, 6b |
| | Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) | 6a, 6b |

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# **Criteria 1:** Establishing a single tier of local government

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base** | **Criteria 1a** |
| **Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery** | **Criteria 1b** |
| **Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure** | **Criteria 1d** |


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# Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base

**Criteria 1a.** Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

**Each of the four new unitary authorities is economically viable with balanced GVA and tax bases supporting long-term financial sustainability. The model brings together places with complementary strengths, ensuring no area is left behind. Each unitary has a recognised economic centre and international port - including airports - providing each with a gateway to trade and supporting future economic growth prospects. This creates a fairer and more resilient foundation for long-term growth.**

### Aligning councils with growth opportunities

The four-unitary model brings together places with complementary economic profiles and infrastructure.

It reflects the distinct economic geographies of the region but brings them together in a way that will support future growth and development.

As set out below, each of the three proposed council areas has significant growth opportunity.

***Table 9**: Growth opportunities across the four unitary areas*

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent** | • Brings together nationally significant infrastructure and economic assets, forming part of the Thames Estuary growth corridor.<br>• Dartford is the strategic gateway to Kent, with the Dartford Crossing and proximity to London, supporting high commuter flows and logistics.<br>• Ebbsfleet International Station has created significant housing and commercial development opportunities.<br>• The Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) will enhance connectivity between Kent and Essex, boosting economic integration and accessibility.<br>• Medway is the largest urban area in Kent and Medway, with a population of nearly 300,000, offering critical mass for growth in sectors such as creative industries, engineering, and higher education.<br>• The area is well positioned for clean growth, with a focus on sustainable urban development and high-tech industry.<br>• Gravesham offers key opportunities in transport and infrastructure investment, given its proximity to Ebbsfleet, the River Thames, and the M25.<br>• North Kent benefits from strong public transport and road infrastructure, enabling efficient access to London, the South East, and Europe.<br>• A location of national significance within the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, with Medway and Dartford supporting strategic housing and employment growth. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **West Kent** | • Characterised by high quality natural environments, strategic connectivity and a highly skilled workforce, supporting professional services, life sciences and creative sectors.<br>• Sevenoaks has one of the highest levels of Green Belt in the UK and includes two AONBs, Kent Downs and High Weald, covering 60% of the district.<br>• Tonbridge & Malling is predominantly rural but contains key market towns, contributing to its strength in small-scale industry, logistics, and a growing professional services sector.<br>• Tunbridge Wells serves as a cultural and economic centre in West Kent, with a strong residential property market and an educated workforce.<br>• Maidstone, the county town of Kent, hosts a concentration of public services and legal institutions, and is an important employment hub for the region.<br>• The area has a high proportion of knowledge-based employment and is well-positioned to attract inward investment from London and beyond.<br>• Green infrastructure, heritage towns and quality of life are key drivers of investment in the sub-region. |
| **East Kent** | • Canterbury is a sub-regional economic centre, with significant cultural heritage, including three UNESCO World Heritage Sites.<br>• The higher education sector is well represented in Canterbury through three universities and across east Kent through an established further education sector.<br>• The cooperation on health / life sciences between the two larger universities and skills growth between the higher education sector and Discovery Park in Sandwich provide significant growth opportunities in both skills and jobs<br>• Thanet boasts extensive coastline, Blue Flag beaches, and a growing creative and digital economy centred around Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs.<br>• Thanet is also home to a large and ageing population, necessitating investment in health and social infrastructure, while offering potential for the growth of health and care industries.<br>• Dover is a critical international gateway, with the Port of Dover handling a significant amount of UK trade in goods.<br>• Ports in Ramsgate and Whitstable offer opportunities to maximise UK trade capacity, resilience and industrial growth<br>• The potential reopening of Manston airport, along with its direct links to London by high-speed rail and conventional rail, further expands future trade and transport growth potential |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • East Kent offers competitive land values, a strong cultural offer and strategic transport links (eg, HS1), making it an attractive area for regeneration and development.<br>• Coastal regeneration and place-making strategies in all three districts aim to improve socio-economic outcomes and attract investment.<br>• The area's natural and built heritage is among the strongest in Kent, supporting tourism and creative industries.<br>• East Kent also boasts an AONB between Canterbury city and the Dover coastline, that is starting to see a boost in rural and environmental tourism.<br>• Growth in the viticulture sector is seeing a change in agriculture practices as the region adjusts to irreversible climate change impacts. |
| **Mid Kent** | • Ashford is Kent's largest borough by area, with rapid population and housing growth, supported by high-speed rail to London and access to international routes via Eurotunnel.<br>• Swale serves as the physical and economic bridge between North, East, and Mid Kent. The Port of Sheerness is a key deep-water port with national logistics importance.<br>• The growth of Kent Science Park offers significant opportunities for growth in the field of life sciences<br>• Swale includes both mainland and the Isle of Sheppey, offering a mix of coastal, rural and industrial assets.<br>• Folkestone & Hythe is defined by strong coastal communities, rural hinterlands and excellent connectivity to mainland Europe via the Channel Tunnel.<br>• The district includes significant portions of the Kent Downs AONB and high-quality agricultural land across the Romney Marsh.<br>• Mid Kent offers significant opportunities for infrastructure-led growth, including garden communities and town centre regeneration.<br>• A strong location for mixed-use development, energy generation and climate resilience initiatives.<br>• Growth in the viticulture sector is seeing a change in agriculture practices as the region adjusts to irreversible climate change impacts |

**Balanced economy and tax base**

The four-unitary model is designed to ensure economic viability and long-term financial sustainability across Kent.

Each geography is structured around complementary strengths, with a recognised economic centre and international port (or equivalent infrastructure), enabling gateway access to trade and growth.

While West Kent leads in productivity and tax base, the other three councils are sufficiently robust and balanced to avoid creating undue disparities.

***Table 10**: Economy and tax base metrics for 4 unitary model options*

| | North | West | East | Mid |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Current authority areas** | Dartford, Gravesham, Medway | Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone | Canterbury, Dover, Thanet | Swale, Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe |
| **GVA**[14] | £14,206m | £20,168m | £10,217m | £10,374m |
| **GVA per capita (productivity)**[4] | £26,888 | £35,566 | £24,065 | £25,196 |
| **Council tax base (no. of band D equivalent properties)**[15] | 169,245 | 223,706 | 145,435 | 141,264 |
| **Council tax average band D rate (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes)**[5] | £1,841 | £1,903 | £1,874 | £1,906 |
| **Gross business rates**[16] | £111m | £114m | £67.5m | £72m |
| **Unemployment Rate (%) Apr 24-March 25**[17] | 3.84% | 3.05% | 4.30% | 4.00% |
| **Deprivation score (2019)**[18] | 0.12 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.13 |

**Business rates**

Business rates tax bases are strong, with each unitary generating between **£70 million and £113 million** in retained business rates.

All four authorities have the economic capacity to operate independently and sustainably.

[14] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[15] Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages
[16] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[17] LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics
[18] Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics

Any minor imbalances between proposed councils are countered by strong growth potential, which will support longer-term economic growth and prosperity across the whole of Kent.

Each authority will be able to tailor economic and employment strategies to local needs, while aligning with the wider strategic ambitions of Kent.

**Council tax**

Each unitary has a sufficient council tax base to support service delivery, ranging from **c.141,264 to c.223,706** Band D equivalent properties.

Differences in average band D rates between councils within each proposed unitary are modest, ranging from **£1,841 to £1,906,** minimising disruption for residents and reducing administrative complexity during transition.

## Council tax harmonisation

Council tax harmonisation is an important and sensitive area. Council tax rates must be consistent by the eighth year of a unitary authority and there are currently significant disparities in council tax rates across Kent.

***Table 11:*** *Current council taxbase, rates and yield*

| Current council | 2024-25 final taxbase[19] | Current combined Band D rate[20] | Current Tax Yield |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ashford | 49,832 | £1,799 | £89,636,805 |
| Canterbury | 53,348 | £1,851 | £98,732,177 |
| Dartford | 41,029 | £1,796 | £73,679,473 |
| Dover | 40,875 | £1,825 | £74,604,137 |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 40,466 | £1,907 | £77,159,931 |
| Gravesham | 35,995 | £1,842 | £66,296,691 |
| Maidstone | 68,264 | £1,904 | £129,958,194 |
| Medway | 90,913 | £1,755 | £159,523,255 |
| Sevenoaks | 52,395 | £1,855 | £97,168,160 |
| Swale | 50,368 | £1,812 | £91,242,368 |
| Thanet | 46,454 | £1,874 | £87,054,908 |
| Tonbridge & Malling | 53,478 | £1,849 | £98,879,623 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 48,361 | £1,816 | £87,822,911 |
| **Total** | **671,778** | | **£1,231,758,633** |

The baseline council tax point to which the rates will be harmonised will be set through key decision by the shadow authorities.

This is a sensitive political decision as it is likely to result in an increase in council tax rates for residents in areas which currently charge lower rates.

[19] Financial data return submitted by councils
[20] Financial data return submitted by councils

Council tax harmonisation is governed by the referendum limits so the increase will be in line with what is legal and acceptable under the current system.

This also means the total council tax bill across Kent will be lower than if all current councils increased rates at the maximum allowed as would be typical in local government.

This is because residents who currently pay rates at, or higher than, the baseline rate set by the shadows will have their council tax rate frozen or potentially reduced to align with the baseline rate.

While there are many different scenarios including the baseline rate and the rate of increase, council tax harmonisation can be achieved within seven years and we have not assumed any increase in council tax rates into the financial modelling.

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# Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery

**Criteria 1b.** Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.

**The model creates geographies that make sense for how people live and work. It supports better planning, more consistent services and a more even spread of need. This helps councils respond to local priorities while working more efficiently.**

## Geographies and population

The model achieves a balanced distribution of population, geographic area and population density across Kent. This balance enables effective governance, manageable service delivery footprints, and equitable representation.

***Table 12**: Geographies and population in 2023 and 2032 forecasts*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Population 2023 ONS[21]** | 528,377 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 |
| **Geographic area (sq.km)[22]** | 366 | 1,334 | 728 | 1,311 |
| **Population density (people per sq.km)** | 1,444 | 425 | 583 | 314 |
| **Forecast population 2032 ONS[23]** | 540,597 | 597,059 | 439,629 | 434,473 |
| **Forecast growth** | 2.3% | 5.3% | 3.5% | 5.5% |

## Sensible geographies

The model reflects the diversity of Kent's geography, from dense urban areas to rural and coastal districts. Areas range from 411 square km (Mid Kent) to 1,334 square km (West Kent). This avoids the creation of overly-large rural authorities that would be difficult to manage operationally, or very small urban authorities that lack spatial flexibility. This size of councils will allow strategic land allocation to be supported in allocating development to the most suitable locations, avoiding piecemeal or reactive planning.

North Kent is a comparatively smaller geography but with a dense population and many of the same characteristics as the other regions such as infrastructure, key transport links and economic growth opportunities.

[21] Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[22] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
[23] Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics

Population densities range from 1,444 people per square km (North Kent) to 583 people per square km (East Kent). This spread reflects the natural variation in settlement patterns across Kent and allows councils to tailor their service delivery to align with their requirements.

For example, authorities with higher densities, such as East Kent, can focus on urban regeneration and transport, while lower-density areas, such as Mid Kent, can prioritise land use planning, green infrastructure and climate resilience.

The coherent geographies of this four-unitary model will allow environmental management to be undertaken at scale with AONBs and Green Belt areas to be preserved and effectively managed.

Climate resilience and energy generation can be embedded within each region, tailored to the specifics of each area, such as rural and coastal considerations.

These geographies support infrastructure-led planning by aligning geographies with major transport corridors and key growth areas.

Strategic transport links (eg HS1, M2, A2, Dartford Crossing, Channel Tunnel) are distributed across the four areas, ensuring each unitary has access to national and international connectivity.

This distribution simplifies infrastructure delivery by aligning planning authorities with existing economic corridors and transport hubs, reducing duplication and enabling more effective capital investment.

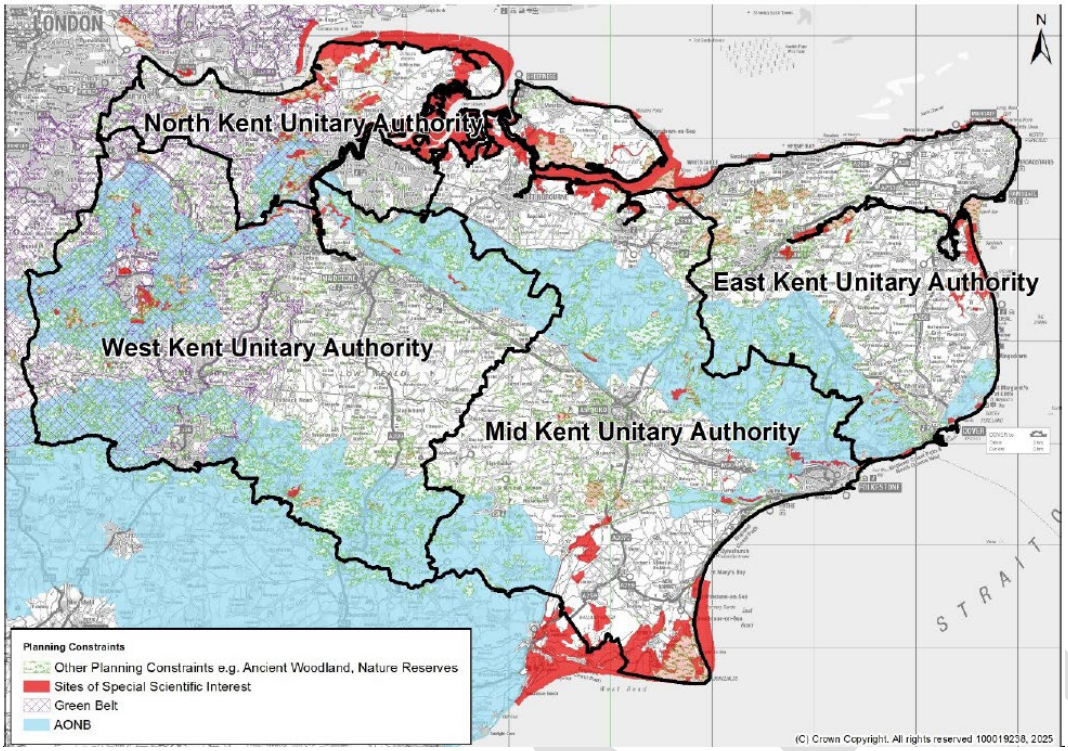
The model enables a more coherent and strategic approach to housing planning across Kent to be taken with each geography retaining sufficient scale and diversity to support tailored housing strategies – urban and urban-coastal regeneration in East Kent, garden communities in Mid Kent, and commuter housing in North and West Kent.

Cross-boundary coordination will aid planning and housing delivery in managing shared constraints such as environmentally sensitive areas.

This four-unitary options works as a whole by aligning Kent's geography with its functional realities – transport corridors, environmental zones, and economic clusters – while preserving existing boundaries and enabling strategic planning.

It offers a pragmatic balance between local responsiveness and county-wide coordination, making it well-suited for managing land, planning, infrastructure and environmental priorities across Kent.

***Figure 8:*** *Map of spatial planning constraints*




## Travel to work patterns across Kent

The figure below shows the distribution of workers across Kent, along with commuting flows into and out of these areas.

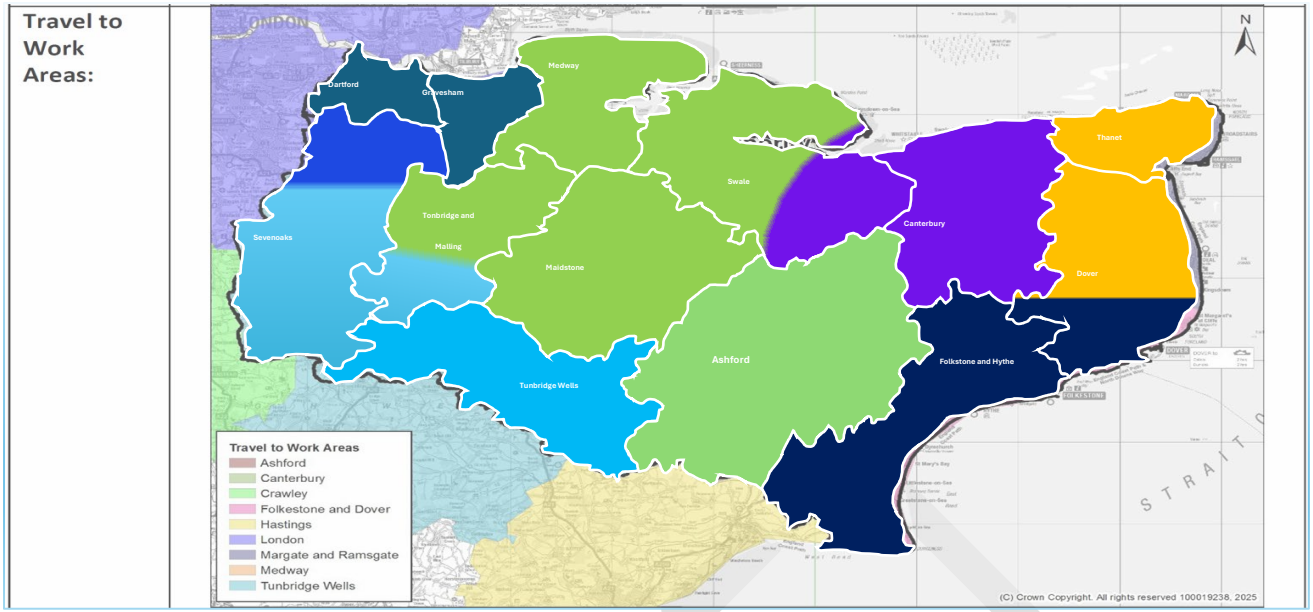
Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) are defined as geographic zones where at least 75% of residents work within the same area and at least 75% of workers also live there.

These areas represent self-contained local labour markets with boundaries statistically designed to reflect real-world commuting patterns.

The eastern Kent area has a greater local catchment of employees, with the majority of people working within 5km of their home.

In contrast, western Kent residents tend to travel, reflecting those who work locally in addition to those who travel slightly further to work in London.

***Figure 9:*** Map of travel to work areas




**Functional geographies and travel to work areas**

The four councils provide a coherent and functional geographic split of Kent that aligns well with Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs), supporting effective land management, housing planning, environmental stewardship and infrastructure delivery across the county.

By grouping districts into four unitary authorities—North, West, East, and Mid Kent—the model reflects real-world commuting patterns and labour markets, ensuring administrative boundaries do not disrupt daily life.

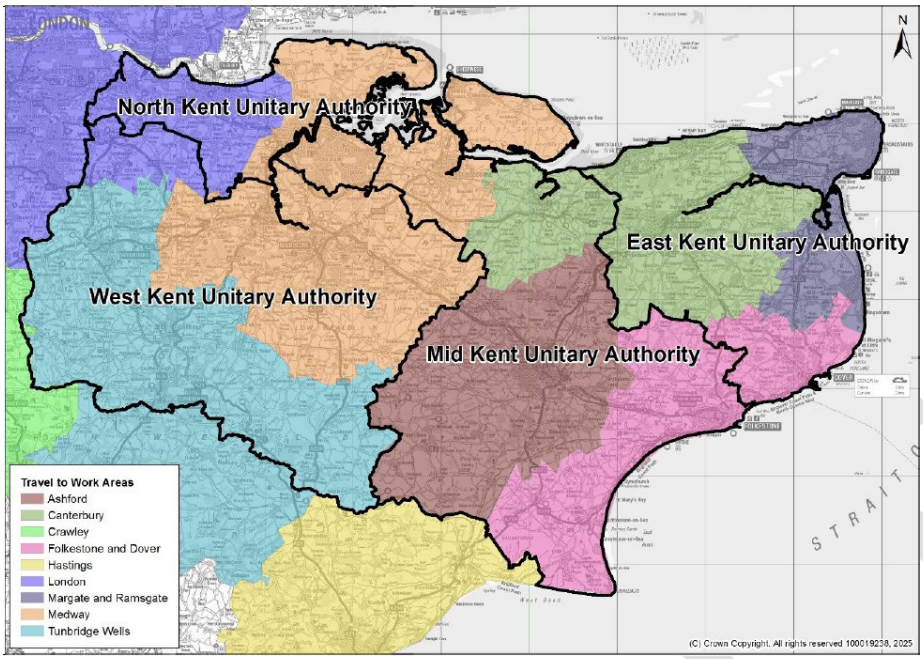
Each geography encompasses self-contained employment zones and transport corridors, allowing for strategic planning around housing and infrastructure that matches how people live and work.

For example, North Kent captures high commuter flows to London and Essex which will be furthered through the delivery of the Lower Thames Crossing in Gravesham, while West Kent supports strong rail connectivity and home-working trends.

East Kent reflects more localised employment and urban and coastal regeneration needs, and Mid Kent integrates strategic transport hubs like Ashford and the Channel Tunnel.

This alignment with TTWAs enables joined-up service delivery, supports place-based planning, and ensures housing growth and infrastructure investment are targeted where they are most needed, all while preserving local identity and minimising disruption to existing boundaries.

***Figure 10:*** *Map of travel to work areas against unitary areas*




The observed travel patterns show alignment with the 4B. A summary of how each proposed unitary council corresponds with existing TTWAs is provided in the table below.

***Table 13:*** *Overview of travel to work across unitary areas*[24]

| Proposed Council | Current council areas | Key travel patterns and alignment to travel to work data |
|---|---|---|
| **North Kent** | Dartford, Gravesham, Medway | • North Kent, particularly Dartford and Gravesham, exhibits strong outward commuting flows to London and surrounding counties like Essex.<br>• Dartford stands out with 7.8% of workers commuting by train, more than double the Kent average, highlighting its role as a key London commuter hub. Gravesham follows closely behind with 5.3% using trains.<br>• In contrast, Medway is more self-contained, with over 52% driving to work and only 4% commuting by train. Despite being well-connected, many Medway residents both live and work locally.<br>• The future Lower Thames Crossing in Gravesham will further opportunities for inward and outward commuting between North Kent and Essex |
| **West Kent** | Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge | • West Kent shows distinct characteristics of a wealthier commuter belt, particularly Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells, where over 42% of residents work mainly from home, significantly higher than the Kent average (31.1%). |

[24] https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-kent/economy-and-employment-data/kents-workforce

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Wells, Maidstone | • Train usage is also relatively high: Sevenoaks has 5.4% train commuters, with Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells around 3%. At the same time, car use remains substantial, especially in Maidstone (50.1%), the largest borough by workforce. |
| **East Kent** | Canterbury, Dover, Thanet | • East Kent shows lower reliance on rail and higher proportions of people walking or driving to work, indicating more localised employment or limited public transport options.<br>• In Canterbury, 10.8% of people walk to work, the highest in Kent, reflecting its compact city layout and university economy. Rail usage remains modest (2.3%) compared to other areas.<br>• Dover and Thanet have high car dependency (both around 50%) and relatively low train usage (~2.0–2.4%), suggesting fewer commuting options or jobs located closer to home. Thanet, with 3.5% using buses, has the highest bus usage in Kent, possibly reflecting socio-economic factors or transport access challenges and good connectivity between the main urban centres and out of town shopping centre in the district. |
| **Mid Kent** | Swale, Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe | • Mid Kent is marked by high car dependency, especially in Swale (54.8%) and Ashford (50.9%). This reflects limited public transport access or jobs distributed across rural and suburban areas.<br>• Ashford, however, benefits from HS1 rail links, which likely contribute to 2.5% train usage, the highest in Mid Kent. Folkestone & Hythe shows similar patterns, although with more walking commuters (9.1%), possibly linked to a denser urban core.<br>• Ashford's connectivity by major road and rail sets it as an important growth centre, linking the opportunities of the north Kent coast to the south Kent coast |

## Travel infrastructure

Kent benefits from a comprehensive strategic transport network.

Major motorways including the M2, M20, M25, and M26 provide vital road links to London, the wider south east and key ports such as Dover and Folkestone.

These roads primarily connect Kent from the east to west through the districts and eventually into London.

While the east to west connection is strong, the north to south connection through Kent is less direct, particularly for those not commuting into London.

The county is also well-served by rail, with services operated by Southeastern on the North Kent Line, Chatham Main Line and the UK's only domestic high-speed rail service, High Speed 1 (HS1), which connects Kent to central London via St Pancras International in under 40 minutes.

**Strategic transport corridors across the four-unitary regions**

The four-unitary model proposed creates a well-integrated network of transport corridors that supports Kent's connectivity.

Each geography is strategically aligned with major road and rail infrastructure, enabling efficient movement of people and goods across the county and into London and beyond.

North Kent benefits from the M25 and M2 motorways, as well as Southeastern rail links connecting Dartford, Gravesham, and Medway to London.

West Kent is served by the M20, M25, and M26 with strong rail connections supporting commuter flows, particularly from Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, and Maidstone.

East Kent's transport corridors, including the Thanet Way and Southeastern rail, link Canterbury, Dover and Thanet to London, although regional road connectivity remains more limited as motorways terminate to local A trunk roads.

Mid Kent is anchored by the M2 and M20 motorways and high-speed rail services through Ashford and Folkestone & Hythe, offering rapid access to London and mainland Europe.

Collectively, these corridors ensure each unitary area is both internally connected and externally accessible, supporting economic integration, housing growth and strategic planning across Kent.

***Table 14:*** *Transport connectivity across the four-unitary areas*

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent** | • Dartford: M25 runs north to south through the district. Northern side flanked by River Thames and southern side flows into Sevenoaks. North Kent line connects to London and Medway.<br>• Gravesham: Watling Street (A2) is the main road running west to east, eventually entering the M2. Southeastern rail connects Dartford with Gravesham and high-speed rail at Gravesend and Ebbsfleet provides connection to London and East Kent<br>• Medway: A229 runs north to south and eventually meets the M2. Thameslink and Southeastern rail, with high-speed services, connects to London. |
| **West Kent** | • Sevenoaks: Well-connected with M25, M26 and A21 providing connectivity to north, south, east and west. Southeastern main line connects to London.<br>• Tonbridge & Malling: Well-connected by M20 and M26 running east to west. Southeastern rail connects to Tonbridge and West Malling.<br>• Tunbridge Wells: No motorways run through the district, though there are a number of A-roads providing connections to the rest of Kent. Southeastern trains provide rail connections to London. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Maidstone: M20 runs east to west through the district. More rural areas outside of the M20 and A229 corridors are not as well connected. Multiple towns across the district are directly connected to London through rail, including Maidstone, Marden, and Headcorn. |
| **East Kent** | • Canterbury: Thanet Way (A299) runs east to west connecting to the M2, as does the A2 linking the district to Dover. Connections from rural areas into Canterbury are good. Southeastern rail provides connections to London and elsewhere in Kent.<br>• Dover: All major roads across East Kent connect into Dover, particularly the A2, A20 and A256, however outside of these main routes road connection is more limited. Southeastern and Chatham main rail lines connect to London.<br>• Thanet: Canterbury Road (A28) is the main connection from Margate to Canterbury and Ashford in the north of the district and the A299 provides connections across the south of the district from Ramsgate. Southeastern rail provides connections to London. |
| **Mid Kent** | • Swale: M2 runs east to west connecting Faversham and Sittingbourne. Swale rail line provides local connections.<br>• Ashford: High speed rail provides direct connection into London as well as wider Kent and the M20 runs through the district giving access to North Kent and Folkestone.<br>• Folkestone & Hythe: M20 provides an east to west connection to Ashford and Dover in the north of the district, however much of the rest of the district relies on more minor roads. High speed rail connects through Kent and into London. |

**Why the four-unitary model delivers on housing and homelessness**

LGR provides the opportunity to think differently and more strategically, beyond current district boundaries.

We must use this opportunity to learn from the areas with the strongest track record of delivery and apply best practices across the new councils.

The four new councils will:

- be ideally positioned to coordinate spatial planning, helping to ensure that growth is both deliverable and supported by the infrastructure residents expect
- provide a stronger platform for joined-up place-shaping and regional coordination with balanced distribution of housing and infrastructure investment across the region
- reflect local housing markets while retaining sufficient scale to plan strategically and negotiate effectively with government and developers
- avoid the dilution of focus that can occur in overly-large geographies
- avoid the fragmentation risks of a model with more, smaller councils, which may lack the capacity to manage housing pipelines or respond to homelessness effectively

- work together on housing delivery challenges, such as nutrient neutrality, rather than placing all these risks in one, larger authority
- ensure spatial planning constraints are well distributed across all four areas, ensuring current and future housing growth needs can be accommodated

Regeneration efforts across Kent are being driven by a clear sense of purpose, focusing on placemaking to unlock new opportunities.

This involves the creation of new housing and employment areas, alongside the revitalisation of town centres and public spaces.

Significant investment is also being directed towards essential infrastructure in education, healthand care.

Furthermore, cultural-led regeneration and the establishment of creative enterprise zones are playing a key role.

These initiatives are carefully designed to foster a sense of belonging within communities, ensuring they reflect the unique character and needs of the people they serve, rather than simply constructing new buildings.

***Table 15:*** *Housing and homelessness metrics for four-unitary model option*

| Metric | North | West | East | Mid |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024)[25]** | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| **Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement (%)[26]** | 0.74 | 0.92 | 0.76 | 1.10 |

[25] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[26] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK

# Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure

**Criteria 1d.** Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

**The four-unitary model with strategically-aligned unitary authorities, streamlines decision-making, clarifies responsibilities and enhanced democratic accountability by ensuring each council is directly responsible for all local services within its area.**

## Current electoral arrangements

As set out in the table below there are currently a total of 658 councillors across Kent, including 81 county councillors, 518 district councillors and 59 unitary councillors in Medway.

Kent County Council is divided into 72 electoral divisions with 63 single-member divisions and nine two-member divisions.

Councillor to electorate ratios vary across Kent, but the combined ratio is 1:2,102.

***Table 16:*** *Councillor facts and figures*

| Council | District/ unitary councillors | County councillors | Total councillors | Electorate | Electorate per councillor | Divisions | Wards |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Medway** | 59 | N/A | 59 | 206,567 | 3,501* | N/A | 24 |
| **Ashford** | 47 | 7 | 54 | 100,660 | 1,864 | 7 | 39 |
| **Canterbury** | 39 | 8 | 47 | 111,160 | 2,365 | 8 | 21 |
| **Dartford** | 42 | 6 | 48 | 86,560 | 1,803 | 6 | 20 |
| **Dover** | 32 | 7 | 39 | 88,820 | 2,277 | 5 | 17 |
| **Folkestone and Hythe** | 30 | 6 | 36 | 84,940 | 2,359 | 6 | 13 |
| **Gravesham** | 39 | 5 | 44 | 77,240 | 1,755 | 3 | 17 |
| **Maidstone** | 49 | 9 | 58 | 133,960 | 2,310 | 8 | 22 |
| **Sevenoaks** | 54 | 6 | 60 | 90,200 | 1,503 | 6 | 26 |
| **Swale** | 47 | 7 | 54 | 111,460 | 2,064 | 6 | 24 |
| **Thanet** | 56 | 7 | 63 | 104,500 | 1,659 | 5 | 23 |
| **Tonbridge and Malling** | 44 | 7 | 51 | 100,240 | 1,965 | 6 | 19 |
| **Tunbridge Wells** | 39 | 6 | 45 | 87,340 | 1,941 | 6 | 14 |
| **Total** | **577** | **81** | **658** | **1,383,647** | **2,103** | **72** | **279** |

**As a unitary authority, Medway has a different governance structure, explaining its higher ratio than other areas across Kent*

### What we know about elections to new councils

Elections to shadow authorities will take place in May 2027.

The Boundary Commission (LGBCE) recommends using existing boundaries, e.g. divisions or wards, as building blocks for these first elections but the guidance is to focus on the number of councillors rather than drawing proposed electoral maps at this stage.

Between May 2027 and next elections in May 2032, there will be a review of electoral boundaries and new arrangements put in place.

We understand LGBCE's preference is to avoid significant changes in councillor numbers so arrangements for 2027 should align closely to expectations of councillor numbers from 2032 onwards.

### Reference points for councillor ratios

Set out below are some examples of councillor-to-electorate ratios for newly-formed unitary authorities in recent years, with a focus on larger authorities which are more relevant for comparison.

***Table 17:*** *Examples of councillor-to-electorate ratios*

| Council | Established | Councillors | Electorate | Electorate per councillor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dorset** | 2019 | 82 | 297,726 | 3,631 |
| **Buckinghamshire** | 2020 | 97 | 420,610 | 4,336 |
| **North Northamptonshire** | 2021 | 68 | 263,915 | 3,881 |
| **West Northamptonshire** | 2021 | 76 | 307,611 | 4,048 |
| **Somerset** | 2023 | 110 | 446,698 | 4,061 |
| **North Yorkshire** | 2023 | 90 | 478,539 | 5,317 |

### Proposed councillor numbers for Option 4B

In calculating the proposed number of councillors for each new authority, we have considered:

1. an appropriate electorate to councillor ratio in line with MHCLG guidance and recent newly formed unitary authorities of comparable size
2. potential means of using current electoral boundaries for elections to shadow authorities in May 2027

Kent County Council divisions have been used as the main building blocks.

KCC divisions, while not redrawn for more than 10 years, are more consistent in size than wards and are considered to be a more practical

Up to three councillors can represent a single division, which guides the modelling of options for councillor numbers.

Fewer than three councillors per division would lead to ratios which are considered too high to be practical, where there are currently two councillor divisions - this is the case for six divisions - six councillors in the new model have been assumed with consideration at a future point for sub-division to maintain a maximum of three councillors per ward.

A different approach is required for the current Medway area to arrive at a comparable ratio. Two members per Medway ward would mean a ratio of 1:4,293 in the Medway area.

As shown in the table below, our calculations lead to a proposed total of 291 councillors across Kent, compared to 658 in the current model. The average ratio proposed is 1:4,755.

***Table 18:*** *Calculating proposed councillor numbers per council*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Electorate*** | 370,367 | 411,740 | 304,480 | 297,060 | 1,383,647 |
| **Electoral boundaries** | | | | | |
| **Divisions, assuming 2-member divisions split into two** | 11 | 28 | 22 | 20 | 81 |
| **Medway Wards** | 24 | - | - | | 24 |
| **Calculation** | | | | | |
| 3 councillors per division (current KCC area) | 33 | 84 | 66 | 60 | 243 |
| 2 members per Medway ward | 48 | | | | 48 |
| **Proposed number of councillors** | **81** | **84** | **66** | **60** | **291** |
| **Electorate to councillor ratio** | **1: 4,572** | **1: 4,902** | **1: 4,613** | **1: 4,951** | **1: 4,755** |

* Electorate figures source: data provided by Kent County Council related to elections in May 2025 and ONS data for Medway.

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## Caveats on proposed councillor numbers

Once the geographies are agreed, the constituent councils of each area will prepare and agree what is required for first elections to each council.

**Efficient and locally-focused democratic arrangements**

The four-unitary model will create a new democratic model that is more efficient and delivers savings but remains at a scale that allows for local focus.

It reduces duplication, simplifies decision-making and ensures the right powers are held at the right level to deliver effective, accountable leadership.

While this approach will lead to larger unitary councils with increased councillor-to-elector ratios, this challenge can be effectively managed through structural and policy measures that enhance neighbourhood and community engagement such as establishing parish and town councils or neighbourhood area committees.

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# **Criteria 2:** Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience


| | |
|---|---|
| **Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency** | **Criteria 2a and 2b** |
| **Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies** | **Criteria 2c** |
| **Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation** | **Criteria 2d** |
| **Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government** | **Criteria 2e** |


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# Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency

**Criteria 2a.** As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more

**Criteria 2b.** There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal

**The four-unitary model creates balanced populations close to the recommended size, supporting larger tax bases, lower costs and economies of scale. It promotes financial stability, efficient service delivery and the capacity to manage future growth and challenges.**

## Government guidance on population size

Population size can be used as a proxy for the size and scale of councils.

Government has outlined a population size of 500,000 or more as a guiding principle, not a hard target.

There is recognition there should be flexibility and all proposals, regardless of the population size being proposed, should set out the rationale clearly.

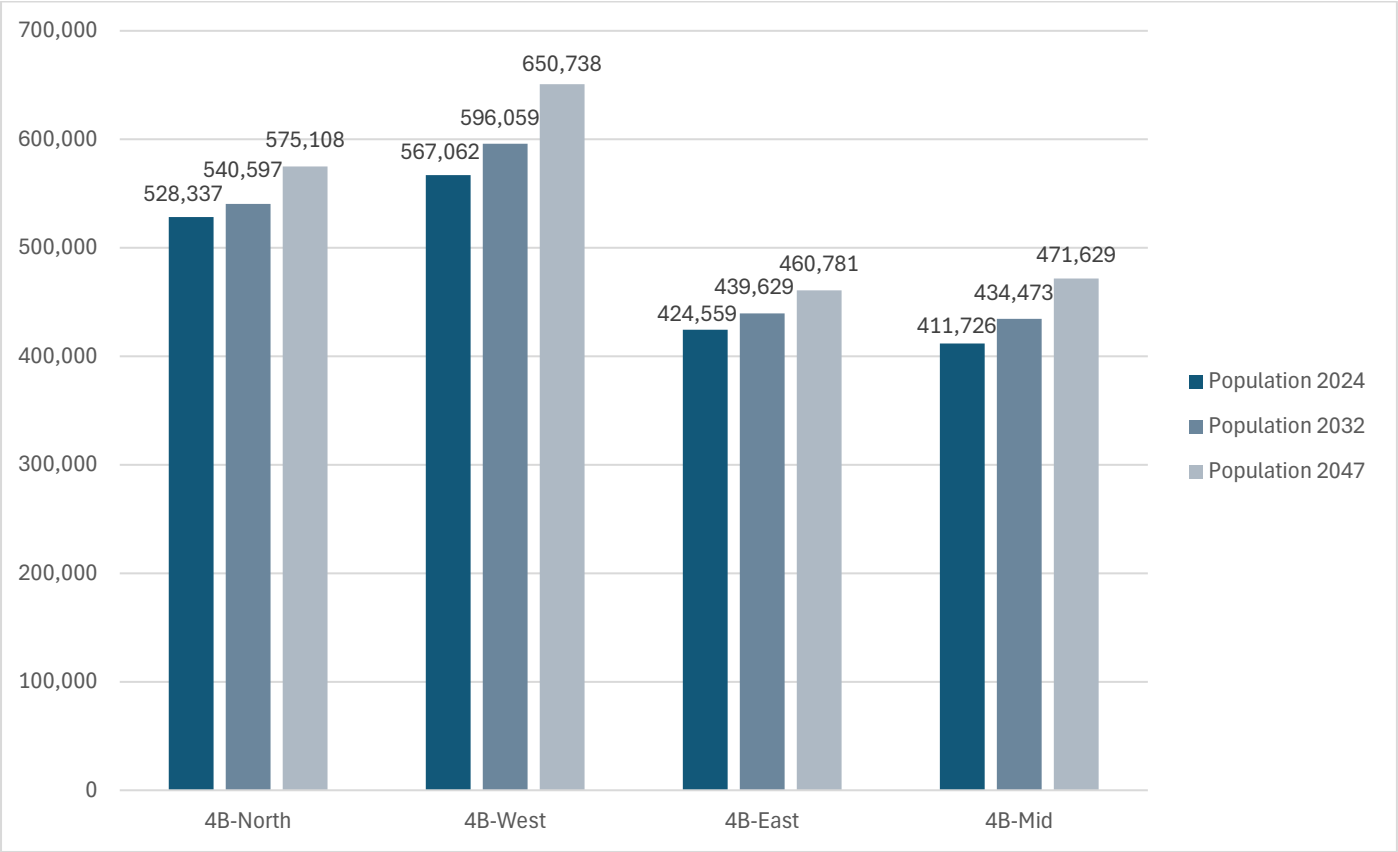
All councils across Kent agree that, given the implementation complexity of any LGR, new local government structures should be in place for generations to come.

As a result, projected future populations as well as current population sizes are considered for each proposed council.

### Populations and forward projections

Set out below are population numbers and growth projections for the three proposed councils under Option 4B.

***Figure 11:*** *Population size forecasts (ONS)*




**The argument for 4B: Balanced populations with room for growth**

Under the four-unitary model, all four councils will have a 411k to 567k starting population.

Option 4B provides a balanced population distribution that supports resilience and strategic capacity.

Each authority is large enough to deliver services efficiently, withstand financial pressures and invest in transformation while remaining connected to place.

This balance ensures no single authority is overburdened, particularly in areas with higher levels of need, and that each has the scale to attract and retain specialist expertise.

The model is set up to absorb future shocks and manage demand in high-pressure services such as adult social care and children's services.

These new authorities are expected to be in place for the long term and it is therefore appropriate to look to long-term population growth estimates which will align better with the future implementation of the mayoral combined authority model – that won't, currently, exist on day one of the new councils.

# Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies

**Criteria 2c.** Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money

**Option 4B maximises value for money by consolidating Kent's local government into four strategically-aligned unitary authorities that reduce duplication, streamline service delivery and unlock economies of scale in staffing, procurement and infrastructure – delivering an estimated £67.5 million in recurring revenue savings over time.**

## Collaborative working on finance across Kent councils

All 14 S151 officers are members of the long-standing Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG).

In relation to LGR, it has been responsible for the following key activities:

- developing working relationships and shared understanding of finances, which will be a key enabler of successful LGR;
- informing a shared financial baseline; and
- reviewing and collectively updating assumptions behind a base case model for inclusion in proposals to government.

## Approach to modelling the financial impact of LGR

Refer to ***Appendix 2: Financial modelling*** for more detailed description of assumptions, approach and results of the financial modelling.

Finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have reviewed and informed the financial modelling to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to government.

The financial model aims to:
- quantify the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options; and
- compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings, costs and payback.

The financial model estimates savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs calculated with reference to a series of benchmarked LGR business cases, the characteristics of the options being put forward and the characteristics of local government in Kent.

## Assumptions in financial modelling

While being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all KFOG agrees LGR does not provide the solution combating the scale of the financial challenge being faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The KFOG has agreed the following position:

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The

scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.

- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be paid for.
- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new councils may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new councils.

**Financial modelling results**

The results of the financial modelling are shown below.

Option 4B will have one off implementation costs of £130.9m, recurring disaggregation costs of £48.6m and recurring reorganisation savings of £67.5m. This suggests a phased payback period of 10+ years.

***Table 19:*** *Financial modelling summary results*

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4B** | (130.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) – (48.6) | 18.9 – 34.6 | 7.8 – 14.3 years |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

**Payback period**

As shown in the chart below, Option 4B is estimated to pay back in over 10 years. The profile of costs and benefits have been developed collaboratively across all LGR options.

***Figure 12:*** *Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR option*

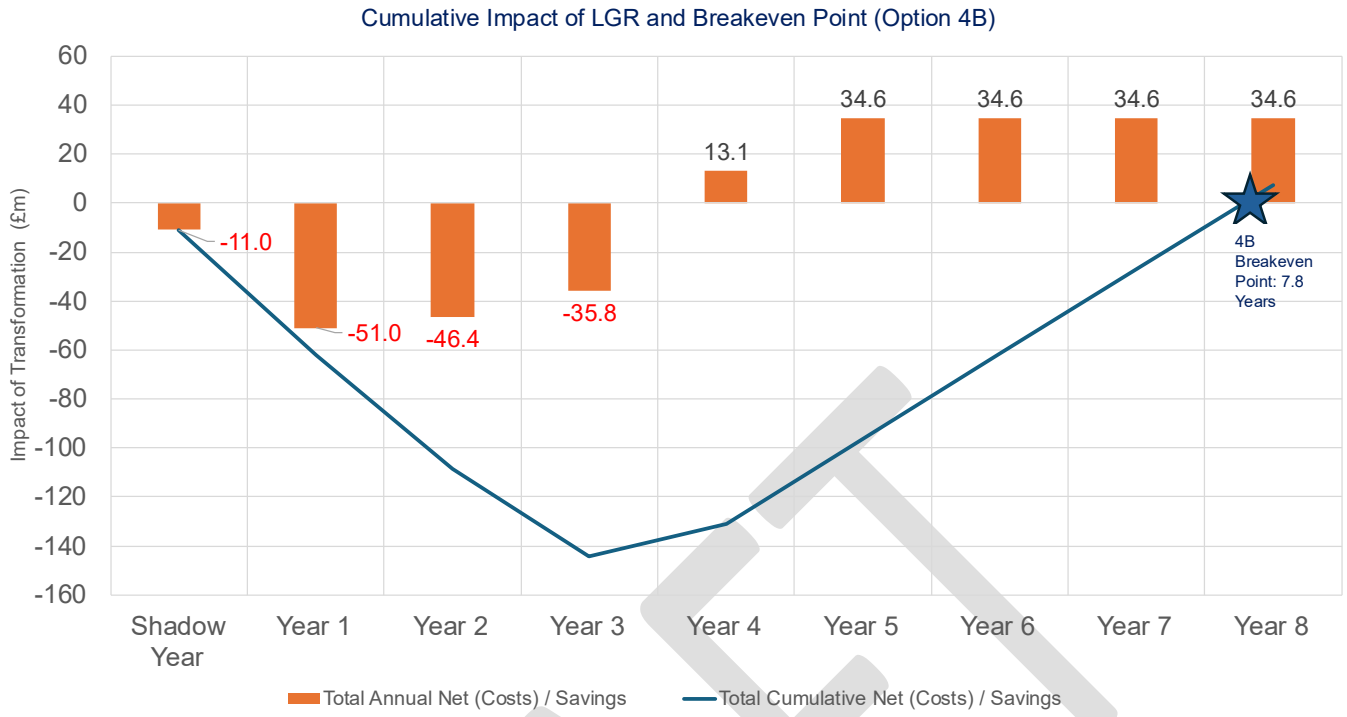



*Chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest end of the range

## Savings and financial efficiency: the argument for Option 4B

Option 4B is designed to consolidate local government services into four unitary authorities, each with sufficient scale to operate more efficiently and resiliently.

By reducing fragmentation, these larger units can better absorb financial pressures, respond to emergencies and maintain service continuity.

The model supports streamlined decision-making and resource allocation, which enhances the overall stability and responsiveness of public services across Kent.

The four-unitary structure enables councils to leverage economies of scale in procurement, staffing and infrastructure.

Existing shared services, partnerships and centralised systems – such as IT platforms and HR functions – will reduce duplication and implementation overhead costs.

This approach ensures public funds are used more effectively, delivering better outcomes for residents while maintaining fiscal discipline.

The model also supports strategic investment planning across broader geographies, improving long-term value for money.

Option 4B aligns council boundaries with functional economic areas, supporting a more sustainable tax base and enabling strategic growth in housing and infrastructure.

Simplified governance structures improve transparency and financial oversight, reducing the risk of inefficiencies and mismanagement.

By fostering stronger partnerships and clearer accountability, the model enhances the ability of councils to plan for the future and deliver services within a stable financial framework.

Maintaining existing boundaries further reduces the need for boundary reviews or structural disruption, minimising implementation risk and supporting organisational stability throughout the change process.

There is a strong argument effective long-term delivery, grounded in a sense of place and the ability to deliver meaningful public service reform, will ultimately impact demand and therefore the long-term financial health of future authorities.

The Option 4B model is well placed to deliver at scale while remaining grounded in local identity with manageable geographies for service delivery.

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# Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation

**Criteria 2d.** Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects

**Option 4B manages transition costs through joint planning across Kent's 14 councils, leveraging existing budgets and capital receipts to fund invest-to-save initiatives while enabling long-term transformation through digital innovation, integrated service reform and scalable governance that supports sustainable public service delivery.**

## A complex transition regardless of the option selected

LGR is inherently complex, and the size and number of councils in Kent means the Kent LGR programme will be one of the most complex implementations nationally, regardless of the option selected.

This has the potential to impact public service delivery in the short term if transition is not managed effectively.

The 14 councils have made progress on transition planning, including considerations of quick wins and capturing of key joint actions. Refer to 'Section 6: Implementation Plan' for further details.

### Transition: the argument for Option 4B

While the transition to a new governance model involves upfront costs, Option 4B includes a robust financial strategy to manage these effectively.

Councils plan to fund transformation activities from existing budgets and capital receipts, using invest-to-save principles.

Joint transition planning across the 14 existing councils is expected to minimise disruption and avoid unnecessary expenditure.

This coordinated approach ensures the financial burden of change is shared and mitigated through careful planning and collaboration.

Option 4B avoids changes to current district and ward boundaries, meaning additional cost and complexity are avoided as well as delays and fragmentation of existing delivery.

Existing shared services and shared systems will help create smooth transition.

This is especially the case in East Kent where a shared services LATCo for customer services and Revenues and Benefits services will create a seamless transition on vesting day.

## Opportunities for transformation

All councils across Kent have taken steps to modernise, including more effective use of data and introducing digital approaches to service delivery.

This transformation activity has already improved outcomes and enabled cost savings.

However, all councils recognise LGR presents an opportunity to transform services and ways of working more fundamentally.

On 17 September 2025, Kent councils met to discuss the future vision for Kent.

As part of these discussions, the below key ambitions for service transformation were captured:

1. Clear focus for transformation on the needs of residents.
2. Establish a consistent, whole-council approach and culture across services, breaking down silos and joining up the experience for residents accessing multiple services.
3. Digitise and automate resident journeys for more transactional services, while maintaining alternative routes for those who need them.
4. Increase focus on prevention and a more holistic person-centred approach, especially for those with more complex needs (see Criteria 3: Public service reform).

To enable this transformation the below enablers were discussed:

- continual focus on cultural change and effective communications;
- joining up key data sources across services to support seamless working across services, better understand resident needs and achieve better, more proactive decision-making;
- meaningful transformation strategies and wider approach to public service reform in advance of Day 1, informing meaningful corporate plans with clear ambitions and actions; and
- linking transformation to a shared Kent-wide approach to public service reform (see Criteria 3).

Specific transformation plans, including funding arrangements for investment will need to be agreed as part of the budget-setting process and Medium Term Financial Strategy for each new council.

Across Kent, capital receipts are expected to support this to some extent.

However, investment in transformation will be on the basis it delivers cost savings and is therefore self-funding over the medium to long term.

**Transformation: the argument for Option 4B**

Option 4B proposes a four-unitary model that is explicitly designed to unlock transformation across Kent's public services.
The proposed unitary councils under Option 4B are large enough to support significant transformation initiatives.

Each council will have the scale, capability and financial resilience to:

- deliver complex reforms in adult and children's social care
- invest in digital transformation and data-driven service models
- respond flexibly to local needs while maintaining strategic oversight

This scale also enables agility in decision-making, allowing councils to act quickly and effectively in response to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Option 4B builds on existing district footprints, which helps minimise disruption and supports closer partnership working.

This includes enhanced collaboration with NHS Kent and Medway, Kent Police and other public sector partners.

Shared transformation goals will be enabled across councils, such as preventative care and integrated service delivery.

There will also be able to be a more consistent approach to transformation across services, breaking down silos and fostering a unified culture.

The model also supports joint transition planning, which has already begun across the 14 councils, focusing on quick wins and coordinated actions.

While the four-unitary model enables localised service delivery, it also allows for Kent-wide collaboration where scale and consistency are beneficial.

This will include strategic planning for housing, infrastructure and transport, shared digital platforms and data strategies and coordinated responses to regional priorities and devolution opportunities.

This dual approach – local responsiveness with regional coordination – ensures transformation is both place-sensitive and system-aware.

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# Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government

**Criteria 2e.** For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable

## The Kent financial context

None of the 14 councils in Kent are in Best Value intervention or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support.

However, Medway Council has been granted a capitalisation direction under the government's Exceptional Financial Support.

There is collective concern regarding the financial sustainability of the current system, particularly given rising demand in adult social care and children's services, rising costs and increasing levels of debt.

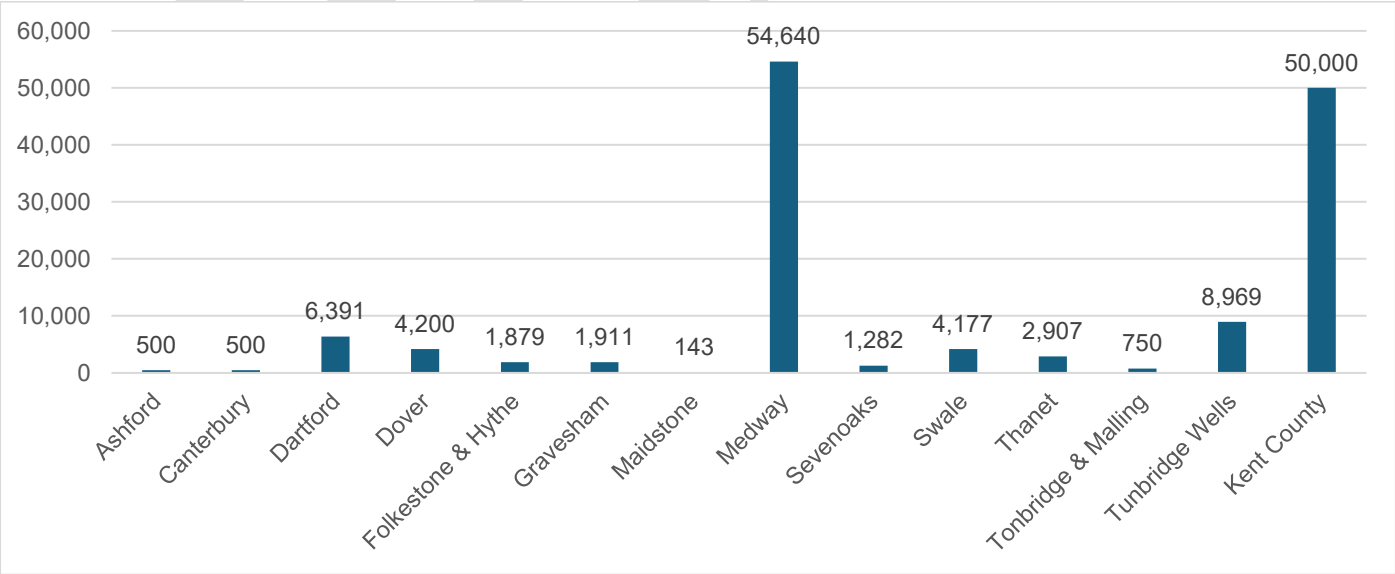
The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery across county and districts.

## Existing budget challenges

The forecast total gross budget gap, including assumed funding from reserves, for all councils by 2028/29 is £138.2m, which includes £54.6m within Medway and £50.0m within Kent County Council.

These figures exclude consideration of the impact of Fair Funding 2.0.

***Figure 13:*** *Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£'000)*




All existing councils will continue to focus on delivering savings and managing their ongoing budget gaps regardless of LGR.

However, the starting point for all new councils is expected to be stretched, with ongoing need for savings to be identified.

**Projected budget position for new councils under Option 4B**

| Local Authority | Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£m) |
|---|---|
| North Kent | 76.6 |
| West Kent | 25.8 |
| East Kent | 18.6 |
| Mid Kent | 17.2 |
| **Total** | **138.2** |

The budget gaps in West, East and Mid Kent are balanced against each other, while North Kent's gap is proportionally larger – though a significant portion of this is attributable to Medway.

Despite the difference between North Kent and the other three councils, it is important to consider the relevance of scale in assessing financial sustainability.

The formation of a new, larger North Kent authority would enable greater financial resilience.

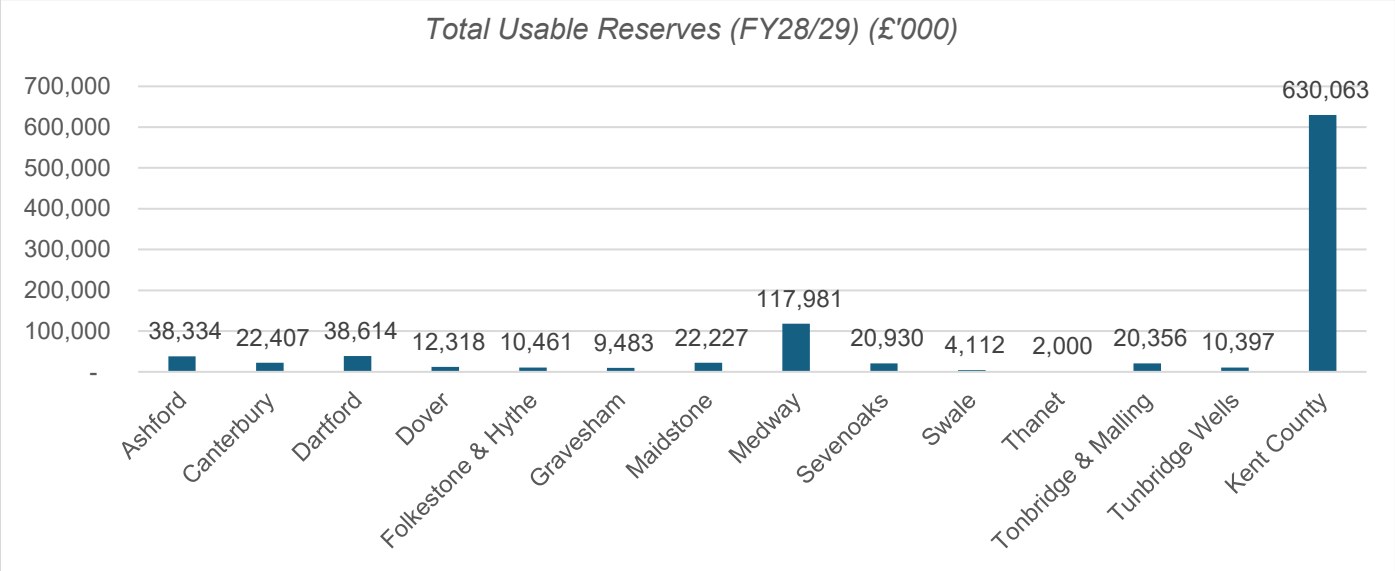
This consolidated authority would benefit from a broader revenue base and enhanced capacity to absorb financial pressures, offering a more robust fiscal position than the current fragmented arrangements.

### Current reserves levels

Across Kent councils, Total Usable Reserves are forecast to be £959.7m.

This includes the full value of the Kent County Council's usable reserves of £630.1m.

***Figure 14:*** *Total Usable Reserves (FY28/29) (£'000)*



*Note – for all districts, this amount related to General Fund balance, Earmarked Reserves, Capital Receipts Reserve and Capital Grants Unapplied.*

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the new councils post reorganisation.

It will be the decision of each new council to determine how to use its resources to pay for the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

**Projected reserves levels under Option 4B**

| Local Authority | Total Usable Reserves (FY27/28) (£m) |
|---|---|
| North Kent | 338.4 |
| West Kent | 258.9 |
| East Kent | 175.2 |
| Mid Kent | 187.2 |
| **Total** | **959.7** |

All unitary authorities have healthy reserves levels above £175m and are all moderately balanced, in the range of £175m to £338m.

### Existing council debt

The external debt position reported across all Kent councils is £1.7bn on a net revenue of £2.3bn with a total financing cost of £123.6m. 67% of the borrowing and 87% of net revenue and 87% of the financing cost is within Kent County Council and Medway.

The combined financing ratio across all Kent councils is 5.3%.

***Table 20:*** *Borrowing and financing costs across Kent councils*[27]

| Local Authority (£'000) (26/27) | General Fund Borrowing (External) | Financing cost | Net Revenue | Financing ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ashford | 95,375 | 402 | 9,009 | 4.5% |
| Canterbury | 120,358 | 5,417 | 31,800 | 17.0% |
| Dartford | - | 370 | 21,531 | 1.7% |
| Dover | 102,600 | 1,424 | 20,088 | 7.1% |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 53,000 | 2,628 | 35,504 | 7.4% |
| Gravesham | 101,955 | 2,777 | 25,693 | 10.8% |
| Maidstone | 65,000 | 4,183 | 27,945 | 15.0% |
| Medway | 442,468 | 21,731 | 481,631 | 4.5% |
| Sevenoaks | 13,934 | 1,040 | 21,868 | 4.8% |
| Swale | 13,000 | 2,802 | 31,400 | 8.9% |
| Thanet | 6,622 | 371 | 26,749 | 1.4% |
| Tonbridge & Malling | - | - | 27,346 | 0.0% |
| Tunbridge Wells | - | 529 | 21,535 | 2.5% |
| Kent County Council | 716,039 | 79,890 | 1,531,280 | 5.2% |

[27] Financial data return submitted by councils

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 1,730,351 | 123,573 | 2,313,379 | 5.3% (Average) |

**The projected debt position for new councils under Option 4B**

The district borrowing costs, net financing costs and net revenue have been combined and the county costs have been apportioned based on population data.

| Local Authority (£'m) (26/27) | General Fund Borrowing (External) | Financing cost | Net Revenue (26/27) | Financing ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Kent | 740.3 | 46.7 | 947.7 | 4.9% |
| West Kent | 289.1 | 29.2 | 548.2 | 5.3% |
| East Kent | 387.0 | 24.8 | 415.2 | 6.0% |
| Mid Kent | 314.0 | 22.9 | 402.3 | 5.7% |
| **Total** | **1,730.4** | **123.6** | **2,313.4** | **5.3%** |

**Four councils driving long term financial sustainability**

Option 4B is structured to align new unitary boundaries with Kent's functional economic geographies.

This alignment is critical for long-term sustainability as it ensures each new authority encompasses a coherent economic footprint.

By doing so, councils can better plan and deliver services that reflect local economic patterns, such as travel-to-work areas and housing markets.

This alignment supports more effective economic development strategies, which in turn can boost local Gross Value Added (GVA) – a key indicator of economic productivity and resilience.

The four-unitary model is designed to create authorities with a more sustainable and balanced council tax base.

By reducing fragmentation and aligning boundaries with areas of economic strength, Option 4B enables each unitary to draw on a broader and more stable revenue base.

This is particularly important in Kent where disparities in council tax rates and Band D equivalents currently create inefficiencies and inequities in funding.

The model supports harmonisation over time, reducing administrative complexity and enabling fairer distribution of resources.

With larger, more capable councils, this four-unitary model facilitates strategic investment in infrastructure, housing and digital transformation.

These investments are expected to stimulate local economies, thereby increasing GVA and expanding the tax base.

The model also supports shared services and centralised systems – such as IT and HR – which reduce duplication and overheads.

This ensures public funds are used more efficiently, delivering better outcomes for residents while maintaining fiscal discipline.

Option 4B positions Kent to take advantage of future devolution opportunities.

Larger, strategically aligned authorities are more likely to meet government criteria for devolved powers and funding.

This will unlock new revenue streams and enable councils to invest in growth-driving initiatives.

The model's emphasis on aligning with economic geographies and strengthening the tax base is central to building a compelling case for devolution and long-term financial autonomy.

***Table 21:*** *Key financial metrics for the four-unitary option*

| | North | West | East | Mid |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total GVA (£ million) (2023)[28]** | 14,206 | 20,168 | 10,217 | 10,374 |
| **GVA per capita (£) (2023)[19]** | 26,888 | 35,566 | 24,065 | 25,196 |
| **Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (2025-26)[29]** | 169,245 | 223,706 | 145,435 | 141,264 |
| **Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes) (£) (2024-25)[20]** | 1,841 | 1,903 | 1,874 | 1,906 |
| **Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[30]** | 108 | 113 | 70 | 73 |
| **Net revenue expenditure (£m) (2023/24)[22]** | 645 | 651 | 494 | 482 |

[28] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[29] Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages
[30] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK

# **Criteria 3:** Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Improving delivery of key services** | **Criteria 3a and 3c** |
| **Public service reform** | **Criteria 3b** |


DRAFT

# Improving delivery of key services

**Criteria 3a.** Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services

**Criteria 3c.** Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

**Ensuring the delivery of high-quality, sustainable services – particularly in areas such as adult social care, children's services, SEND, homelessness, and wider public safety – stands at the heart of the future vision for local government in Kent.**

## Working together on the future of services

As part of the Kent LGR programme, the 14 councils have collectively agreed key service areas to explore in more detail through workshops, supplemented by additional discussions and data gathering.

Workshops were held in five key service areas, bringing together representation from across the councils of Kent and Medway to ensure multiple perspectives were shared.

These services were:

- Adult Social Care;
- Children's Services including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC);
- Housing and Homelessness;
- Highways Services; and
- Waste Services.

During these sessions, attendees considered the following:

- current service challenges;
- existing good practice and collaboration;
- future improvement opportunities shared across all LGR options; and
- opportunities and challenges specific to individual options where a proposal is being submitted to government.

In addition to the sessions held, colleagues from a wide range of services across Kent have had the opportunity to input to collective thinking on service-specific impacts through online forms with in excess of 125 responses.

There were a number of emerging themes and these were aligned with workshop discussions where the same themes were consistently identified.

We are continuing to engage with colleagues across the councils.

| Challenges of two tier working | How single tier working can improve performance and customer outcomes |
|---|---|

- **Service fragmentation:** Services split between county and district councils cause confusion over responsibilities, leading to resident frustration and delays.
- **Coordination and communication issues:** Lack of shared systems and contacts between tiers results in slow responses and missed opportunities.
- **Duplication of effort:** Overlapping services between councils waste resources and confuse residents with inconsistent messaging.
- **Strategic misalignment:** Differing priorities and leadership across tiers hinder cohesive planning and policy alignment.
- **Limited access to expertise and resources:** Smaller district teams often lack specialists and face challenges in recruitment and timely support.
- **Inconsistent service standards:** Variations in budgets and policies across districts lead to unequal service quality for residents.
- **Funding and commissioning challenges:** Fragmented funding and commissioning processes reduce flexibility and limit district influence over county decisions.

- **Consistent and integrated services**: Uniform standards and joined-up support for complex needs reduce disparities and improve outcomes for all residents.
- **Faster decision-making**: Simplified governance structures allow quicker, more coordinated responses and clearer responsibilities.
- **Efficiency gains**: Streamlined processes and reduced bureaucracy lead to cost savings and faster service delivery.
- **Strategic alignment**: Unified leadership and planning enable coherent strategies and better prioritisation across services.
- **Optimised resources**: Shared staffing and expertise increase flexibility, resilience, and effective demand management.
- **Enhanced data sharing**: Integrated systems improve planning, monitoring, and decision-making through better access to information.
- **Improved performance management**: Clear accountability and consistent use of key performance indicators (KPIs) enhance service monitoring and impact tracking.
- **Simplified customer access**: A single point of contact eliminates confusion, ensuring easier navigation and fewer misdirected queries.

Our shared view across Kent is that LGR must be the catalyst for fundamental reform in how we deliver our services, how we work with our partners and how we deliver for all communities.

From the engagement with services to date, it is clear there are opportunities to enhance service delivery by building on areas of good and innovative practice, alongside opportunities to operate differently post-LGR.

Initial discussions are the first steps in designing future service provision and we are committed to building on the momentum of our service specific workshops as we progress with reorganisation.

**Pan-Kent working**

There are functions and services which will be best delivered across Kent. This minimises the disruption from disaggregation but is driven by considering what the best geographic footprint and operating model for delivery of those services is.

A strategic authority across Kent and Medway provides a real opportunity to strengthen Kent as a whole and to focus the role of unitary authorities on their delivery role. The strategic authority will take a strategic role across Kent including:

- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

There are also services and organisations that operate across Kent that our approach to LGR would not disrupt including Adoption Partnership South East, Safeguarding Adults Board, elements of commissioning, Attendance Alliance for Kent and Medway, Kent Housing Group and Kent Resources partnership.

While not tying future councils into service delivery model decisions, we are supportive of partnership arrangements and other approaches that enables strategic functions, services and operations to be delivered across Kent where it is in the best interests of residents to do so.

**Adult Social Care and Children's Services spend data**

During the Options Appraisal, analysis was carried out of the actual cost incurred by different councils for key county-wide services.

This was led by KCC and tested with finance officers across Kent.

It found:

- for all of the multi-council options being put forward there is significant misalignment between the costs of delivery and the funding provided for both adult social care and children's services, with some areas at more of a disadvantage than others.
- the impact of the Fair Funding Review has been considered and is expected to have some impact on funding allocation, but based on analysis to date, misalignment between costs and funding is expected to continue for any multi-council model.
- this disparity is important for all councils across Kent to be aware of and to take appropriate mitigating steps in LGR planning. The potential to share funding appropriately based on actual demand and costs is an opportunity for discussion.

**Funding and expenditure**

***Table 22:*** *Total expenditure on Social Care*

| **Total Expenditure**<br><br>*(based on 23/24 spending)*[31] | **North Kent** | **West Kent** | **East Kent** | **Mid Kent** |
|---|---|---|---|---|

[31] Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2023 to 2024 individual local authority data - outturn - GOV.UK

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Children's Social Care (£m)** | 124.3 | 43.8 | 64.1 | 65.8 |
| **Adult Social Care (£m)** | 159.7 | 162.3 | 162.9 | 149.2 |

## Adult Social Care (ASC)

Overview of current ASC delivery

Kent County Council and Medway Council deliver adult social care as part of their existing responsibilities with some place-based partnerships in place across the existing councils to bring integrated teams together to understand the needs of the population, agree plans to meet those needs and implement solutions.

Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board oversees strategic planning and resource allocation for health and care services.

Delivery is planned and co-ordinated on the footprint of four health and care partnerships which bring together health providers, social care, public health, district councils and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Partnership for Better Health.

Kent County Council and Medway Council have a history of working together to great effect, with examples including:

- The Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board: a multi-agency partnership consisting of statutory and voluntary partner organisations, working together to keep adults at risk of abuse or neglect safe.
- The Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit (VRU): a partnership between the police, councils, health service providers and other key agencies to deliver a reduction in violence the county.

Evidence of shared posts demonstrates how working together across councils can build resilience, provide flexibility, offer value for money and deliver good outcomes.

***Case study – Joint Commissioning Post – Learning Disability and Autism***

The Kent and Medway Learning Disability and Autism Delivery Partnership was formed in January 2022.

It was established after a review of previous commissioning and alliance arrangements highlighted the need for a new whole-system approach.

This approach aims to improve health outcomes and maximise choice, control, independence and human rights for citizens with learning disabilities, autism or both.

In September 2023, NHS Kent and Medway and Kent County Council formed a legal partnership to jointly plan and commission services for neurodivergent citizens.

This Partnership for Neurodiversity Agreement allows for delegated functions under section 75 of the NHS Act (2006) if deemed necessary.

This agreement is further supported by a memorandum of understanding between Kent County Council, representing the partnership, and Medway Council, which aims to explore a tripartite

agreement and facilitate discussions on resources for neurodivergent individuals in Kent and Medway.

The System Programme Lead is a pivotal role established in August 2022, focusing on senior system leadership and comprehensive programme management.

This position is instrumental in fostering collaborative improvement, working with various partners to design and implement projects aimed at enhancing the health, wellbeing and life chances of individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people across Kent and Medway.

Effective and sustainable delivery of Kent and Medway's Learning Disability and Autism programme is ensured through collaboration and whole-system leadership, underpinned by securing commitment from essential stakeholders across health, social care and the third sector.

**LGR provides the opportunity to consider strategically how shared services and posts across the future councils can enhance delivery.**

Key ASC delivery challenges

CQC inspections in 23/24 across Kent and Medway rated both as Requires Improvement.

The strengths and areas for improvement included:

- for Kent County Council strengths included co-production and lived experience, improved hospital discharge, high demand management and staff development. Areas of focus included communications and information, transitions, delays in support and staff morale.
- Medway Council strengths included positive staff interactions, person-centred support, effective transitions and partnership working. Areas of focus included accessibility of information waiting times, service gaps and staffing challenges.

Given the differences highlighted there is an opportunity for KCC and Medway ASC teams to share learning and areas of good practice in preparation for LGR.

Additional challenges include:

- **Demographic and geographical challenges:** more than one-fifth of Kent's residents are aged 65 and above (20.5%), a higher proportion than Medway's 17%, and this demographic is expected to grow considerably by 2040.
- Areas of deprivation exist across Kent, particularly in eastern Kent. Coastal regions face specific difficulties, including economic precarity, geographical remoteness, and the complexities of service provision.
- **Funding shortfalls and financial strain:** budgets are insufficient to meet the rising demand and complexity of care needs, leading to difficult decisions and financial pressure on the entire system.
- **Workforce crisis:** difficult to recruit and retain enough care staff with specific challenges in Kent due to geography (coastal) and competition from neighbouring councils, alongside shortages in specialist roles like Approved Mental Health Professionals.
- **Rising and complex demand:** an increasing number of older adults with multiple health conditions, plus more younger adults with complex disabilities, means services are stretched by growing and more intricate care needs.
- **Fragile care market:** the local market of care homes and home care providers is unstable and inconsistent.

- **Fragmented health and social care:** despite efforts, integrating NHS health services with council social care remains difficult, causing disjointed care pathways, delayed hospital discharges, and gaps in support.
- **Poor data and system integration:** information sharing across different services and partners is complex and fragmented, hindering effective coordination, strategic planning and the ability to gain insights from data.
- **Policies:** differing local policies, procedures and ways of working across the area can lead to different cultures across localities resulting in inconsistent experiences for people accessing services.

Future ASC delivery and opportunities through LGR

Regardless of the geographies of future councils, we are committed to transforming adult social care by:

- **Improved, innovative service delivery:** developing and implementing new models of delivery based on best practice.
- **Fostering collaborative partnerships:** strengthening meaningful collaborations across Kent to achieve improved outcomes for all residents.
- **Strategic housing integration**: adopting a unified, strategic approach to the planning and co-ordination with housing services across the wider footprint to achieve closer alignment of these services for the benefit of adults needing support, reduce inequalities and prevent escalating need.
- **Streamlining data and systems:** enhancing data sharing and analytics through integrated systems to drive insights and improve service delivery.
- **Building workforce resilience:** exploring shared service models and new approaches to strengthen the social care workforce and ensure its sustainability.
- **Optimising commissioning:** implementing a strategic, Kent-wide commissioning approach where appropriate to better shape and influence the market, delivering enhanced outcomes and improved value for money.
- **Localising care provision:** ensuring services are delivered closer to home, with a deeper understanding of communities and individual needs.

**Adult Social Care delivery under Option 4B**

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the four proposed councils making up Option 4B.

***Table 23:*** *Adult Social Care Metrics*

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Population Size (mid 2024)** | 528,337 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25) | 12 | 18 | 46 | 37 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25) | 262 | 210 | 346 | 324 |
| People accessing short term support during the year, rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-25) | 21 | 30 | 62 | 51 |
| People accessing short term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 (2024-25) | 328 | 328 | 406 | 385 |
| People accessing long term support during the year (18-64), rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 57 | 44 | 70 | 65 |
| People accessing long term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 464 | 326 | 393 | 383 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 1,418 | 1,444 | 2,129 | 1,613 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 445 | 512 | 736 | 570 |

Key points in relation to the data:

The data seeks to identify, at a high level, the indicative demand on the system.

This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

- In the metrics above, East Kent faces the most demand, except in People access long term support during the year (65+). This is a known area of higher deprivation. In addition, there is a greater number of residential homes in the coastal areas which will have an impact.
- There is a trend in the metric above that East and Mid Kent face more demand than North and West Kent.
- The largest disparities between metrics around people 18-64 accessing short term support, and people over 18 with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support with the East Kent's demand being notable higher than North Kent.
- There is a consistent theme that demand in North Kent is lower except for in People accessing long term support during the year (65+). In this metric North Kent faces more demand than the other three proposed unitary authorities.

Opportunities for Adult Social Care delivery under Option 4B

Specific opportunities for this option include:

- The size of the four unitary authorities will enable community-based delivery so that different areas can design services around prominent needs and demands. For example, around older

persons (65+) accessing long term support in North Kent. Services will feel closer to the communities they serve. A greater sense of local accountability will strengthen this sense of proximity between people and adult social services.

- The four unitary authorities will also be able to focus on a system of early intervention and prevention. This is enabled by a greater proximity to the people they serve and understanding the different need profiles in each area. For example. there is an opportunity to review services around coastal areas and focus on said model of prevention and early intervention to manage relatively higher levels of demand.

## Children's Social Care

Overview of Children's Social Care current delivery

Kent County Council and Medway Council currently deliver children's social care services with positive Ofsted recognition.

The current delivery of services is an excellent foundation for LGR and provides the opportunity to learn from each other.

Kent County Council, covering a large and diverse region, achieved an Outstanding rating from Ofsted in November 2021.

This reflects consistently high-quality social work, strong leadership and significant positive impacts on children and families, particularly in early help, child protection and support for looked-after children.

Medway Council, serving a more concentrated urban area, was rated Good by Ofsted in July 2023.

This rating acknowledges effective leadership, sound social work practice and positive outcomes for children.

Medway's success is attributed to robust multi-agency partnerships and a commitment to early intervention, demonstrating a stable and responsive service model.

The rating demonstrates the transformation journey that Medway has been on.

Delivering effective and impactful children's services cannot be done in isolation and partnership working are critical.

Whatever tools, enablers or metrics you use, there is an undeniable and fundamental need for excellent leadership, clarity of vision and values, a culture of high support and high challenge, adequate resourcing and a resilient workforce to deliver day-in, day-out.

There are multiple examples which demonstrate how services are already being delivered innovatively across organisations.

- KCC has operated Out of Hours (OOH) services for Medway since 2014, with the current contractual arrangements being in place since April 2023. The service covers between 5pm and 7am, Monday to Friday and weekend and bank holidays and results in effective delivery and value for money. This arrangement works well, with good levels of open communication

between managers. Inspection feedback regarding OOH work for Medway has always identified effective service delivery and good to outstanding practice. There is no reason why this approach could not be replicated across the Kent and Medway footprint going forward.

- The Attendance Alliance for Kent and Medway is a regional initiative, working in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE), to share good practice and develop new strategies for improving school attendance.

***Case study - Adoption Agency South East***

Adoption Partnership South East (APSE) is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) delivering adoption services for three local authorities - the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council. It was launched on 1 November 2020. Kent County Council remains the host local authority.

RAA's 2023 Three-Year Plan focuses on building a supportive adoption community.

Its mission prioritises securing permanent homes for children and providing comprehensive support to all affected by adoption.

Since its inception, RAA has encouraged innovation and collaboration across several key areas.

These include innovative projects funded by the Department for Education, development of the adoption community, training and practice enhancement, and comprehensive adoption support services.

RAA has also focused on adopter recruitment to achieve permanency for children and has implemented mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement.

The RAA has allowed a localised service to operate across a regional footprint to the best advantage of providing permanence to children.

**The principles of this approach with a host authority can be explored further across the future unitary authorities.**

Key Children's Services delivery challenges

- **Workforce instability:** a national shortage of qualified social workers, leading to recruitment and retention difficulties, reliance on agency staff and higher caseloads that impact continuity and quality of care.
- **Rising and complex demand:** services are under pressure from a growing number of referrals, often involving highly complex issues.
- **Placement shortages:** securing enough suitable and stable placements for looked-after children is a critical challenge, particularly for older children, sibling groups and those with complex needs, often resulting in out-of-area placements and increased costs.
- **Limited specialist support:** access to timely and appropriate specialist services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), is difficult, leaving social care teams to manage complex emotional and behavioural needs.
- **Socio-economic impact:** areas of deprivation in both Kent and Medway contribute to child welfare concerns, with poverty, poor housing and family stressors increasing the demand for social care intervention.

- **Inconsistent thresholds:** differing thresholds for intervention across services and partner organisations can create confusion and make navigation difficult for families and professionals alike.
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities:** The SEND system including funding through the high needs block continues to face significant national and local challenges. This includes rising demand, increasing complexity, sufficiency of provision, capacity and capability gaps in relation to SEND specialists and educational psychologists and scale and complexity of the partnership landscape.
- **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) pressure**: the presence of UASC, particularly in Dover and the wider area, places significant strain on multiple services, including housing, with varying policies for their support.
- **Out-of-Area Placements (OOAP)**: both councils, especially Medway with its high per capita rate, face a major challenge from children placed by other local authorities, impacting housing, children's homes and foster care capacity.
- **Improving prevention:** while good social care practice exists, there is a shared need to enhance preventative services to intervene earlier and reduce the escalation of needs to statutory services.

***Case study - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children***

Kent faces a unique and profound challenge as a primary entry point for unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UAS) children, a direct consequence of its proximity to mainland Europe.

The county's UAS Children's Service holds comprehensive responsibility for the care and accommodation of these newly-arrived children, providing support until they are transferred to another local authority under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) or integrated into Kent's mainstream Child in Care Services, where support continues until they reach eligibility limits or are advised to return to their country of birth.

Since January 2016, more than 10,000 UAS children have arrived in Kent, necessitating a substantial expansion of services.

This now includes 10 reception centres and increased social work teams dedicated to assessment and placement.

Crucially, the timely transfer of these children is vital for maintaining sufficient accommodation capacity within Kent.

**This ongoing demand on the system and associated services is significant and will continue beyond LGR, representing a unique and disproportionate pressure not experienced by other areas across the UK.**

Future Children's Social Care delivery and opportunities through LGR

We are committed to continuing to transform children's services through LGR. Taking learning from across the area and delivering across the new councils.

- **Evolving best practice:** developing and putting into practice new ways of delivering care rooted in the best approaches for children and families.
- **Streamlined service delivery:** reducing complexity in delivery, for example, by consolidating current community service partnerships from 14 to enhance efficiency.

- **Leveraging convening power:** utilising our unique position to foster stronger partnerships and collaborations across the system.
- **Holistic place-based prevention:** adopting a comprehensive approach to prevention through multi-agency teams and neighbourhood working.
- **Community-centric approach:** ensuring local needs and cultures are deeply understood to influence and tailor delivery approaches.
- **Child and young person-led system:** placing the voice of our children and young people at the heart of our whole system approach, with stronger ownership and engagement from families and schools.
- **Strategic financial redesign:** designing new service budgets to optimise resource allocation, rather than relying on existing financial structures.
- **Building workforce resilience:** exploring shared service models and innovative approaches to strengthen the social care workforce and ensure its sustainability.
- **Unified housing provision:** implementing a simplified and unified approach to housing and planning to build market capacity at a local level.
- **Integrated early help pathways:** reducing duplication and improving visibility of risk across agencies.

***Case study - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities SEND***

In recent years, Medway Council has transformed its delivery of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services, driven by a commitment to accountability and collaborative commissioning.

By engaging with partners across the system, fostering a culture of shared responsibility, and holding providers to account, Medway has moved from a £24 million deficit to a balanced budget.

This strategic financial management, coupled with a high-trust-high-challenge mantra for providers, has enabled the development of more local provision and a transparent funding model, ensuring resources are effectively directed to where they are most needed.

Core to this success lies in an embedded cultural change, uniting stakeholders and particularly bringing schools around the table to address issues and problem-solve together. This approach has fostered a powerful sense of collective responsibility, resulting in a system where schools actively challenge each other, develop new initiatives and have significantly increased the proportion of EHCPs managed within mainstream settings from 26.4% to 35%.

This cultural shift is further reinforced by robust quality assurance, ensuring all provision meets high standards and is responsive to children's needs.

The size of Medway has proven to be a distinct advantage, enabling rapid change and full oversight of the entire SEND system.

This agility allows for the co-production of teams, personalised responses for complex cases and a deep understanding of families and social workers within the community.

With strong parent/carer involvement, locality-focused initiatives and a commitment to embedding accessibility policies, Medway has not only achieved significant financial stability but has also cultivated a happier, more integrated team and a highly responsive, accountable and inclusive SEND service that truly knows and supports its children.

**The proposed options are in relation to smaller scale, multiple councils where this approach and learning could be applied.**

Children's Social Care delivery under Option 4B

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the three proposed councils making up Option 4B.

***Table 24:*** *Children's Social Care Metrics*

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Active Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) by School District, rate per 10,000) (Oct 2025) | 368 | 339 | 488 | 376 |
| Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Y12&13, rate per 10,000 (2024) | 360 | 283 | 425 | 351 |
| Child in Need Plans, rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025) | 94 | 65 | 104 | 95 |
| Child Protection Plans Rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025) | 37 | 25 | 40 | 35 |
| Looked After Children (LAC) by placement address, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 65 | 22 | 94 | 64 |
| Other Local Authority Looked After Children placed in Kent & Medway, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 60 | 21 | 63 | 52 |
| Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Looked After, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 7 | 2 | 14 | 10 |

Key points in relation to the data:

The data seeks to identify, at a high level, the indicative demand on the system.

This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

There is a consistent trend in all the metrics above that East Kent faces the most demand and West Kent the least. North and Mid Kent face similar levels of demand across the metrics, apart from greater variation in OLA rate and UASC rates.

**High needs (SEND):** The data above highlights a fairly consistent distribution of EHCPs, especially across North, West and East unitary authorities. East Kent has the highest proportion of EHCPs, which reflects a combination of demand and the distribution of suitable provision.

**NEET:** North and Mid Kent have similar levels of NEET, with West Kent being notably lower than the other unitary authorities. East Kent has the highest level of NEET which likely reflects wider economic pressures in the area.

**Children's services:** The LAC rate in East Kent is higher than the other unitary authorities, especially when compared to West Kent which has a much lower rate than the others. There is a slight adjustment for this in the OLA rate but it broadly matches the distribution of the LAC rate. Lower LAC and OLA rate in West Kent reflect the relative cost of provision, which is higher in the area when compared to areas like east Kent.

The bulk of UASC demand is split between East and Mid Kent, with demand being highest in East Kent.

Opportunities for Children's Social Care delivery under Option 4B

Specific opportunities for this option include:

- The four unitary option will enable children's services to be closer to communities and the voice of children in each area. With this proximity comes greater local accountability and the ability to design around families and children. Boundaries reflect local identities and partnership clusters.
- Option 4b will also enable effective and joined-up partnership working through aligning with health and education boundaries.
- Through the creation of East and Mid Kent, there is an opportunity to spread UASC demand effectively across two authorities and collaborate across the region to address what is a national issue.
- The is also the opportunity for the four unitary authorities to work together and investigate joint commissioning arrangements to help mitigate the uneven distribution of demand and provision in children's services across the wider footprint.

## Housing and homelessness

Overview of current housing and homelessness delivery

Operating within the structures of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and national housing targets, councils are pivotal in delivering housing and homelessness services.

The provision and key responsibilities vary across the type of local authority.

- **Medway Unitary Council:** full housing authority covering strategic spatial planning, homelessness services, social housing allocation, private sector housing regulation and affordable housing delivery.
- **Kent County Council:** indirect housing impact including securing supply for needs arising from social care, public health, education and strategic infrastructure planning influencing housing needs and support for vulnerable people.
- **12 district councils:** local housing authority covering homelessness prevention and relief, social housing allocation, private sector housing enforcement, local housing strategy and strategic spatial planning to enable supply of housing through land allocations including for small sites and garden communities and determination of planning applications. In addition, some districts are housing providers which includes building and managing housing stock and in some cases managing a Housing Revenue Account.

Delivering successful outcomes is a complex challenge, whether it's managing vast infrastructure projects or tackling homelessness in our communities.

While large-scale programmes demand intricate planning, addressing homelessness requires understanding a deeply personal and varied set of needs.

Homelessness itself stems from a difficult mix of financial struggles like poverty, unaffordable housing and low wages; societal problems such as domestic violence, discrimination and a lack of support; and individual battles with mental health, addiction, physical disabilities, or past trauma.

This intricate web of challenges extends beyond homelessness, frequently impacting other vital services like adult and children's social care.

Initiatives are already in place and there is the opportunity to build on these through LGR.

***Case study – Homelessness Employment Pathway - Gravesham Brough Council***

Gravesham Borough Council (GBC), using its role as the area's largest employer, has successfully tackled a critical barrier to employment for homeless individuals.

Recognising traditional employment services often fail vulnerable individuals, the council identified an opportunity to use its influence to support disadvantaged people back into the workforce and to stabilise its own frontline services, such as waste and refuse collection, which experienced high staff turnover and agency spend.

This led to the introduction of a dedicated Employment Pathway in September 2023, specifically targeting former rough sleepers residing in GBC's supported housing scheme.

The Employment Pathway is designed for holistic support, moving beyond just job placement.

Once clients are ready for employment, they receive help with CV creation and employment risk assessments.

The programme includes an induction day, two weeks of work experience and entry into casual contracts, providing a crucial first step back into the workforce.

The initiative integrates ongoing mentorship, mental health and wellbeing support through weekly sessions and flexibility during hardship, all aimed at helping individuals establish a routine, build confidence and develop essential skills for long-term stability and independence.

This innovative approach has proven highly successful, not only providing participants with vital employment history and a route to unsupported accommodation but also significantly reducing the council's in-year agency spend.

Due to its positive impact, GBC is now expanding this initiative, rolling it out to private companies to maximise job opportunities for more vulnerable individuals.

**Innovation on a local scale which can be applied across an area of multiple unitary authorities.**

The need for working together and sharing of information to deliver outcomes cannot be underestimated.

The Kent Housing Group (KHG) is a forum for housing organisations in Kent and Medway.

KHG has representation from all 12 district councils across Kent, Medway Council, 13 housing associations, four support providers, Kent County Council and Kent Public Health.

KHG also has affiliated membership with a number of organisations who have a vested interest in the housing sector across Kent and Medway.

This strong strategic approach will provide stability through LGR and beyond.

***Case study – Kent Forum Housing Strategy***

The Kent Forum Housing Strategy provides clarity on the major strategic housing challenges facing Kent and Medway, acknowledges that past ways of working may not be fit for the future and identifies where a Kent and Medway perspective can add value, stimulate innovation and contribute to the delivery of local aims.

The strategy is unique in that it looks across a whole county area and brings district, borough, unitary and county council ambitions together through a bottom-up approach.

This is not about centrally-imposed targets. This is about lower tier and unitary authorities identifying their own local housing needs and requirements, while recognising the added value that can be gained by adopting a common approach to meeting these where appropriate.

**An adaptable model which can be shaped for future delivery while minimising the risks associated with change to the current model.**

Key housing and homelessness delivery challenges

**Overarching challenges:**

- **Complex delivery landscape:** the involvement of 14 councils delivering diverse services and initiatives across the area results in significant complexity and different approaches to policy formulation through to actual delivery.
- **Data fragmentation:** Kent and Medway use the same software for homelessness and operation of housing registers. There are multiple systems for housing management activities meaning that it is difficult to gather comprehensive data and insights impeding effective decision-making.
- **Staffing and capacity gaps:** a notable shortage of skills and capacity including challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced staff, impacts the effective delivery of both large infrastructure projects and critical public services.
- **Funding constraints:** investment in housing delivery varies across Kent. Notwithstanding this, the level of investment, grant and subsidy needed to address social housing need is not available. Limited and often short-term funding restricts long-term planning and investment in housing and homelessness services, making proactive solutions difficult.

**Housing supply and delivery challenges**

- **Housing delivery shortfalls:** each district has its own challenges in delivering housing requirements both in terms of the overall amount of housing needed and housing that people can afford including social rented homes and supported accommodation. Housing cost to earning affordability ratios differ across Kent and Medway resulting in varying housing requirements. Market conditions which significantly impact the ability of housing developers to deliver housing also vary markedly. This produces a complex picture. Consequently, delivery performance varies markedly both spatially and over time in line with economic cycles. Reflecting the national picture, meeting housing delivery plans is challenging, leading to a scarcity of housing and in particular affordable housing options.
- **Rising demand:** rising demand for housing is further exacerbated by Kent's location. Our coastal position results in a situation where asylum seekers disproportionately put strain the housing system, leading to increased demand for temporary accommodation, pressure on the private rental market, significant unreimbursed financial burdens and operational challenges.
- **Proximity to London**: where housing costs and demand produce a more acute set of challenges also impacts on demand in Kent through out-of-area placements, gradients in costs for housing being generally higher in the west of the county results in out-of-area placement within Kent and the spatial pattern of this is complex. For example, currently Maidstone currently hosts 222 out-of-area placements by other Kent authorities while Thanet hosts five. Unitary authorities covering larger geographies and populations offer the opportunity for many of these pressures to be managed within their own boundaries.
- **Private rental sector issues:** concerns exist regarding the quality of homes in the private rental sector and frequent breakdowns in relationships between tenants and landlords, contributing to housing instability. The distribution of challenges and resources are not uniform.
- **Social housing stock:** the availability of local authority social housing stock, coupled with varying quality and high maintenance costs for existing properties. Not all current authorities are stock holding. This needs to be recognised in both the transition to new unitary authorities e.g. arising from the need to appropriately engage with tenants and the time needed for successor authorities to design a structured approach to future arrangements in the larger geographies where social housing will have a more diverse landscape in terms of providers.
- **Temporary accommodation (TA) shortage:** a lack of suitable and affordable temporary accommodation options further strains services and resources. There is a mixed picture across Kent with variation in investment in TA or capacity arising within HRAs in some places. Notwithstanding this all councils use expensive nightly-paid accommodation to bridge the gap between their own accommodation levels and need.

**Homelessness services**

- **Homelessness visibility and policy fragmentation:** the propensity for rough sleeping and homelessness varies across Kent and Medway reflecting differences in the factors that cause homelessness. This impacts on the consequent demands, the distribution of cost and the solutions that have been developed. Maintaining visibility of individuals experiencing homelessness is difficult as they often move across districts. This is compounded by differing strategies and policies between councils, hindering a unified approach.
- **Disconnected services and complex needs:** homelessness is often linked to a wider range of complex individual needs, yet services are not always joined up effectively for proactive prevention and holistic support.

Future housing and homelessness delivery and opportunities through LGR

We are committed to:

- **Building on successful initiatives**: identify, scale and celebrate proven best practices and successful initiatives across Kent, fostering shared learning and replicating positive outcomes.
- **Communities**: listen to and collaborate with our diverse communities, ensuring their voices shape housing and homelessness strategies and solutions.
- **Partner collaboration:** continue to foster robust and effective partnerships with all stakeholders including statutory bodies, third-sector organisations and private providers to deliver comprehensive and coordinated support.
- **Simplified Strategic Planning**: simplified strategic plan for housing and homelessness, maximising available opportunities and resources through coordinated effort across smaller unitary and place focus.
- **Holistic service integration and prevention:** adopt a truly holistic approach to service delivery, ensuring seamless integration across all relevant services and the wider system to proactively support, prevent and reduce homelessness through early intervention.
- **Data insights:** simplified and streamlined systems will enable data and insights to be more readily available to inform strategies, measure impact and drive continuous improvement in service design and delivery.
- **Policy alignment for impact:** drive greater alignment of policies and ways of working, where practical, to achieve more consistent and effective outcomes and address systemic drivers of housing instability.
- **Sustainable**: focus on developing and implementing sustainable, long-term solutions that address the root causes of homelessness and ensure lasting housing stability for individuals and families.

***Case study – innovative use of Housing Revenue Account***

Ashford Borough Council is making innovative use of its Housing Revenue Account to deliver an ambitious programme of more than 1,000 new council-owned homes within the next six to seven years.

The council has an identified pipeline of 33 sites which will deliver a mix of affordable and social rent homes, including independent living homes for older people and accessible homes for people with disabilities, as well as properties for shared ownership.

A diverse range of delivery models are being used to achieve the pipeline of new homes.

These include:

- building on council-owned land
- regeneration schemes
- largescale acquisitions from developers of already-built homes
- purchasing affordable homes that have been secured under a s106 agreement which Registered Providers are unable or unwilling to deliver and package deals where land is purchased and the properties paid for during the construction process.

The HRA is also used buy properties on the open market and taking them into council ownership and use.

A majority of these properties are former council homes that were sold via the Right to Buy.

The strategic focus is on larger homes that can be adapted for people with physical disabilities to help them live independently.

This ambitious programme aims to significantly address housing needs and improve the quality of life for residents across the borough.

**A scalable best practice approach which can replicate positive outcomes.**

***Case study: Canterbury City Council – resettlement support***

Canterbury City Council took the decision to deliver resettlement support in house rather than using the KCC provision, supporting those arriving on resettlement schemes since 2015.

The work expanded rapidly in 2021 when the council supported the opening of two hotels to accommodate Afghan nationals within the district.

The wraparound support work includes successful integration into communities, access to services, one-to-one and group support, money management, entering into employment/skills/training and longer-term housing solutions.

The experienced team consistently deliver excellent integration outcomes for families.

A key strength of the Canterbury approach is partnership working with voluntary and statutory sector partners to deliver joined up and innovative services such as the Welcome Hub – a jobs, English language and drop-in advice service.

**This initiative was praised by the Ministry of Defence as a model of good practice and work is already underway to replicate this approach in other areas of Kent.**

Housing and Homelessness under Option 4B

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the three proposed councils making up Option 4B.

***Table 25:*** *Housing and Homelessness Metrics*

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rates of homelessness | 5.34 | 4.07 | 5.45 | 4.17 |

Key points in relation to the data:

- Homelessness rates between North and East Kent are closely aligned, suggesting similar levels of demand.
- West and Mid Kent perform better and shows a comparably lower rate at around four per 1,000 households.

Opportunities for housing and homelessness under Option 4B

Devolution will be a key enabler to help accelerate delivery of the future ambition through strategic joined-up planning and delivery across the area.

The four-unitary model offers distinct advantages for addressing housing and homelessness challenges:

- **Streamlined strategic planning and policy alignment:** by reducing the number of local authorities involved in housing and homelessness from 14 to four, Option 4B significantly simplifies the strategic planning landscape. This enables a more cohesive and coordinated approach to policy formulation and delivery, reducing fragmentation and fostering greater consistency across the region. This simplification will maximise available opportunities and resources through coordinated effort across smaller unitary and place-focused areas.
- **Enhanced visibility and unified approach to homelessness:** with larger geographical remits, unitary authorities can gain better visibility of individuals experiencing homelessness, even as they move across former district boundaries. This, combined with the opportunity for policy alignment, will facilitate a more unified and effective approach to preventing and relieving homelessness, addressing the current challenge of differing strategies and policies.
- **Improved housing delivery capacity and responsiveness:** unitary authorities, with their larger scale and potentially greater resources, are better positioned to address housing delivery shortfalls. They can develop more robust local housing strategies that account for varying affordability ratios and market conditions across their broader geographies. This critical mass can also support a more ambitious council house building program, including social rented homes and supported accommodation, leading to increased supply.
- **Integrated service delivery for complex needs:** the unitary structure inherently supports a holistic approach to service integration. This will enable seamless coordination across housing, social care, public health, and other relevant services, allowing for proactive prevention and comprehensive, person-centred support for individuals with complex needs, moving beyond the current disconnected service landscape.
- **Optimised management of demand pressures:** unitary councils covering larger geographies and populations offer the opportunity to manage significant demand pressures, such as those arising from asylum seekers or out-of-area placements, more effectively within their own boundaries. This can reduce the strain on temporary accommodation and the private rental market and mitigate unreimbursed financial burdens.
- **Strategic management of social housing stock:** for authorities that become stockholding, the unitary model provides an opportunity to design a structured approach to future arrangements for social housing. This includes engaging appropriately with tenants during transition and developing long-term strategies for managing a more diverse landscape of providers across larger geographies, addressing the current varied picture of stockholding and maintenance.
- **Leveraging data for informed decision-making:** the simplification and streamlining of systems under a unitary structure will make data and insights more readily available. This will significantly improve the ability to inform strategies, measure impact and drive continuous improvement in service design and delivery for both housing and homelessness.
- **Building on existing strengths and collaboration:** Option 4B provides a strong foundation to build on successful initiatives and existing collaborative forums like the Kent Housing Group. It allows for the identification, scaling and replication of proven best practices across the new unitary areas, fostering shared learning and positive outcomes.
- **Addressing private rental sector issues:** with a broader remit, unitary authorities can implement more consistent and effective strategies to address concerns regarding the quality of homes in the private rental sector and improve tenant-landlord relationships, contributing to greater housing stability.
- **Enhanced workforce capacity and skills:** larger unitary authorities are better equipped to address staffing and capacity gaps in housing and homelessness services. They can attract and retain experienced staff, improving the effective delivery of critical public services.

## Transport and highways system function

Overview of current transport and highways delivery

The transport and highways system function encompasses a broad range of activities from strategic transport planning and policy development to the delivery of highways programmes, planned and reactive maintenance and network management including coordination with utility works.

Highways services in Kent and Medway are managed by three primary authorities: National Highways, Kent County Council, and Medway Council.

Each holds distinct responsibilities for different parts of the road network, ensuring comprehensive coverage across the region.

While these three are the designated highway authorities, district councils also play a vital supporting role, acting as key intermediaries and advisors in local highway-related matters and securing developer financial contributions.

- **Department for Transport:** defines national policy for transport planning and systems including public transport and highways. This includes its vision for the future of the English strategic road network and a Roads Investment Strategy.
- **National Highways:** manages and improves the strategic road network including motorways and major A-roads (trunk roads) within Kent and Medway.
- **Kent County Council (KCC):** is the transport planning authority for Kent and the highway authority for the majority of Kent, overseeing the production of transport and infrastructure strategy and the management, maintenance and improvement of local roads, pavements, cycleways and associated infrastructure.
- **Medway Council:** as a unitary authority, it is the transport planning and highway authority for all local roads and highways within its specific Medway unitary boundary.
- **District councils:** provide crucial local input and advice on planning applications impacting transport and highways. While Kent County Council (KCC) acts as a statutory consultee on planning applications, providing advice, identifying conditions, and managing Section 278 agreements, district councils also act as public liaisons for community concerns and manage local amenities.

Examples of collaboration include district council engagement with KCC and National Highways to bring forward local improvements on the strategic network.

***Case study - Ebbsfleet Garden City***

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation EDC was announced in 2015 to facilitate the delivery of up to 15,000 homes and create a 21st-century Garden City in Ebbsfleet, north Kent.

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation is the planning authority for development management.

However, Dartford Brough Council (Dartford BC) is the local planning authority.

Dartford has worked closely with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation and KCC highways in the successful preparation of the Dartford borough local plan and implementation of development schemes and the associated infrastructure requirements.

This is facilitated through regular meetings and collaboration on sustainable travel projects between the EDC, Dartford BC, Gravesham Borough Council and KCC.

This builds on a longstanding history of collaboration on the Ebbsfleet area, prior to the establishment of the EDC, in relation to junction and road improvements required to facilitate the significant growth in the area.

***Case study: Bringing back international rail services to Kent***

Strong and sustained collaboration has taken place between KCC and district and borough councils to bring back international rail services like Eurostar to Kent.

This involved a concerted effort to build a strong case for resuming operations, addressing technical challenges with operators and infrastructure managers and demonstrating the economic benefits of serving the Kent passenger market.

The aim was to convince key stakeholders both Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International stations should have services restored, similar to the pre-pandemic situation in 2020.

This objective was achieved through collaboration between Kent County Council (KCC) and the district/borough councils, particularly Ashford and Dartford.

While KCC led on the transport aspects and coordinated economic arguments between the boroughs, the individual councils were crucial in championing their respective stations and highlighting local economic growth opportunities.

This combined effort allowed for a comprehensive and unified argument to the government for the reopening of both stations.

Key transport and highways delivery challenges

- **Active Travel and pedestrian infrastructure:** both authorities face challenges in maintaining and improving pedestrian environments. Ageing footways, limited accessibility in some urban centres and gaps in safe walking routes, particularly around schools and town centres, hinder efforts to promote walking. Funding constraints have slowed progress on upgrading crossings, improving public realm quality and ensuring compliance with accessibility standards, especially for vulnerable users.
- **Sustainable and public transport connectivity:** bus services continue to face declining patronage and reliability issues due to congestion, rising operating costs and driver shortages. Limited funding for service subsidies restricts route coverage and frequency, particularly in rural areas. Opportunities to enhance integration between bus, rail and active travel modes are often constrained by infrastructure limitations and inconsistent investment across the region. The ambition to grow sustainable travel is also challenged by public perceptions of reliability and affordability.
- **Private vehicles and freight movement:** high volumes of commuter, tourist and freight traffic, driven by Kent's strategic location, cross-Channel gateways and proximity to London, place sustained pressure on the road network. This contributes to congestion, accelerated asset deterioration and difficulties in meeting air quality and carbon reduction targets. The

maintenance backlog, exacerbated by rising material costs and climate impacts, continues to challenge network resilience.

- **Operational, workforce and coordination challenges:** persistent workforce shortages and skills gaps across engineering, planning and operational roles affect both authorities. Coordination with utility companies and developers for roadworks and infrastructure upgrades remains complex and disruptive, often prolonging project delivery times and reducing public satisfaction.
- **Governance, geography and strategic balance:** Medway Council, as a unitary authority, has direct responsibility for all local transport functions within a dense urban area, requiring a fine balance between supporting growth and improving sustainable transport options. Kent County Council, overseeing a much larger and more rural network, faces distinct challenges in ensuring equitable access and consistent service standards across varied geographies.

Future transport and highways delivery and opportunities through LGR

Future delivery of transport and highways services relies on ongoing collaboration and a strategic approach to deliver for the people of Kent.

In the future we are committed to:

- **Integrated strategic planning:** significantly streamlining the current 12 Local Plans, this approach fosters a more cohesive and joined-up strategic planning framework across the area, particularly for transport and highways infrastructure, with improved integration of land planning and transport planning.
- **Equitable influence:** the creation of evenly-sized unitary authorities ensures each entity possesses a balanced voice, enabling effective influence over strategic decision-making for the entire transport network.
- **Service harmonisation:** standardising service provision and associated fees and charges across the entire area will simplify processes and enhance consistency for residents across all transport-related services.
- **Balanced local governance:** this model establishes unitary authorities that are sufficiently large for strategic decision-making yet remain agile enough to deeply understand and respond to local impacts and needs across the transport system.
- **Enabling devolution:** this option directly supports the ambition for establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority, facilitating greater local control and accountability over transport and highways.
- **Innovative service delivery:** exploring and implementing shared service models and pioneering approaches to enhance organisational resilience and service effectiveness which can support future devolution plans.
- **Optimised commissioning:** implementing a strategic, integrated commissioning approach where appropriate, to effectively shape and influence the market, driving better outcomes and value.
- **Resilience:** if there is poor delivery in one unitary authority, the delivery in the remaining unitary authorities is unaffected.

Opportunities for transport and highways delivery under Option 4B

As outlined, devolution is a key enabler that will help to accelerate the delivery of future ambitions. Operating on a smaller scale enables teams to be more responsive while strategically aligned.

Key opportunities include:

- **Enhanced strategic planning and integration:** the consolidation of Local Plans from 12 to four under this model will create a more cohesive and integrated strategic planning framework for transport and highways infrastructure. This directly improves the integration of land use and transport planning, leading to more efficient and effective development.
- **Equitable influence and decision-making:** the creation of four evenly-sized unitary authorities ensures each entity possesses a balanced voice. This allows for more effective and equitable influence over strategic decision-making across the entire transport network, ensuring diverse local needs are considered.
- **Harmonised service provision:** this structure facilitates the standardisation of service provision, fees and charges across the entire area. This simplification enhances consistency for residents and businesses across all transport-related services, improving user experience.
- **Balanced and responsive governance:** Option 4B establishes unitary authorities that are sufficiently large to undertake strategic decision-making for complex transport challenges yet remain agile enough to deeply understand and respond to specific local impacts and needs across the transport system.
- **Stronger foundation for devolution:** this model directly supports the ambition for establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority, providing a robust local government structure that facilitates greater local control, accountability and strategic oversight over transport and highways.
- **Fostering innovation and resilience:** the four-unitary approach encourages the exploration and implementation of shared service models and pioneering approaches to enhance organisational resilience and service effectiveness. This supports future devolution plans by building capacity and adaptability.
- **Increased system resilience:** a key benefit of multiple unitary authorities is that if there is poor delivery or a significant issue in one unitary area, the delivery and stability of services in the remaining unitary authorities are unaffected, providing greater overall system resilience.

## Waste services

Overview of current waste delivery

As a unitary authority, Medway Council is the Waste Collection Authority (WCA) and Waste Disposal Authority (WDA). Contracts are in place with Medway Norse, Countrystyle and Veolia with lengthy terms up to 2040.

Waste arises in Medway of 117kt per annum of which 38% is recycled, reused or composted

Kent County Council acts as the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), contracting with third parties like FCC and CSKL until 2030 to manage waste disposal infrastructure.

This includes Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), Waste Transfer Stations (WTS), Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) and Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities at Allington.

The 12 district councils serve as Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs), collecting household waste and delivering it to KCC-managed disposal outlets.

Waste arises in Kent of 650kt per annum of which 42.1% recycled, reused or composted

Kent and the districts work closely through partnerships including Mid Kent Partnership, South West Kent partnerships and the Kent Waste Partnership.

***Case study – Kent Waste Partnership***

The Kent Resource Partnership brings together staff from Kent County Council and the 12 district councils.

Together, they manage waste collection and disposal, street cleaning and enforcement services across the region.

A dedicated strategic lead guides all partnership activities including how they are run, how they communicate, and what projects they work on.

The lead also builds relationships with other groups and looks for new opportunities and funding.

The Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, developed through the partnership provides the framework for collaborative delivery with a strong focus on developing and delivering services to be efficient, effective and sustainable while navigating significant change in waste policy.

All partners contribute money each year to cover staff costs, for the lead and an analyst, and to pay for agreed projects.

A recent campaign to recycle food waste increased the average amount collected and recycled across seven areas by 20%.

**This collaborative approach and shared strategy have been crucial in driving alignment, maintaining a shared focus and ultimately achieving positive outcomes.**

Key waste delivery challenges

- **Aging infrastructure:** maintaining and upgrading existing waste management infrastructure to ensure continued operational efficiency and reliability.
- **Infrastructure capacity:** strategic planning and investment are required to meet future infrastructure demands, particularly in response to significant housing growth.
- **Divergent delivery approaches and policies:** inconsistencies in collection methodologies and varying resident expectations across different areas hinder the establishment of a unified and efficient waste management system.
- **Waste and collection strategy misalignment:** the two-tier delivery structure often leads to a disconnect between waste strategies and budgetary allocations, potentially resulting in isolated decision-making and collection approaches that do not adequately consider disposal costs.
- **Limited funding transparency:** a lack of clear information regarding the flow of funding from central government to local waste services.

- **Complex contractual landscape:** the presence of multiple long-term contracts across Kent, including one currently under dispute, complicates operational management and strategic planning.
- **Public engagement and behaviour change:** challenges in encouraging effective resident participation in recycling schemes, waste reduction and sustainable waste practices including addressing contamination issues.
- **Regulatory compliance and evolving legislation:** the ongoing demand to adapt to and comply with changes in national and international waste management regulations, environmental standards and targets.
- **Workforce recruitment and retention:** difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled personnel across all levels of waste management operations.
- **Technological adoption and innovation:** the complexities and costs associated with integrating new technologies for waste sorting, treatment, energy recovery and data management.
- **Illegal dumping and fly tipping:** addressing the persistent issue of illegal waste disposal and its associated costs and environmental consequences.

Future waste delivery and opportunities through LGR

In the future we are committed to:

- **Learning from success:** we will take what has worked well across Kent, like our Waste Liaison Officers, and build on those successes to make things even better.
- **Working together:** we will strengthen our relationships across Kent, adapting our partnerships as needed to deliver on our regional waste plans.
- **Smarter way to deliver:** we will look into creating a single, strategic waste body for the whole region, potentially linking it with how we plan for new developments.
- **Connecting the dots:** we will bring together collection and disposal budgets so we can make smarter decisions that consider the whole picture, not just parts of it.
- **Better use of information:** we will get our data and systems talking to each other so we can gain clearer insights and make better plans.
- **Planning ahead:** planning for the infrastructure we need, making sure it fits with local areas and future building projects.
- **Making decisions easier:** working together across future councils will enable us to reach consensus and move forward more quickly.

***Case study – Waste Liaison Officers***

Kent County Council (KCC) has established two Waste Liaison Officer roles to enhance the operational relationship between the Waste Disposal Authority (KCC) and the 12 district and borough councils, which act as Waste Collection Authorities.

These officers serve as a crucial link, fostering communication, promoting shared understanding, and supporting performance improvement across both tiers of local government.

Their responsibilities include facilitating quarterly liaison meetings, sharing monthly performance data for transparency and resolving operational issues arising between the collection and disposal authorities.

By acting as a bridge, they ensure service challenges are addressed collaboratively and efficiently, ultimately improving outcomes for residents.

The Waste Liaison Officers monitor performance data - tonnage, recycling and contamination - for statutory reporting and improvement, collaborating with district teams and KCC Waste Data and Insight to interpret trends.

They ensure two-way communication on policy and operational changes for consistency, translate complex data into actionable insights for districts and coordinate abandoned vehicle disposal.

In addition to strengthening relationships, the Waste Liaison Officers have significantly improved operational efficiency by resolving service issues faster and with fewer escalations.

They have also been crucial during disruptions like extreme weather or contractor problems, coordinating responses and maintaining service resilience through rapid communication and joint problem-solving.

**This has minimised impact on residents and upheld service standards.**

***Case study – creation of a waste Local Authority Trading Company***

Canterbury Council established a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) called Canterbury Environment Company (Canenco) to take over household waste collection services from a commercial contractor.

This decision was made after an options appraisal due to dissatisfaction with the previous service.

Canenco's board consists of three council officers and a managing director with extensive waste management experience was recruited.

Staff from the former contractor were transferred to Canenco and the council bought the necessary vehicles.

The council maintains oversight of the client function and waste collection strategy.

This change has resulted in a more responsive company for waste collection and street cleansing.

The council and Canenco teams work closely, leading to efforts to reduce contamination in dry recycling bins.

**Following the successful transfer of waste collection and street cleansing in February 2021, grounds maintenance services were transferred in December 2021 and public toilet cleansing and maintenance in June 2024.**

Opportunities for waste delivery under Option 4B

The 4B proposal creates a single-tier structure in which each of the four new Unitary Authorities - North Kent, East Kent, Mid Kent and West Kent - will take full responsibility for waste collection, disposal, recycling and environmental services within their boundaries.

This integration ends the fragmentation between district waste collection and county waste disposal, allowing joined-up planning, consistent service standards, and better environmental outcomes across Kent and Medway.

- **Integrated working** - integrated budgeting enables single-stream decision-making on vehicle fleets, treatment contracts and recycling infrastructure, improving value for money. Based on the proven efficiency of Medway's existing single-tier service, this model is expected to generate savings on contract and operational costs through shared procurement, joint depot use and harmonised service standards.
- **Environmental standards** - each council will be responsible for achieving local net-zero and waste-reduction targets aligned to Kent's county-wide climate strategy. Harmonised policies across the four councils will support consistent recycling collections, contamination controls, and food-waste treatment, making services simpler for residents and more cost-effective for contractors. Shared data systems across the four councils will enable transparent reporting of waste performance and carbon reduction.
- **Customer experience -** residents will have a single point of contact for all waste, street cleansing and recycling queries, improving customer satisfaction and responsiveness. There are also opportunities to run hyper local campaigns that can drive behaviour change and increase recycling participation. Local control allows each unitary to design services reflecting their nuanced geographies, for example:
    - North Kent and Medway: urban waste optimisation and riverside recycling logistics.
    - East Kent: coastal litter management and tourism-related waste strategies.
    - Mid Kent: rural route rationalisation and community composting.
    - West Kent: green-waste and recycling services tailored to rural and commuter communities.
- **Partnerships and investment -** the 4B proposal will enhance partnership working with Kent Resource Partnership (KRP), DEFRA and private-sector waste operators through simplified governance. Each council will be able to lead or co-invest in regional waste infrastructure, such as materials recovery facilities, transfer stations and low-carbon fleet depots. Joint procurement across the four authorities will attract stronger bids, secure economies of scale and stimulate innovation in waste technology. Collaboration with universities and FE colleges (eg Medway's Institute of Sustainable Futures, Canterbury Christ Church University) will support research into waste reduction, recycling behaviour and green skills.
- **Social value -** integrated contracts will include local employment, apprenticeships, and reuse initiatives, replicating Medway's successful social-value approach in highways and waste. Each authority can partner with local voluntary organisations and social enterprises to expand reuse, repair and community recycling centres. The 4B model creates opportunities to link waste policy with climate, housing and transport planning, enabling low-carbon logistics and circular-economy clusters along major corridors such as the Thames Gateway and M20.

# Public service reform

**Criteria 3b.** Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money

**At the core of any successful public service organisation is the desire to do the best for those who need those services most. Kent, as an area, starts from a high base but there is an obvious desire to push further and faster for the citizens of Kent. LGR provides the platform to meet the moment and drive for fundamental change. There is a clear desire to be ambitious and to change public services. There is an underpinning set of shared principles focused around shifting the system to a preventative model. Public services cannot just keep meeting demand. They must move from being responsive to being proactive. LGR can be a catalyst to this change. Kent will drive the reform of public services, ensuring they are rooted in their communities with outcomes at the centre of decision making.**

## What is public service reform (PSR) and why is it needed?

Public service reform will be the core to the transformation of any new configuration of local government in Kent.

LGR offers an opportunity to rethink how people and communities are supported, moving from a fragmented, reactive system to one that is proactive, integrated and designed around the needs and strengths of Kent's residents.

There will be the opportunity to root this in reform of public services in the community and people of Kent.

Public service reform will seek to change the way public service professionals work together and ensure residents feel the positive benefits of that work, fundamentally changing the way services are configured and delivered.

Too often services are organised around institutional and professional boundaries rather than people.

In the latest Spending Review, the government outlined three principles to its approach to PSR:

- to integrate services so they are organised around people's lives;
- to improve long-term outcomes for people through a focus on prevention, relying less on expensive crisis management; and
- to devolve power to local areas that understand the needs of their communities best, with services that are designed with and for people, in partnership with civil society and the impact economy.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring together services and improve outcomes.

A move from a demand-led model to a preventative model will allow for greater focus on outcomes and using precious resources in a more effective way.

## Demand and prevention

Nationally and across Kent, public services face growing pressures.

The system is struggling to meet the demand for key services that are vital to the health and wellbeing of the community.

Services, such as adult social care and children's social care, are being stretched to breaking point. The system is broken for those who need it most.

**Cuts to non-statutory services**

Failure to see the connection between prevention and demand, and to join the dots across the silos between service providers, means statutory services are protected from deep root-and-branch transformation.

This leads to cuts in non-statutory services which are often preventative services.

Cutting preventative services only increases demand in the more expensive acute part of the system, resulting in increased costs and increased pressure on statutory services.

**The 'front door' and thresholds**

At the 'front door' of these statutory services, more and more expensive specialist staff are being deployed to triage and assess.

This means that these specialist staff are using their time on assessment rather than treatment.

Furthermore, given the cuts to services, and their lower capacity to deal with demand, eligibility thresholds for support are rising further, leading to gatekeeping and meaning help is only available at the point of crisis.

As a result, the most pressing demand - those in crisis - continues to grow, creating a cycle where services intervene too late and at greater cost.

**Assessments and siloes**

Given this increase in pressure, services often refer cases on to one another in attempt to control in-service demand and residents are frequently required to repeat their stories to multiple agencies, undergoing assessment after assessment.

Services have slipped into an 'assessment mindset' where practitioners and leaders have been siloed into their respective organisations.

This not only causes frustration but also erodes public trust and confidence in local services.

**Outcomes**

These mounting pressures are leading to poorer outcomes for residents.

The danger is this provides a negative loop where demand keeps growing and preventative services cannot be prioritised as resources are used to address the immediate challenge.

## Fiscal control

At the same time as outcomes are declining and there is less preventative focus, public service leaders, trying to counteract growing financial risks, are increasingly reliant on salami slicing - incremental cuts to service budgets.

These cuts are a way to demonstrate better financial control but ultimately mean that services fail to address underlying demand and associated costs.

## The urgency of now

The continued cutting of services will not resolve these challenges.

As crisis response consumes a larger share of resources, the underlying problems persist and intensify.

The system becomes reactive rather than proactive, focusing on managing emergencies rather than preventing them.

This approach is unsustainable, both financially and in terms of outcomes for residents.

A focus on prevention and early intervention needs to be prioritised before services hit breaking point. Now is the time to act.

Public services in Kent need to be fit for purpose and fit for the future.

Public service sustainability cannot be addressed without PSR.

Without reform, councils will be forced to make ever deeper cuts, further reducing the quality and accessibility of services and undermining the support available in communities.

LGR offers an opportunity to embrace change and deliver a different form of support that will serve communities in a way that works for them.

## PSR: a new approach

Kent leaders are fully aware of the need to act and are ambitious to embrace PSR.

On 17th September 2025, leaders and chief executives from county, unitary, and district councils came together to outline and agree the opportunities presented by the LGR process. PSR was a central theme of the day, with stakeholders discussing and agreeing a vision for the region.

To achieve these ambitions for Kent and to break this cycle of growing costs and poor resident outcomes, the focus must shift to public services being more community based and preventative. This means focussing on outcomes, managing demand more effectively, and supporting people before their needs escalate.

Through the discussions between Leaders and Chief Executive, five PSR principles have been defined.

1 Community first

2 Outcomes focussed
3 Prevention and early intervention
4 Collaborative partnership working
5 Digital mindset

| | |
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| **Community first** | • Service delivery must be led by the needs and aspirations of communities, with openness and transparency in the governance and the delivery of public services.<br>• By working closely with residents and local groups, services can better understand what matters most and tailor their offer accordingly.<br>• Residents should feel that their voice is being listened to, and the subsequent service design reflects their input.<br>• Services should be reshaped to reflect the needs of local people in flexible, community-focused provision.<br>• By designing support around the lived experience of residents, Kent can deliver more effective, efficient, and equitable outcomes.<br>• Leadership at all levels should mirror the diversity of Kent's communities, ensuring that a broad range of voices and experiences shape decision-making. |
| **Outcomes focussed** | • An outcomes focussed approach should drive the reform of public services.<br>• Leaders must focus on providing joined-up support that is accessible and tailored to the presenting need of a person and designed around meeting that need.<br>• A relational approach should be applied, where public servants focus a person, rather than just dispensing the services of their organisation. |
| **Prevention and early intervention** | • Prevention and early intervention are fundamental principles underpinning effective PSR that are essential to deliver better outcomes for residents, achieve financial sustainability, and build public services that are fit for the needs of the people of Kent.<br>• By intervening before issues escalate, services can help people maintain control over their lives, access support at the right time, and avoid the distress and disruption that comes with crisis intervention.<br>• Evidence demonstrates that pre-crisis intervention delivers financial benefits through a more effective and better targeted use of public services. Early help can reduce demand on high-cost crisis services and enable resources to be targeted where they have the greatest impact. For example, investment in family support, community health, and neighbourhood-based services has been shown to reduce the need for statutory intervention in both children's and adults' services. |
| **Collaborative partnership working** | • LGR presents a unique opportunity to reset and strengthen relationships across the public sector in Kent.<br>• The benefits have been seen from a number of successful partnerships across the geography, involving statutory and non-statutory services, the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, and a wide range of public bodies.<br>• While there are excellent examples of joint working, these are often isolated and not yet embedded as the norm across the system.<br>• Key partners that collaborate together include the police, health services, the Department for Work and Pensions, fire and rescue, |

| | |
|---|---|
| | housing providers, waste management, social services, education, and asylum support, among others. |
| **Digital mindset** | • To set up services for success, Kent needs to embrace the benefits of adopting a digital first mindset, seeking to leverage opportunities in LGR to transform services with a digital approach.<br>• Integrated digital systems and improved data sharing between services will enable a single, holistic view of residents' needs, leading to a more joined up service. This will support more timely interventions, reduce duplication, and ensure that every professional involved has access to the right information at the right time. There is an opportunity to strengthen evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.<br>• AI can be used to better understand large data and identify resident need or risk earlier. This can be used by services to more quickly and better understand the residents they serve, so more time can be spent on treating need rather than identifying it. |

***Case study – development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams***

In eastern Kent, the health and care partnership is working with four Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) as Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) early adopter sites.

They are looking at tools to identify those most at risk of needing social care or who are likely to experience worsening health outcomes.

This is known as risk stratification and will help identify those people who will benefit from remote monitoring and early identification of deterioration to provide additional support.

This is a formal programme working alongside John Hopkins University and will be invaluable in informing how INTs develop across the county of Kent.

This integrated approach is emerging across western Kent too as they prepare for INTs. This includes examples such as, but is not limited to:
- the core frailty team with shared case management and shared system use working well in Tonbridge PCN area.
- a mental health multi-disciplinary team dealing with complex mental health needs working well in Weald.
- Maidstone PCNs have worked together on a joint service provided by the VCS for people with complex mental health-related needs across all their PCNs.
- the Sevenoaks area has established a health and wellbeing huddle approach to link in with the core primary care networks/Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.

The development in INTs with health, social care, the VCS and other key organisations working together are a foundation of good practice to build off when adopting the PSR principle of partnership working.

## Enablers of PSR

To realise the full potential of PSR, partners must work together to embrace its core tenets.

This means moving beyond organisational boundaries and focusing collectively on the needs of the person.

It requires a cultural shift. One where engagement is purposeful, open and rooted in a shared ambition for Kent as a whole.

Several enablers are critical to making this collaborative approach a reality:

1. **More permeable boundaries between partners and services:** services must become more open and flexible, allowing for the free flow of information, resources and expertise. When one partner's actions benefit another's budget or outcomes, this should be recognised and the benefit shared.
2. **Shared benefits and budgets:** a move towards shared benefits naturally lends itself to the possibility of shared budgets. By pooling resources, partners can take a joined-up approach to tackling key issues, ensuring investment is targeted where it will have the greatest impact.
3. **Co-location of services:** Bringing services and organisations together physically - whether in community hubs, shared offices, or integrated teams - can drive a more joined-up way of working, break down silos and make it easier for residents to access the support they need.
4. **Inclusive partnership:** No partner should be left out of this process. Every organisation, whether statutory, voluntary or community-based, must feel a sense of purpose and importance in helping the people of Kent. Organisations should embody a shared learning culture, recognising that they have something to learn from someone else round the table.

Achieving this vision will require organisations to work together differently.

It means moving away from transactional relationships and towards a model where partners are engaged as equals, united by a common purpose.

It means recognising the challenges facing communities cannot be solved by any one organisation alone.

**The next steps for PSR:**

There is broad agreement among Kent Leaders they want to:

- **Refresh working arrangements between organisations**: updating governance structures and shared forums between Chief Executives to enable more effective joint working. This will result in better alignment and a collective approach to PSR.
- **Establish shared learning culture**: councils and partners actively sharing key learning, where best practice is actively sought and embedded.
- **Purposeful and reassuring staff communication**: ambition for reform must be communicated clearly and confidently to staff, providing reassurance about their future and a sense of shared purpose.
- **Prepare for a seamless transition**: LGR should a seamless handover between services with support that feels joined up and easy to navigate. Residents should feel well informed about the changes from LGR, what to expect and the positive impacts that will be driven.
- **More voices are required and welcomed**. There is also an ambition to engage with voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to understand excellent practice that drives resident outcomes currently. To achieve more community-centred, outcome focused service delivery, collaborating with the VCSE, who are at the heart of communities and places, will be pivotal.

***Case Study – Dover SmART project***

Dover SmART Project is a charity founded in 2013 to support disadvantaged children, especially young carers, through creative activities to improve their wellbeing and boost their confidence.

It runs creative groups to boost children's aspirations and as a safe space away from other responsibilities.

The charity has evolved to support other age groups now, such as supporting older people who may be isolated in the community or have conditions like dementia.

Dover SmART project is funded by a variety of fundraising efforts including the private sector and the district council.

In 2025, the Dover SmART Project was named a winner at the Kent Mental Health Wellbeing Awards.

The SmART project demonstrates the impact the VCS can have on the community.

**There is an opportunity for voluntary and community sector projects to use their expertise and knowledge to support statutory services in supporting vulnerable people, acting as partners where there are opportunities for a holistic approach.**

**PSR under Option 4B**

Option 4B creates the optimum framework to deliver that ambition by unifying governance, integrating services, and embedding the five public sector reform (PSR) principles agreed by Leaders on 17 September 2025.

Under Option 4B, each council will be large enough to deliver efficiently yet close enough to communities to understand local priorities, through:

- Neighbourhood-based service design: local hubs combining housing, health, social care, employment and advice services.
- Stronger community engagement: residents directly shaping priorities through area committees and digital participation platforms.
- Cultural alignment: leadership structures reflecting the diversity and identity of local communities.

These three activities will help deliver value-for-money through early engagement and co-production reducing duplication, targeting resources more accurately and improving overall resident satisfaction, for example, in health and social care evidence nationally shows that early-intervention programmes yield savings of £2–£4 for every £1 invested through reduced acute demand and better targeted support.[32]

[32] Investing in preventative support can save more than £3 for every pound spent

# **Criteria 4:** Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)

This section includes:


**Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design** — **Criteria 4a and 4c**

**Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance** — **Criteria 4b**


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# Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design

**Criteria 4a.** It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal

**Criteria 4c.** Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed

**Overview of the approach taken to engage the community and stakeholders:**

Kent's approach to LGR has been firmly rooted in the principles of transparency, inclusion and shared ownership.

Kent's 14 councils have worked together to formulate a set of joint proposals and have a coordinated, county-wide programme of public and stakeholder engagement.

We ran a resident survey in September and October 2025, have met with key partners and have engaged with communities through our usual engagement routes to ensure the voices of local people and organisations are central to business case development.

Reflecting local identity and fostering a shared vision across the county requires meaningful engagement with residents, businesses and key stakeholder groups at every stage of the process.

This engagement activity aligns with the political commitment across Kent to meaningfully involve communities in shaping their future governance while exceeding what is required under MHCLG guidance.

While MHCLG has not prescribed the extent of engagement, Kent's Leaders chose to pursue a proactive and inclusive approach.

The process has been informed by best practice from previous LGR areas, advice from the cross-Kent communications group and feedback from council Chiefs Executives and Leaders.

We gathered the views of more than 2,000 stakeholders to understand reflections, including:

- Kent residents
- businesses
- community groups
- councillors and officers
- Members of Parliament
- strategic partners across housing, health, emergency services, social care and safeguarding, education and skills, economic development, government, public sector and volunteering

**Overview of engagement activities:**

A) Standardised resident survey
B) Stakeholder engagement programme

The feedback from the public survey and stakeholder engagement has been analysed by the Canterbury City Council Policy and Communications team, which led the communications and engagement workstream. The findings are reflected below and throughout this proposal.

A) Standardised resident survey

A standardised resident survey, agreed across all Kent councils, was launched during the engagement period.

This consistency ensures data comparability across districts and enables the creation of both Kent-wide and locally-specific insights.

The survey aimed to capture residents' views on their local identity, service expectations and priorities for the future shape of local government.

These insights have informed the business cases and local decision-making processes within each council.

The survey received 2,107 responses, which includes written responses and survey responses.

B) Stakeholder engagement programme

In addition, a joint stakeholder engagement programme has been developed, via a coordinated letter sent on behalf of all Kent councils to a wide-ranging list of county-level stakeholders.

Each council has also engaged with its own networks including parish and town councils, voluntary and community organisations, businesses and sector-specific partnerships.

Councils were encouraged to host meetings and discussions to ensure stakeholders could explore the implications of different governance models and offer their perspectives on how local identity and service delivery can be best preserved and enhanced.

Across all Kent councils, priority strategic partners* have been engaged in dedicated workshops to understand key reflections, including:

- challenges that can be addressed through reorganisation
- opportunities to be realised through reorganisation
- issues that may arise through reorganisation that need to be mitigated

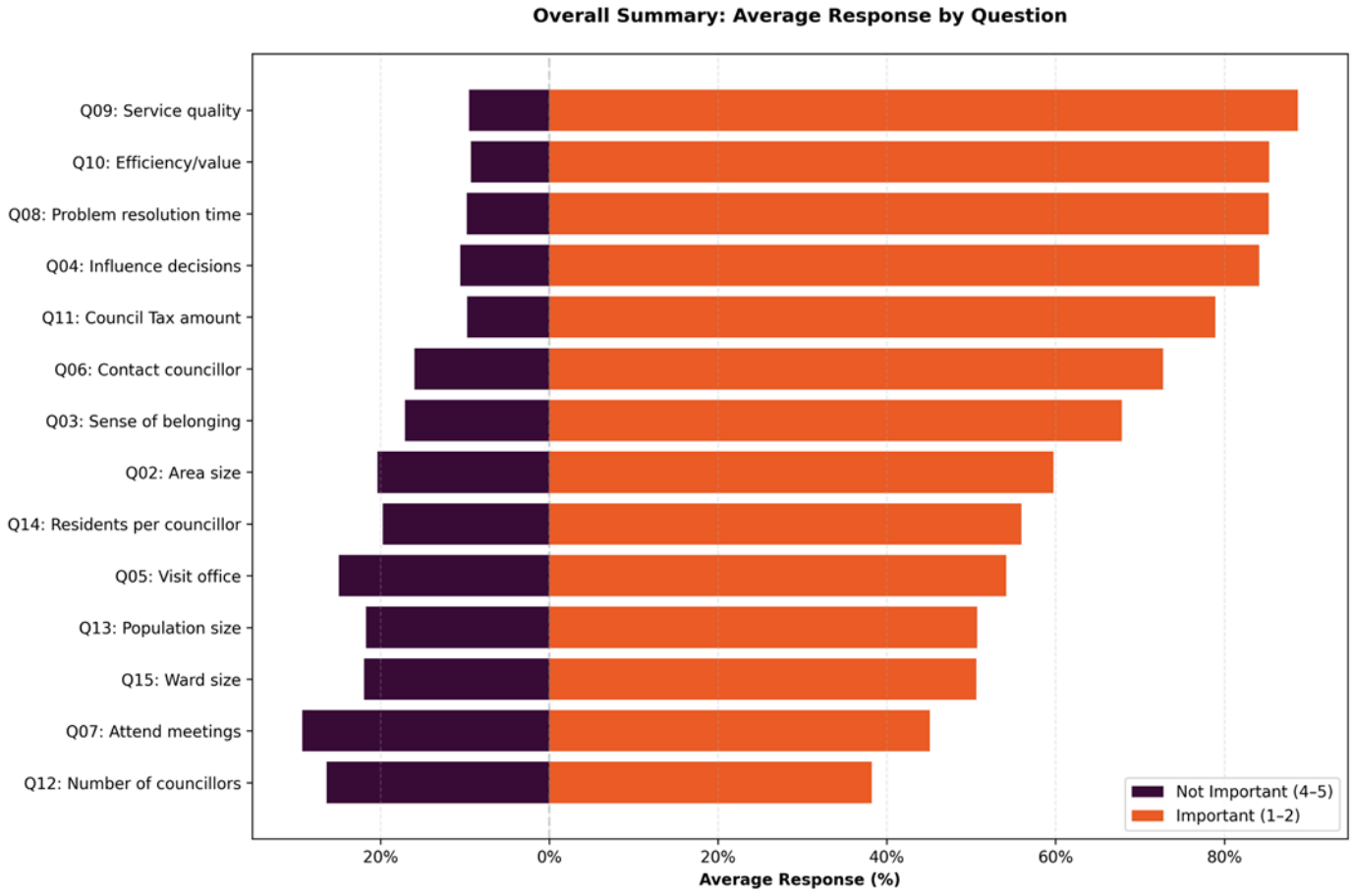
***Table 26:** *Priority key strategic partners*

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| **Health** | • NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB)<br>• Kent Integrated Care Alliance<br>• NHS Provider Trusts<br>  ○ East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust<br>  ○ Medway NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust |
| **Emergency services** | • Kent Police<br>• Kent Police and Crime Commissioner<br>• South East Coast Ambulance Service |
| **Social care and safeguarding** | • Chairs of Safeguarding Boards – Adults and Children's<br>• Chairs of any Partnership Board<br>• Chair of Kent and Medway Resilience Forum |
| **Education and skills** | • University of Kent<br>• Canterbury Christ Church University<br>• University of Greenwich |

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| | • University for the Creative Arts<br>• FE colleges |
| **Economic development** | • Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce<br>• Federation of Small Businesses |
| **Government and Public Sector Partners** | • Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)<br>• National Highways<br>• Port health authorities<br>• Housing associations |
| **Volunteering** | • VCSE sector representation |

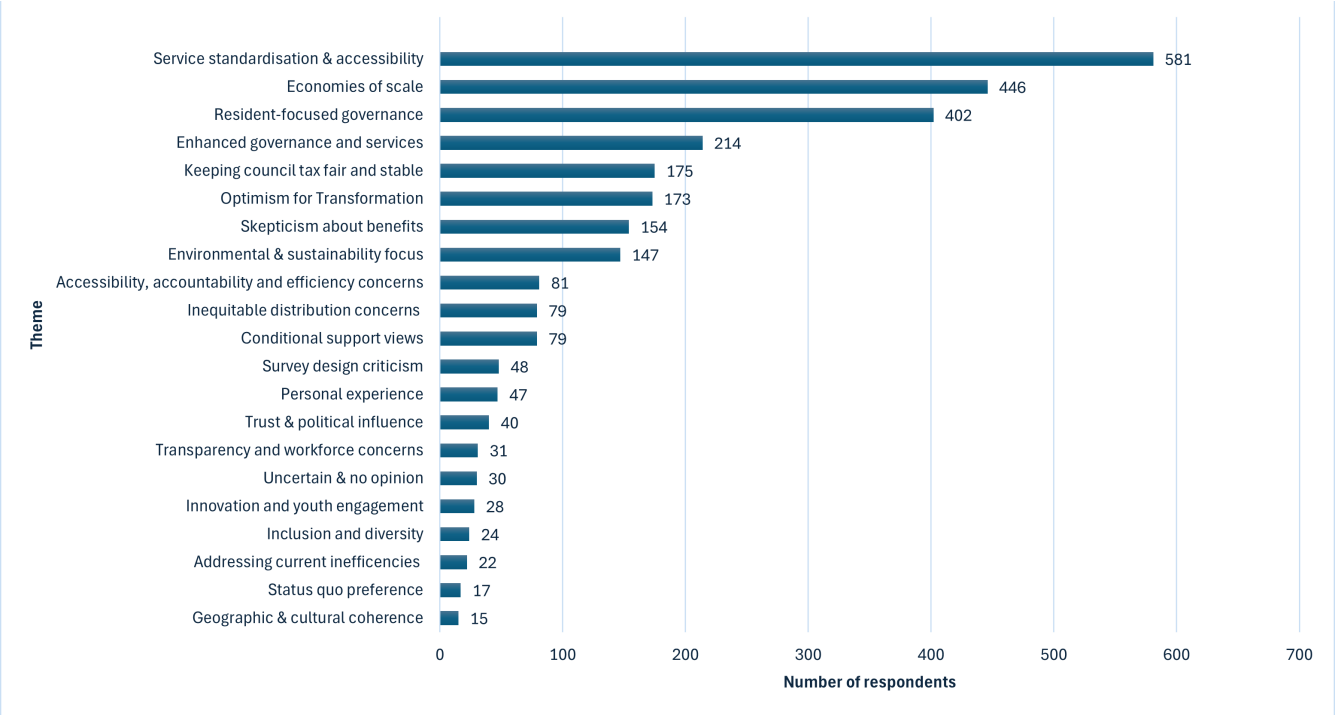
## The perspective of Kent residents

***Figure 15:*** *What Kent residents value most about their local council*




Overall, the highest-rated aspects were service quality, efficiency and value, problem resolution time, decision-making influence and council tax amount.

***Figure 16:*** *Opportunities identified by Kent residents from local government reorganisation*

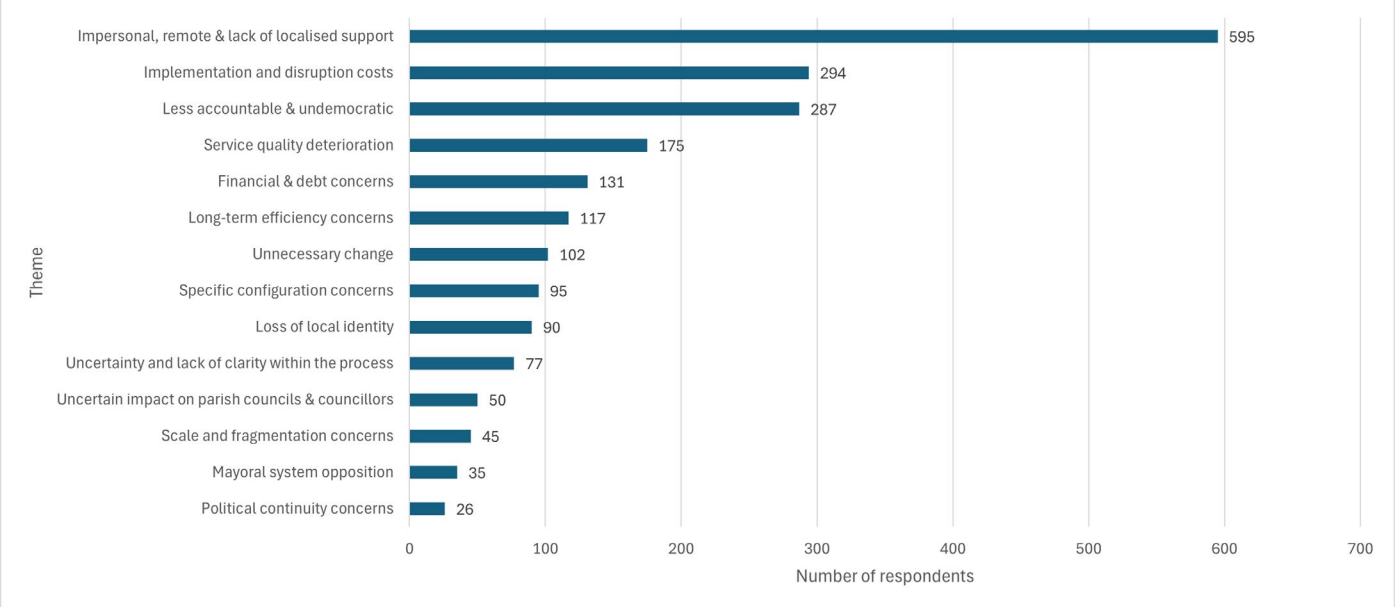



Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Participants identified economies of scale as another key opportunity of reorganisation, seeing it as a means to streamline operations, reduce bureaucracy and deliver better value and a fairer balance of power across areas.

*"This is a generational opportunity, use it wisely or it will slip away like the last one… this is a chance to make a council work in new and innovative ways delivering services fit for 2025 not 1980." – Kent resident*

***Figure 17:** Kent residents' concerns about local government reorganisation*



Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote with fears that larger councils could become disconnected from communities, particularly in rural and coastal areas.

Participants questioned whether the promised efficiencies would outweigh the significant costs of restructuring and expressed concern about potential service disruption.

There was some concern that reorganisation will undermine local democracy and some fears that larger councils could weaken local accountability, reduce democratic representation and limit residents' ability to influence decisions that affect their communities.

*"[I am concerned by] loss of local connection, information and knowledge… Impersonal services due to number of residents, vulnerable residents suffering and likely to be left behind. Reduced opportunities for employment locally with risk of redundancies and increasing levels of unemployment. Potential increase in levels of vulnerabilities and failings of individuals, households and families mental health, safeguarding and domestic abuse." – Kent resident*

**Overview of key themes that emerged from the resident research:**

1. Service quality is a top priority for residents, yet many are concerned that services will deteriorate throughout the reorganisation process

Service quality ranked as residents' top priority with 81.4% rating it very important and a further 7.5% as important, underlining the need to maintain reliable everyday services through LGR.

Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Overall, there is an expectation for high quality, reliable and effective council services.

Residents want services to be responsible to community needs and to support local economies.

There was a strong desire to see improvements in coordination of local services, particularly those that impact daily life such as waste collection, highways, social care and community safety.

*"My main priority is to have big enough bins that are emptied on a weekly basis. This is very important to me and my family due to the amount of medical waste we have as a result of chronic illness." – Kent resident*

Some residents expressed concern LGR will result in a decline in service quality across the board, driven primarily by cost cutting measures rather than genuine efficiency improvements.

There is some anxiety essential services including social care, special educational, needs, waste collection and community facilities will suffer as budgets are spread thinner across large populations and competing priorities.

Many respondents noted any short-term financial savings from reorganisation will be offset by transition costs and the loss of established relationships and local expertise, ultimately leaving residents paying more through increased council tax while receiving demonstrated demonstrably worse services.

*"I work in education in Medway, we also have pupils who reside in Kent. From my experience, current services for education (especially SEND) and social care provision are poor and do not meet need" - Kent resident*

2. Service quality and input into decision-making is of particular importance for residents with disabilities

Residents with disabilities and those with long-term health conditions prioritised both service quality and having meaningful influence over decisions, reflecting a desire for responsive, inclusive services and concerns about accessibility, loss of voice and potential disruption to existing support.

While service quality remains priority for people who consider themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition, they also put a strong emphasis on influencing decisions.

This may suggest disabled residents value both swift service resolution and meaningful say in decisions affecting them, possibly reflecting experiences of services sometimes being designed without adequate input from people with disabilities.

When asked to outline their concerns about local government reorganisation, one of the respondents who considered themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition said:

*"Ability to be heard and to influence decision making in a much larger council area; The loss of a local Council making decisions for local people; The possibility of the Council offices being located somewhere that I can't get to (I don't drive); The possibility of losing services currently provided." - Kent resident*

Residents with disabilities want to ensure their voices are included in the redesign process to ensure their perspectives can shape services and meaningfully influence decision-making.

*"As a disabled resident who is passionate about shaping policy, I believe local government reorganisation presents a vital opportunity to build a more inclusive and accessible system… I hope any new council structure prioritises digital accessibility, transparent decision-making, and proactive outreach to underrepresented voices. It's essential that disabled people can contact councillors easily, attend meetings remotely, and have their concerns heard without barriers. Efficiency and value for money are important, but so is ensuring that no one is left behind. I urge decision-makers to design councils that reflect the diversity of their residents—not just in services, but in how they engage and empower us. This reorganisation is also a chance to improve accountability."- Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 3 for further detail on the option-specific support high quality and sustainable service delivery.

3. Residents want to protect local identity, connection to community and democratic representation

Kent residents feel connected to their respective towns, villages and districts and want this to be reflected in new council arrangements.

67% of residents said a sense of belonging to their council area was important.

However, participants had concerns LGR will erode the distinct identities and characters of individual areas, towns and communities across Kent.

Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote.

Residents were worried councillors representing significantly larger populations will lack local knowledge and understanding of area-specific issues, making it harder for residents to reach their representatives and have their voices heard.

Some comments highlight fears that some areas, particularly rural and coastal communities, will be forgotten and abandoned in favour of larger urban areas.

*"Living in a rural area I consider that at larger authority including larger populated areas will mean our needs and wants are ignored." - Kent resident*

There is a desire for strong local representation.

Residents want to feel connected to their councillors and have confidence their voices will be heard and can shape their neighbourhoods.

68% of residents rated the ability to influence local decisions as very important.

Clear access to decision-makers and accountability in council actions was also highly valued by residents.

Residents emphasised the importance of maintaining a clear local voice in decision making and expressed concerns that larger councils may become distant and disconnected from the communities they serve.

*"If authorities are too large then councillors will have insufficient knowledge about the people they are representing and not be seen as part of their local community." - Kent resident*

Many expressed anxiety about the ability of a remote council to address everyday local concerns, with some noting that they already struggle to contact their current MPs due to large electorates and fear this problem will worsen.

There was concern amongst some residents that council offices may become physically inaccessible and that service quality may decline as decision-making becomes centralised among people unfamiliar with local needs and contexts.

*"Residents will have less representation and therefore local concerns or issues will not be sufficiently represented or addressed." - Kent Resident*

Notably, the ability to visit a council office, population size, ward size, attendance at council meetings and number of councillors were considered least important to residents when compared to other factors like service quality.

See Section 4: Criteria 1 for further detail on the model defines functional and coherent geographies and Section 4: Criteria 4 for further detail on how the model maintains local identity.

4. Residents view local government reorganisation as an opportunity to deliver better economies of scale value for money, but many are concerned with the cost to transition

Efficiency and value for money was the second highest priority among residents, with 74.3% rating it very important and 12.3% as important and residents expressing anxiety about costs and desire that promised savings materialise in practice.

*"The chance to simplify structures, reduce duplication, and make better use of resources across Kent and Medway. Clearer accountability for residents, with one council responsible for all services rather than multiple tiers… [as well as] efficiency and savings." - Kent resident*

Many participants viewed the reorganisation process as an opportunity to deliver more efficient, streamlined local government services that ultimately deliver better value for money for residents.

There was an expectation that reorganisation should bring economies of scale, reduce bureaucracy and ensure fairer balance of power across areas.

*"A single, unified authority could make it easier for people to understand who to turn to, and ensure that concerns are addressed without being passed between layers of bureaucracy." - Kent resident*

While many residents are hopeful about the potential benefits of reorganisation, some are concerned about the financial and operational cost of reorganisation, with many questioning whether the promised savings will ever materialise.

Participants were sceptical about transition costs, redundancies and systemic integration outweighing any efficiency gains, ultimately resulting in higher council tax for residents without any service improvements.

Comments highlight substantial anticipated expenses including restructuring, retaining and redundancy packages, IT system migrations, rebranding, new office infrastructure and external consultant fees.

*"My concerns relate to time and cost and how and the cost to Council Tax payers. With any reorganisation the short-term risk is always upheaval, delays in each council dealing with Business as unusual." - Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 2 for further detail on how the model supports resilient and efficient finances.

**The perspective of Kent partners and organisations**

There were shared perspectives across partner organisations and businesses:

1. <u>There is genuine recognition among many stakeholders that reorganisation could unlock efficiencies.</u>

Pooling resources, efficiency savings, reduced duplication, improved integration, stronger local voice, improved collaboration, joined-up policy making and clearer accountability were all highly referenced by stakeholders as potential benefits of reorganisation.

In particular, participants saw potential for improved mechanisms for communities to be heard, through co-production, forums or strengthened parish/town councils.

Economies of scale were also highly referenced. Participants acknowledged larger councils could enable efficiencies in back-office services, contracts and procurement, as well as recruitment and retention of specialist staff.

*"What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why? Duplication of services and confusion about which tier of local government is responsible for certain functions could be reduced. Larger councils may be able to pool resources to tackle county-wide issues such as major infrastructure or environmental challenges." - Kent partner*

2. <u>Many stakeholders were concerned that reorganisation could exacerbate inequalities</u>

Many stakeholders warned of risks relating to reduced local representation, loss of community identity, widening inequality, unresolved financial pressures and disruption to housing and estate management during transition.

Canterbury Foodbank raised concerns that reorganisation could worsen east/west inequality by separating poorer coastal areas from wealthier western districts.

They highlight new unitary authorities need strong, well-funded regional support to address inequalities.

*"There is a strong risk that unitary reorganisation will divide richer and poorer areas, so that the potential to cross-subsidise between areas of high social need (located mainly in the existing Thanet, Dovel, Folkestone and Hythe and Swale districts) and richer areas (Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells) is lost. At the same time opportunities to create high value-added employment in the poorer areas, whose economies currently rest on low-paid services (tourism, hospitality, social care) and primary sector agriculture will not exist." - Kent partner*

A concern of equality was also raised by a councillor who questions financial sustainability for the East Kent council, which concentrates the poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income.

There are concerns about resource allocation precision avoiding overlooked small, deprived areas and emphasis that local access points are essential for digitally-excluded residents.

3. There were concerns about loss of in-house heritage expertise and local heritage services.

Multiple stakeholders worried that community assets like parks, libraries or historic buildings could be sold off or transferred without adequate funding or consideration of their community.

Many also highlighted that geography should not be the sole driver of reorganisation.

Cultural identity, history, and existing community synergies were seen as equally important drivers e.g. coastal towns sharing challenges.

One stakeholder noted Canterbury's historic significance and other unique identities should be preserved:

*"That resources that people hold dear, such as the heritage in Canterbury or the coastal strip from Reculver to Seasalter, are not cherished in the same way in the unitary as they are in the district council." - Kent partner*

***Table 27:*** *Nuanced feedback from stakeholders*

| Grouping | Key reflections from LGR | Verbatims |
|---|---|---|
| **Health** | • Stakeholders from the health sector emphasised opportunities for better integration if local government boundaries align with health and care partnership areas. The NHS trusts see potential for more seamless join working in social care, public health and prevention. | *"...we would value geographical alignment with NHS boundaries wherever possible and reasonable. Given that poor health is so strongly influenced by social factors, alignment facilitates coordination of approach."* |

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| **Parish Councils** | • Parish councils highlighted community identity and local knowledge are essential to resident wellbeing, concerns that extend to fears about lost heritage expertise, potential sale of community assets and diluted local oversight over planning and service decisions.<br>• Some stakeholders from parish councils emphasised parishes provide valued highly local, responsive community services and argue community identity is vital to resident wellbeing.<br>• Some acknowledged reorganisation could bring efficiency and clarity benefits, but stress local democracy or community identity should not be sacrificed in pursuit of these.<br>• They also emphasised parishes need proper recognition, empowerment and funding. | *"Parish Councils occupy a unique and invaluable position within their communities. As elected representatives who live and work within the areas they serve, Parish Councillors have a direct connection with local residents and a deep understanding of their needs and concerns."* |
| **Councillors** | • Councillors were concerned that reduced councillor numbers and increased responsibilities may deter candidates and reduce local representation and loss of local knowledge among councillors.<br>Residents<br>• Some respondents opposed abolishing district councils and list risks such as service disruption, higher costs and weaker democracy.<br>• A concern around equality was raised by a councillor who questioned the financial sustainability for an East Kent council concentrating poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income. | *"I am very concerned about using strategic planning and transport links on a wider scale to connect people to more places of value, build sustainable homes and vital infrastructure and bolster local growth. It is also important to me that we maintain local representation and community cohesion."* |
| **Housing** | • Stakeholders from the housing sector were concerned about service disruption during transition, delays to housebuilding, confusion over social housing priorities and potential disaggregation of county-wide social care services.<br>• An estate manager argued property management requires local knowledge and RICS regulations require surveyors to practice in known area and questions whether someone unfamiliar with an area can manage valuations accurately, | *"Potential problems which could be created… Delays to housebuilding if newly-created unitary authorities opt to abandon adopted or emerging local plans in favour of developing their own; Confusion amongst residents on the housing waiting list over how local government reorganisation might affect their priority for social housing…"* |

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| | maintain estates or prevent loss of land through statutory rights. | |
| **Education and skills** | • Further education leaders highlighted possibilities for coherent county-wide skills strategies and apprenticeship coordination that could better serve small-sized medium enterprises across Kent.<br>• However, among other things, they also highlighted that the reorganisation may have implications for learners with high needs. | *"Ensuring consistency, equity, and adequate provision will require any new local authorities to have the capacity and expertise to properly co-ordinate and oversee High Needs responsibilities."* |

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# Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance

**Criteria 4b.** Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance

**Each new council reflects and respects the distinct local identities across the area, ensuring that each unitary authority is rooted in coherent and recognisable communities. It builds on established partnerships and avoids arbitrary boundaries, supporting geographies that make sense both culturally and operationally. This strengthens civic pride and makes governance more meaningful.**

## Maintaining local identity across Kent

Kent is a large and diverse region with a rich history, strong civic traditions and distinct local identities.

From coastal towns and rural villages to historic market centres and modern urban hubs, the geography and culture of Kent have shaped how communities live, work and relate to their local institutions.

We know from engagement with our residents they associate their identify with their local town and not their local council.

They do not live their lives according to administrative boundaries.

Their daily experience is shaped by functional geographies – commuting patterns, access to hospitals, schools, and community services – that often extend beyond council borders.

The lived reality is that every road, bus route, and service network crosses boundaries.

New councils must recognise this and work together to create coherent, strategic plans that reflect how people move and access services.

This includes transport, health and preventative care, which are most effective when delivered through local, community-based interventions.

New councils must support both strategic coordination and planning across council boundaries and local responsiveness.

*Placeholder for collage showing geographical identity of Kent*

**Four councils with clear identities**

The creation of four new unitary councils is designed not only to improve governance and efficiency but also to preserve and strengthen the unique local identities, cultures and histories that define Kent's communities.

Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all model, this proposal respects the distinctiveness of Kent's towns, cities, and rural areas by aligning new council boundaries with existing community ties and historical affiliations.

Each of the four proposed councils is built around coherent geographies that reflect long-standing local identities.

These boundaries are informed by shared economic patterns, travel-to-work areas, and service footprints but also by cultural and historical connections that matter deeply to residents.

For example, the model ensures communities with shared heritage – such as the coastal towns of East Kent or the market towns of West Kent – are kept together, allowing them to retain their sense of place and civic pride.

This approach also supports the continuation of local traditions, civic institutions and community networks that have evolved over generations.

By embedding these identities into the structure of the new councils, Option 4B avoids the disruption and disconnection that can come from arbitrary or overly-centralised reorganisations.

Instead, it offers a model that is both transformative and respectful – capable of delivering modern, efficient services while honouring the historical and cultural fabric of Kent.

At the same time, the model enables collaboration across council boundaries where it makes sense to do so.

Strategic issues such as infrastructure, economic development and emergency planning can still be coordinated at a Kent-wide level, ensuring that the county continues to function as a cohesive whole.

***Table 28:*** *Identity and culture for each council area*

| Future council | Description |
|---|---|
| **North Kent**<br><br>• Dartford<br>• Gravesham<br>• Medway | **The North Kent area, encompassing Dartford, Gravesham, and Medway, is a region undergoing significant development and economic transformation. Its strategic location, diverse population, and evolving industrial landscape make it a dynamic part of the south east of England.**<br><br>• Dartford is a significant centre, home to major economic assets like Ebbsfleet International rail station, the Dartford Crossing, and Bluewater, one of the UK's largest retail and leisure destinations. It also hosts Crossways, the largest business park in Kent, and The Bridge, a rapidly growing business location.<br><br>• Medway, with its larger urban area, includes town centres such as Chatham, Rochester, and Gillingham, which are focal points |

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| | for retail, leisure, cultural, and tourism facilities. Gravesend town centre also serves as a retail and leisure hub.<br>• Historically, North Kent was an industrial area with a strong presence in building materials, quarrying, naval shipyards, and papermaking. While these traditional industries have undergone restructuring, the region has diversified and seen successful regeneration projects in areas like Bluewater, Chatham Maritime, and Rochester Riverside.<br>• Growth opportunities are focused on developing culture and creative economy sectors, transport, technology, and regenerating town centres. There are also opportunities to grow Dartford's presence in information technology and the creative sector.<br>• Population in North Kent is currently 528,337 and is growing rapidly. Dartford's population increased by 20% between 2011 and 2021, while Medway saw a 6% increase, and Gravesham's population grew by 5.1% in the same period. The working-age population in Kent and Medway has grown faster than the national average.<br>• Dartford has one of the youngest median ages outside London and university cities, at 37.2 years in 2022. Gravesham also has a comparatively young and diverse population, with nearly 1 in 3 people identifying as non-white British, and a higher proportion of Indian residents than the Kent average.<br>• North Kent boasts strong connections to London with high-speed train services from Ebbsfleet as well as connections from Dartford, Gravesend and Medway towns. The Dartford Crossing is a key feature connecting Kent to Essex and beyond.<br>• Dartford, Gravesend, and the Medway towns are built on chalk. The North Downs, a line of chalk hills, runs through the county, with the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty spanning Dover and Westerham. The land north of the North Downs falls to the marshy and low-lying shore of the Thames estuary. The River Medway, Kent's principal river, flows through the area, breaking through the North Downs at Rochester before joining the Thames estuary near Sheerness. |
| **East Kent**<br><br>• Canterbury<br>• Dover<br>• Thanet | **East Kent is not a collection of districts. It is a recognised region with a shared identity - forged through centuries of maritime trade, coal mining and coastal resilience. From the East Kent Triangle (Canterbury - Dover – Thanet) to our strategic transport hubs, we are united by exceptional history, identity and ambition. Today, East Kent stands united - ready to turn legacy into leadership.**<br><br>• The communities are connected by deep-rooted bonds, from the coalfields of Betteshanger, Aylesham, Chislet and Snowdown to the port and fishing harbours of Ramsgate. They have weathered |

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| | industrial decline and coastal erosion and we've responded with collaboration, creativity and care. East Kent is a known region, not a stitched-together patchwork. The strength lies in unity and shared determination to shape a better future. We share more than geography - we share identity, values and a commitment to inclusive renewal.<br>• East Kent's geography is its strength. With strategic transport hubs including the Port of Dover, HS1, the key transport corridors (M2 & A2 and M20 & A20), we are a launchpad for global trade, tourism and investment. Our proximity to London and Europe, combined with competitive land values, makes East Kent a prime location for regeneration and growth. But connectivity must serve everyone. East Kent is working together to improve economic transport access - linking communities to opportunity, services and each other.<br>• East Kent boasts some of the county's most iconic natural and built heritage assets, including internationally renowned landmarks such as the White Cliffs of Dover, Dover Castle, and Canterbury Cathedral, alongside vibrant seaside towns like Margate and Ramsgate. These assets underpin a thriving tourism sector and provide a strong foundation for creative and cultural industries.<br>• Canterbury is a major cultural, retail, and educational hub. Its globally recognised heritage, dynamic city centre, and four higher and further education institutions attract thousands of students and visitors annually driving economic vitality, innovation, and creativity.<br>• Dover is home to Europe's busiest ferry port; Dover is a critical international gateway. Its economy is shaped by port operations, logistics, and tourism, with iconic landmarks such as the White Cliffs and Dover Castle drawing global attention. Dover's strategic location makes it a cornerstone of UK-EU trade and transport.<br>• Thanet's coastal towns offer a distinct identity and rich cultural assets. Margate's regenerated Old Town and Turner Contemporary gallery, Ramsgate's historic Royal Harbour, and Broadstairs' traditional seaside charm contribute to a flourishing tourism and creative economy. |
| **West Kent**<br><br>• Maidstone<br>• Sevenoaks<br>• Tonbridge & Malling<br>• Tunbridge Wells | **West Kent is a prosperous and strategically important sub-region within Kent. It is characterised by its strong economy, high quality of life and excellent connectivity, particularly to London.**<br><br>• Sevenoaks has one of the highest levels of Green Belt in the UK and includes two AONBs, Kent Downs and High Weald, covering |

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| | 60% of the district. It is also notable as a commuter town with connections to London via the rail network.<br>• Tonbridge & Malling is predominantly rural but contains key market towns, contributing to its strength in small-scale industry, logistics, and a growing professional services sector.<br>• Tunbridge Wells serves as a cultural and economic centre in West Kent, with a strong residential property market and an educated workforce.<br>• Maidstone, the county town of Kent, hosts a concentration of public services and legal institutions, and is an important employment hub for the region.<br>• West Kent's economy is dynamic and well-connected, playing a vital role in sustaining the broader Kent economy. The region has historically experienced strong job growth and is projected to continue this trend. The area offers a mix of rural and urban economies, with increasing focus on innovation and service industries.<br>• Characterised by strategic connectivity and a highly skilled workforce, supporting professional services, life sciences and creative sectors.<br>• The area has a high proportion of knowledge-based employment and is well-positioned to attract inward investment from London and beyond.<br>• Green infrastructure, heritage towns and quality of life are key drivers of investment in the sub-region.<br>• West Kent is served by a strong strategic transport network, including the M2, M20, and M26 motorways. The rail network provides links across the county and into London for commuting. |
| **Mid Kent:**<br>• Swale<br>• Ashford<br>• Folkestone and Hythe | **The Mid Kent area, encompassing Swale, Ashford, and Folkestone & Hythe, presents a diverse landscape of economic activity, demographics, and geographical features. This region benefits from its coastal location, agricultural heritage, and strategic transport links.**<br>• Ashford is a significant economic hub; it has been targeted for population development since the 1960s and is a key transport hub for Kent and the South East. It boasts an international railway station and a designer outlet.<br>• The largest town in the Folkestone & Hythe district, Folkestone is a coastal town with a regenerated harbour, coastal park and a thriving creative quarter. Hythe is a historic coastal town with a seafront promenade, Roman military canal and medieval architecture.<br>• The Swale borough includes the towns of Sittingbourne, the historic Cinque Port of Faversham, Queenborough, and |

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| | Sheerness, with Sheerness having heavy-industrialised ports with deepwater harbours.<br>• Mid Kent's economy is characterised by a mix of traditional and emerging sectors, with key industries including manufacturing, distribution and construction as well as agriculture, green technology and tourism.<br>• The borough of Ashford saw the largest population growth in Kent between 2011 and 2021, with a 14.6% rise to 118,000 inhabitants.<br>• In economic terms, Folkestone & Hythe is the third most deprived area in Kent, with a high unemployment rate and a majority of small businesses.<br>• Swale includes the Isle of Sheppey, separated from the mainland by The Swale, a narrow channel. Land on either side of The Swale is marshland, with both salt marsh and freshwater aquatic vegetation.<br>• Ashford lies at the intersection of two valleys, the south edge of the North Downs and the valley of the River Stour, at the confluence of the Great Stour and East Stour rivers.<br>• Folkestone & Hythe occupies the most southerly part of Kent, on the coast of the English Channel. It extends from the North Kent Downs in the north to the low-lying Romney Marsh and the Dungeness shingle spit in the south. The coastline is varied, with high white chalk cliffs and sandy beaches. |

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# **Criteria 5:** Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

This section includes:


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| **Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent** | **Criteria 5a** |
| **Equal representation from all four corners of Kent** | **Criteria 5c** |


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# Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent

**Criteria 5a.** Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.

**Criteria 5b.** Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.

**All of Kent's councils recognise the critical need to devolve powers to a strategic authority to unlock public sector reform and empower decisions about Kent to be made in Kent. The vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport, and the benefits it would bring across Kent in terms of accelerating public service reform, cannot be underestimated. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve life chances for the residents and businesses of Kent and Medway.**

## A devolution deal for Kent

We were disappointed to not be accepted onto the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and have been pressing the case with ministers and MHCLG to understand the path towards devolution in Kent.

This is particularly important in light of the critical role Kent plays in national infrastructure and border management, and the opportunities that arise from a strategic county-wide approach being taken on economic growth, education and skills.

## Partner support

Key local public sector partners - the Chief Executives and Chairs of the ICB, health and care partnerships and acute trusts, the Chancellors/Vice Chancellors of the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and Greenwich University which has a campus within Kent, the Chairs of the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, Business Advisory Board and Kent Invicta Chamber, the Chief Executives of Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover and the Chairs of the Kent Housing Group and Kent Developers Group - all share our concerns that reorganisation in Kent without devolution would result in a piecemeal approach and sub-optimal transformation.

## Timelines that work for both priorities

Aligning the timeline for the creation of a strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services through localised arrangements only to reaggregate services into a strategic authority shortly after.

This two-stage piecemeal approach would generate additional cost, complexity and create further disruption to staff and services as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government in delivering national objectives and policies.

Kent's district and borough councils and Medway strongly support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority at the first available opportunity in April 2028 to operate alongside the new unitary authorities.

Government support and agreement for devolution to be aligned with local government reorganisation in Kent will enable effective transition planning of key services resulting in a seamless transition, enabling synergies in programme management and leadership capacity while providing clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government and devolution opportunities will be embraced in Kent.

Clarity for partners is critical given our deep ambitions regarding public service reform at the earliest opportunity.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving outcomes.

Kent is a natural fit for devolution as critical partners already work coterminously with the footprint of the strategic authority including Kent Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the integrated care board and many voluntary and community service organisations.

A failure to bring forward devolution simultaneously alongside reorganisation in Kent represents a significant additional cost pressure through missed opportunities, delay, disruption and duplication of effort.

The proposals for LGR in Kent and Medway directly address the rationale given by MHCLG for excluding Kent and Medway from the DPP, namely addressing population disparity imbalance between the area of Kent and the unitary authority of Medway.

We urge ministers to accelerate devolution in Kent to meet the timescale we have proposed as this will deliver the greatest opportunity for successful public sector reform.

**Enabling strategic leadership through a regional governance model**

A strategic authority across Kent and Medway provides a real opportunity to strengthen Kent as a whole and to focus the role of unitary authorities on their delivery role.

The strategic authority will take a strategic role across Kent including:

- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

A Mayor for Kent will provide a clear single voice for the region, support inward investment and ensure the county punches its weight on the national and international stages.

Kent requires a voice on the Council of the Nations and Regions, not only for its size but also for the critical role it plays in national infrastructure, travel and borders.

This high-profile leadership role with government will support growth in Kent and, through the national role, address a gap that would otherwise be apparent in addressing national priorities.

The future councils will be balanced and powerful constituent authorities on the strategic authority, alongside the mayor, and will provide the voice for their distinct economic areas.

We know from existing combined authorities that a single strategic approach does not mean that one size fits all.

A Kent strategic authority will also enable the councils to focus on effective local delivery and deep public service reform on an appropriate footprint.

The councils will have different strengths and needs, local partnerships and communities they represent.

A strategic authority will provide clear overall direction and coherence, enabling councils to focus delivery in their local area which will mean they can become more agile through a place-based approach within a larger strategic framework.

**Progress towards devolution**

Despite not being on the DPP, we have continued to develop our approach to devolution in Kent to enable us to rapidly take advantage of the opportunity when provided.

We have started work to agree our vision and strategic intent regarding devolution and the role and purpose of the strategic authority in delivering it, and the most effective relationship required with the constituent councils.

We are refreshing our shared priorities by identifying critical strategic challenges and opportunities requiring a strategic and Kent-wide approach.

Following MHCLG support for our devolution approach, we will finalise the preferred structure and identify the processes and resources required to integrate into the combined LGR and devolution implementation programme.

This will enable us to prepare the ground for the Mayoral Strategic Authority, develop the early investment programme and begin development of the statutory policy framework.

This will set robust foundations for the mayoral election and strategic authority to vest in April 2028.

**Devolution governance: the argument for 4B**

Option 4B proposes a four-unitary model for Kent designed to support strategic devolution and regional priorities through a coherent and balanced governance structure.

The model establishes four unitary authorities with proportionate population sizes, which ensures equitable representation across the county.

This balance is critical for enabling strong and equal partnerships in regional governance, fostering robust decision-making capacity for any future strategic authority.

The streamlined structure with simplified governance and enhanced leadership clarity is better positioned to engage with central government and regional bodies, allowing Kent to speak with a unified voice on matters of strategic importance such as infrastructure, housing and economic development.

The model also supports the delivery of devolved functions by aligning administrative boundaries with functional economic areas and transport corridors, thereby improving coordination and reducing duplication.

The proposal is underpinned by a collaborative approach across all Kent councils, demonstrating a shared commitment to reform and a willingness to work together to achieve common goals.

This collective effort strengthens the governance case by building trust and transparency in decision-making and by positioning Kent as a proactive and capable partner in regional devolution discussions.

Furthermore, Option 4B reflects place-based leadership by recognising and preserving local identities.

Each unitary authority is designed to be large enough to operate efficiently and deliver services at scale, yet small enough to remain connected to its communities.

This balance enables tailored strategies for neighbourhood involvement and decision-making, ensuring that governance remains responsive to local needs while supporting broader regional ambitions.

Option 4B creates a structure capable of delivering strategic devolution through equitable representation, simplified leadership, collaborative foundations and place-sensitive governance.

It aligns Kent’s geography with its functional realities – transport corridors, environmental zones, and economic clusters – making it well-suited to manage land, planning, infrastructure and environmental priorities across the county.

Option 4B balances opportunity and risk across the four authorities, ensuring no one authority shoulders financial or social challenges while others inherit increased growth and opportunity.

# Population sizes that support devolution

**Criteria 5c.** Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities

**The four-unitary model for Kent meets government criteria by creating balanced and sufficiently large authorities. It supports effective devolution by enabling strong collaboration with a Mayoral Strategic Authority and promotes equitable, efficient local governance.**

**Devolution governance: the argument for Option 4B**

The four-unitary model provides a strong foundation for devolution by aligning with functional economic areas and sensible planning geographies.

Each unitary authority offers sufficient scale and capacity to engage directly with a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA), enabling effective delivery of devolution priorities.

This model achieves four councils with balanced population sizes.

Although four constituent authorities represent a relatively small number within a strategic authority, the balanced population ratios support equal representation and encourage an equitable partnership, fostering collaborative governance and strengthened local delivery under the MSA framework.

Establishing four councils across Kent and Medway, each grounded in the region's real communities and places, strikes the right balance between sufficient scale and local representation, ensuring each authority truly reflects the communities it serves.

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# **Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

This section includes:


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| **Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent** | **Criteria 6a, 6b** |
| **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)** | **Criteria 6a, 6b** |


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# Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent

**Criteria 6a:** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

**Criteria 6b:** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment are central to achieving our LGR objectives in Kent. Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) represent a powerful opportunity to transform how communities take part in local decision-making.**

**Through LGR in Kent, communities will have a stronger voice within their new councils and with partners. We will ensure local insights shape discussions between unitary authorities and service providers, while building on and strengthening existing approaches that are already working well.**

Effective local government is a function of the relationships between elected members, service provision, residents and communities.

Empowered, engaged communities know who they are and what they need.

They know what services are available in their area and they expect to co-design and shape those services.

They see and know their councillors and local service providers.

And they are not afraid to share their perspectives and they are confident they will be heard.

Councils at all levels across Kent and Medway have longstanding commitments to community engagement via county-wide initiatives such as Crowdfund Kent, district and borough forums like the Thanet Youth Council and direct grants for local organisations from parish and town councils like Faversham.

At the heart of this commitment lies a requirement to use LGR as an opportunity to work differently by tempering the tension between the economies and resilience that come with delivering at scale and the granular responsiveness and relevance that thrives on close working with each community.

Having fewer, single-tier councils offers greater opportunities for scaled models, consistent investment of resources and potentially smoother co-operation with statutory partners.

Conversely, a larger number of smaller councils provides a stronger basis to co-design locally-specific services that adapt to communities' distinct needs and priorities.

Regardless of the model selected by government, councils will deliver stronger community engagement and enable genuine neighbourhood empowerment, bringing decisions closer to communities and ensuring services are relevant, joined-up and efficient.

To do this, Kent recognises it requires a new vehicle for community engagement that is at once locally rooted and strategically impactful.

This is the Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC), a neighbourhood hub for partnership working and co-production that unites communities, elected unitary and town and parish councillors and service partners. NACs, working alongside service providers as well as unitary and town and parish councillors, will enable LGR to realise the generational opportunity to improve community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

Alongside the major changes to our council structures, this vehicle will support communities to be closer, more informed and more empowered in the decisions affecting them.

The participation of services will ensure NACs convert local perspectives into meaningful influence, while representation from town and parish councillors will allow close coordination and alignment with local governance and priorities.

Therefore, we have assessed our plans to enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment using three key criteria:

- will the reforms enable communities to make their voice heard by their unitary authority and by partners delivering services?
- will they enable unitary authorities to work effectively with service providers in response to insights from community engagement?
- will they allow unitary authorities to build effectively on community engagement approaches that are already working?

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# Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)

**Criteria 6a:** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

**Criteria 6b:** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are Kent's preferred model for strengthening local engagement through LGR. Led by ward councillors, NACs connect communities with services and decision-making, adapting to local needs and ambitions. They integrate town and parish councils, statutory services, and community groups. Their success will depend on inclusive engagement, strong local partnerships and responsiveness to community priorities.**

## Role of NACs

Central government has made clear that Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are the preferred way for Local Authorities to 'hardwire community engagement into their own structures'[33] through LGR.

Led by ward councillors, NACs are seen as maximising the structural efficiencies brought about by LGR and strengthening localism and community participation across all areas.

Our approach takes advantage of this opportunity to realise these benefits in ways that meet our distinctive Kent context.

This approach has been the prevailing view amongst Kent Leaders and officers during recent engagement with stakeholders

Kent's NACs will be a central hub for local partnership working, connecting residents and communities with services and their council.

Each NAC will identify its initial priorities, which may be specific local issues with significant opportunity to flex new powers and responsibilities around new solutions.

Over time, we anticipate NACs will gravitate towards more strategic arrangements between partners across their areas of responsibility.

NACs will be able to take on different levels of responsibility and decision-making in response to the size and ambition of their area.

Some may begin as largely advisory and consultative, acting as an effective platform to communicate local perspectives to strategic forums in the new unitary authority and other statutory partners.

[33] MHCLG, 'Local government reorganisation: summary of feedback on interim plans', available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-summary-of-feedback-on-interim-plans/local-government-reorganisation-summary-of-feedback-on-interim-plans

Others may request and receive devolved responsibility and budget from their unitary authority.

We want to see NACs tending towards taking on more devolved responsibilities as they develop more mature local ways of working.

**Membership of NACs**

Elected unitary authority councillors will be the anchors of their NAC, ensuring that democratic accountability is central to local collaboration and delivery, and while making listening, understanding, and advocacy integral to their role.

As well as unitary councillors, NACs will include representation from town and parish councils where applicable and statutory services such as police, health, children's and family services.

Residents' associations and business groups will be encouraged to attend, as will Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, to ensure local perspectives and needs are well represented.

Precise membership of each NAC will vary depending on the needs and context of that community but all should enable participation by individual members of the public.

**Scale and local adaptations**

Kent's NACs need to be effective neighbourhood structures.

As such, they need to cover a small enough population for a clear local identity to apply.

NACs in cities are likely to cover a larger population than those in villages, for example.

We will work with stakeholders to identify NAC boundaries and these will be informed by other neighbourhood-level footprints such as primary care networks which cover 30,000 to 50,000 residents.

These areas will cover substantially smaller geographies than those of statutory services and the unitary authorities and NACs will need to work with statutory partners to develop and iterate effective models of engagement.

On the other hand, NACs will cover a substantially larger population than most town and parish councils.

It is recommended these work in clusters to engage with this model.

Across Kent, different community engagement models are in use.

These need to shape NAC formation so that the new NACs work 'with the grain' of local energy and trust.

**Integrating NACs and town and parish councils**

Town and parish councillors will be core members of well-functioning NACs.

The pivotal and established role that Kent's 317 town and parish councils play in community engagement in Kent will remain critical for any new council model.

These hyper-local councils, covering an average population of just over 5,000, are the closest tier of government to residents.

They provide an irreplaceable platform for direct interaction and feedback, and they will allow this representation to be sustained through the disruption and change of LGR.

Town and parish councils in Kent convene and facilitate face-to-face and online discussions and allow residents to ask questions, make suggestions and raise concerns in a setting that ensures their local context is respected and understood.

These forums empower communities and clearly position their unique needs and priorities within broader governmental decisions.

No other level of civic engagement can match their capacity to help smaller towns and villages retain their distinct identity.

Kent's local councils have widely varying numbers of town and parish councils (see below), due to population size and historical context.

Approximately six to 10 town or parish councils might expect to cluster into each NAC, though this will vary in accordance with local need and context.

| Council area | Town and parish councils[34] |
|---|---|
| Ashford | 42 |
| Canterbury | 26 |
| Dartford | 8 |
| Dover | 35 |
| Folkestone and Hythe | 29 |
| Gravesham | 5 |
| Maidstone | 40 |
| Medway | 11 |
| Sevenoaks | 31 |
| Swale | 37 |
| Thanet | 10 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 27 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 16 |
| **Total** | **317** |

### Creating the conditions for community empowerment

NACs can be a powerful structure to drive community and neighbourhood empowerment in Kent, but success depends on three key conditions for success:

1) inclusive community engagement

[34] Borough, District, and Unitary Authority websites

2) being rooted in communities and existing structures
3) the ability to drive strategic impact

| Conditions for success | How this can be achieved in Kent |
|---|---|
| **1. Inclusive community engagement** | • **Embed openness, inclusion, and co-production** as foundational operational principles. Where communities feel 'done to' they vote with their feet, causing meaningful initiatives to wither on the vine. NACs' membership structures and role provide a context for genuine inclusion and co-production. NAC chairs and councillors must visibly and consistently model these values or participation from day one or participation risks quickly reverting to previous levels. This includes allowing NACs to form on different timelines depending on local appetite and capacity.<br>• **Resource communities to shape their NAC's scope and priorities**: Having the authority and resources to make a difference is at the heart of localism. Clear, permissive frameworks will support NACs to use their knowledge to define and tackle the subjects that matter to them.. NACs will be encouraged and supported, with the potential for seed funding and officer support where appropriate, to explore co-production and participatory models in the design and commissioning of services.<br>• **Poor transport links and digital isolation may hamper participation in rural or deprived communities**. And some places will have less past experience of collective action and deliberation. NACs will need support to work through these questions.<br>• **Confusion or cynicism borne of past restructures may demotivate communities** and prevent engagement. NACs and councils must be transparent about the rationale and roadmap for change and demonstrate with actions that NACs represent a real opportunity to make a difference. |
| **2. Drive strategic impact** | • Unitary authorities will need a **sustained commitment to gather and listen to NAC feedback** when developing strategies. The new councils will need structures and practices that embed listening and learning from NACs which should become advisory partners in policy formation.<br>• NACs will need to be supported and empowered in ways that acknowledge historic inequalities.<br>  ○ Given Kent's diversity, some NACs will need participation and resourcing mechanisms that take account of differences in civic capacity and social infrastructure, including additional capacity-building support.<br>  ○ Unitary authorities will need to be willing to listen closely to quieter voices from less well-resourced communities. |
| **3. Rooted in communities and existing groups** | • Accessible, skilled, and informed unitary and town/parish councillors<br>  ○ NACs will need **councillors who are skilled at local convening, mediating, and building coalitions for action**, sometimes in new ways. To support this, future councils will invest in updated |

| | |
|---|---|
| | councillor development programmes that include community leadership and co-production methods.<br>○ **Councillors will need access to local intelligence and data**, ensuring they can respond with insight and evidence to residents' concerns.<br>○ **Councillor remuneration and practical support** will need to be reviewed where new expectations on councillors' time exceed current commitments.<br>• A sustainable ecosystem of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations<br>○ **Strong and resilient VCSE partners are essential** for translating local priorities into tangible outcomes. Kent's small and medium size VCSEs, which will be vital delivery partners, sources of local insight and anchors of community trust within thriving NACs, are collectively experiencing significant financial strain with more closing than opening in recent years[35].<br>○ Unitary authorities will **build on existing work to strengthen local VCSEs**, and NACs will have an important role to play in amplifying VCSE insights and supporting the commissioning of smaller organisations.<br>• Boundaries that promote local engagement and strategic influence<br>• Unitary authorities will need to **develop boundaries that balance competing requirements** in order to unite meaningful communities with shared concerns, and to be coterminous with statutory and other partner geographies (for example, GPs and primary care networks) to support partner participation and dialogue. Community Governance Reviews going on across the region should also be considered in this process. |

[35] KCC, Headline analysis of the voluntary and community sector in Kent, available online at: https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/61718/Kent-voluntary-sector.pdf

# Section 6: Implementation plan

This section includes:

## Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)

## Programme governance and workstreams

## Summary risks and mitigations

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# Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)

## Joint implementation planning across Kent

We are operating a shared programme across all Kent authorities including a Steering Group, Programme Board and have a mature programme team with shared funding operating across all councils.

We have a long history of working across councils which is a very strong foundation to start our LGR journey from.

We bring significant momentum, shared understanding and common purpose that we will maintain into the future phases of the work.

We have worked extensively with colleagues from previous LGR programmes to discuss their approach and lessons that we can take into our implementation approach for Kent.

Our approach is guided by prudence regarding the scale and complexity of Kent but also ambition regarding public service reform and the role that an effective and efficient reorganisation can play in it.

Our approach is designed to implement reorganisation alongside devolution and the establishment of a Strategic Authority across Kent (see Criteria 5 for more detail).

There are significant synergies from operating a combined devolution and LGR programme where they can be done in parallel.

## Implementation principles for LGR in Kent

We have established principles to guide our approach to implementation and to ensure it is aligned with our wider public service reform ambitions. We will:

1) maintain and enhance our collaborative approach
2) ensure LGR decisions enable the bigger picture of devolution and public service reform
3) plan ahead and communicate
4) engage and co-create with partners and residents
5) support staff and partners on the journey
6) minimise disruption to staff and residents
7) establish governance to ensure delivery
8) transparent decision-making
9) be ambitious in what we can achieve beyond safe and legal
10) Keep provision of services to residents at the forefront of decision-making

## The phases of LGR

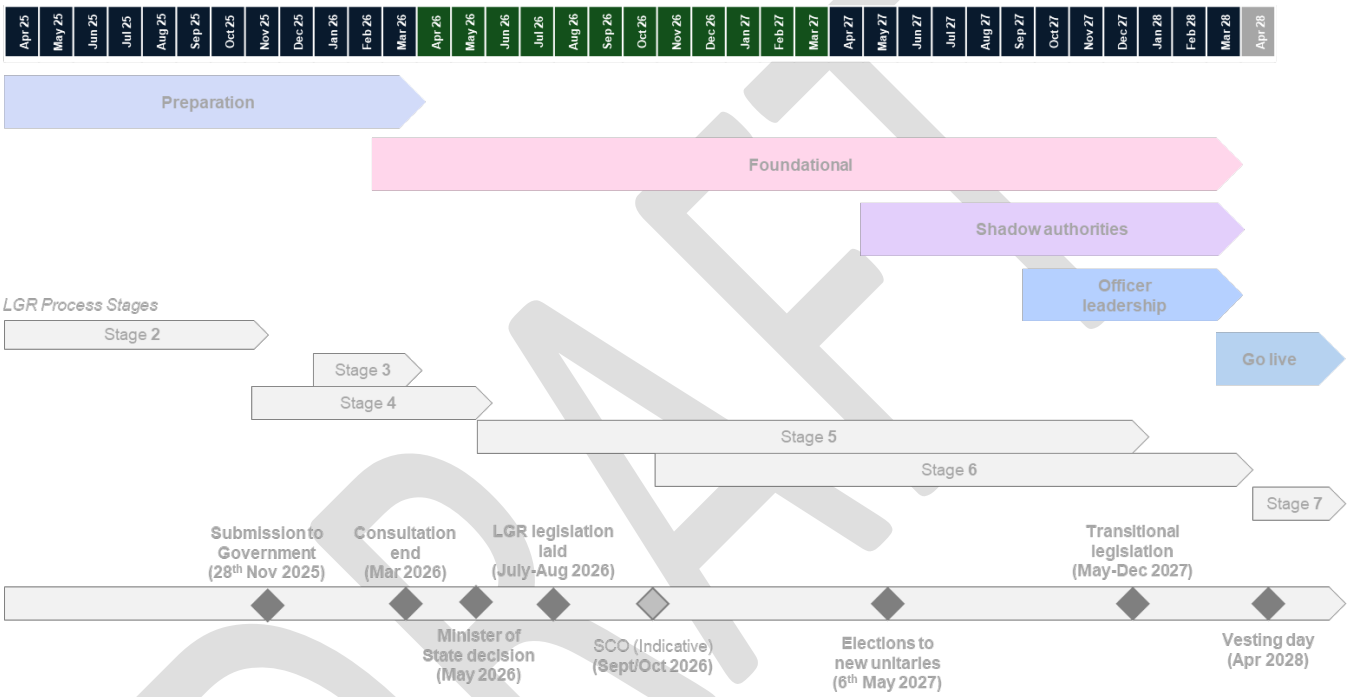
We understand the distinct phases that an LGR programme requires, the relative governance, priorities and resourcing required to make them a success.

Through working with colleagues who have delivered LGR and MHCLG officials we have developed a timeline for reorganisation which maps our phases onto the stages outlined by MHCLG.

We have transitioned our programme approach from development of this proposal into establishing the programme management that we will require through the preparation phase.

The plan and our advance preparation will enable us to deliver efficiently and continue engagement and consistent communication with partners and staff.

This will maintain the resilience of local government and maximise the benefits of reorganisation in Kent throughout the process.




1. **Preparation** Before a decision on the shape of the new councils. We have started work on implementation early to set it up for success. We have a plan for Day One and are ambitious to deliver strong, cohesive councils to deliver transformation and public service reform beyond safe and legal transition. We will appreciate a timely ministerial decision to enable us to move beyond this phase.

2. **Foundational** When a decision on the shape of the new councils has been made, initially before the election of shadow members or appointment of officer leadership.

3. **Shadow authorities** With members elected but only with programme or unofficial groupings of officers for capacity.

4. **Officer leadership** When statutory and senior officers have been appointed and can prepare the new councils working with the appointed councillors.

5. **Go-live** After vesting day when the councils deliver services.

There are fundamentals that will remain in place throughout the reorganisation process:

- staff support and communication
- communication with partners and residents
- access to the right skills and capacity
- clarity on Day 1 requirements and target state
- management of programme creep and over-optimism
- change management
- collaboration and ownership

In addition, these are the summary priorities by phase:

| Phase | Summary priorities |
|---|---|
| **Preparation** | • Collaborative service working – identifying opportunities, risks and shared understanding<br>• Set up the programme (governance, workstreams and finance)<br>• Recruit Strategic Partner(s)<br>• Agree target position for Day One and scenario planning<br>• Set up the plan, timeline and critical path including provisional Day One requirements and milestones<br>• Set up a data hub - gather and maintain consistent programme data<br>• Define and agree scope of LGR-related decisions with sovereign councils |
| **Foundational** | • Adapting programme to specific milestones<br>• Commencing Day One programme plan (what is in appropriate scope of the programme e.g. ICT infrastructure, treatment of systems and contracts)<br>• Service alignment and transformation including reconfiguring existing area based working arrangements to match boundaries of new councils<br>• Options appraisals and preparing for key decisions<br>• Elections<br>• Compliance with Structural Changes Order and legal checks and assurance<br>• Project plan for safely winding down sovereign authorities |
| **Shadow authorities** | • Continuing delivery of Day One programme plan<br>• Appointing Chief Executives and statutory and leadership roles<br>• Member inductions and service briefings<br>• Key decision timetable<br>• TUPE transfer arrangements |
| **Officer leadership** | • Tier 2 and Tier 3 Leadership Recruitment<br>• Service planning<br>• Development of council plan, budget MTFP<br>• Key policies and strategies (strategic priorities and corporate plans, unitary strategic risk register, constitution)<br>• Operating model and staffing allocations |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Preparing for Day One and alignment with Day One vision and change (particularly for vulnerable people and those reliant on services for health and wellbeing). |
| **Go-live** | • Stability and seamless experience<br>• Improvement and post-LGR transformation planning |

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# Programme governance and workstreams

We will operate an LGR Programme Board across Kent and Medway which will report to the existing Leaders group, though acknowledging it does not have decision-making powers, and in due course into Joint Committees.

This Board will include the Chief Executives and Programme Director and will oversee the programme and address strategic issues and risks.

We will establish a Day One Board to focus on managing delivery of the programme plan following the ministerial decision.

This will include tracking progress against milestones and completion of Day One requirements.

We have set up workstreams with Chief Executive sponsors and agreed engagement principles regarding representation from authorities as service leads and on workstreams.

We will set up unitary delivery groups to focus on issues specific to each new council including elections, council plan, member induction, policies and culture.

These groups will increase in importance when working to shadow authorities and when interim heads of paid service are appointed but by starting early, we are setting the councils up for success.

## Our workstreams

We know the importance of operating a single programme across Kent to drive consistency, efficiency and to address challenges where possible.

Our workstreams will cover services and the following key themes:




We will establish Unitary Delivery Groups to focus on preparations for the new councils.

These are collaborative by definition and will be agile to take advantage of opportunities that may arise but relate to one of the new councils individually.

These workstreams will evolve and governance structures will develop to support the Shadow Authorities and establish the new authorities when permanent officers are appointed.

## Stakeholder engagement

We know we need to work closely with partners, staff and residents to avoid LGR having negative impacts on the quality or resilience of services in Kent.

We know we need to communicate early, clearly and transparently with partners and provide opportunities for co-creation and innovation to improve how we work and set the right foundations for public service reform.

We are liaising with stakeholders and are developing an engagement plan to ensure proactive, timely and constructive conversation with stakeholders.

**Our ambition for Day One**

To deliver a seamless transition from the perspective of our residents where those who rely on public services for their health or wellbeing continue to be protected.

We will lay the foundations for improved collaboration across the public sector and harnessing the benefits of transformation.

**Our progress on implementation**

From our experience of reorganisation, we know the value of starting early.

We have a head start as we already work closely together and have a number of shared services, roles and contracts aligned with the new unitary structures.

To build upon this we are working collaboratively to:

- map our ICT infrastructure and enterprise architecture
- set up unitary delivery groups to identify and take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities such as shared roles or where contracts or licenses are expiring
- map our contracts to inform integration opportunities
- bring our service leads together to compare policies and processes and to identify opportunities
- clean up and standardise data across Kent
- establish a Project Management Office
- identify skills and capacity requirements to deliver the programme
- consider further shared roles and skills sharing across councils
- develop a datahub to drive forward the LGR process
- agree how sovereign councils in Kent will operate prior to vesting day
- maintain and transition our LGR programme Board and tools to power the programme
- stakeholder and resident engagement and a significant communications programme

# Summary risks and mitigations

We understand the risks LGR presents and are already working to mitigate them through our programme structure and approach:

- **Disaggregation** – we understand the challenge and risk of disaggregating key services and that this will take up significant programme capacity. We are planning early regarding Day One requirements and supporting services with significant capacity from workstreams to enable them to focus on their specific requirements.
- **Aggregation** – aggregating services requires alignment of policies, processes and systems in addition to fundamentals like organisational culture and ICT infrastructure. These can take time but are critical to achieving the benefits of local government reorganisation.
- **ICT capacity** – ICT is a key service, workstream and enabler of all services and elements of the programme and is a risk to the safe and legal function of the new councils.
- **Collaboration** – LGR requires collaboration across councils, tiers of local government, across political parties and with partners. We are mitigating this through:
    - Building on existing close working arrangements;
    - Developing 'no regrets activities' – a set of actions and decisions that we can deliver across Kent that will benefit the programme regardless of future decision;
    - Discussing protocols for how we will approach LGR.

We know the value of 'good endings and safe beginnings' and will setup the programme efficiently to maintain focus on service delivery in sovereign councils while setting up the future councils for success.

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# Appendix 1: Options appraisal

This section includes:

## Options appraisal approach

## Options appraisal results

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# Options appraisal process

**This appendix outlines the approach taken to appraise potential unitary options for Kent by the 14 local authorities. The appraisal was designed to ensure a robust, consistent and evidence-based assessment to support local decision-making on which options should progress to full business case development.**

**The options appraisal approach was rooted in government guidance, with alignment to the six local government reorganisation (LGR) criteria set out in the Secretary of State's letter dated 6th February 2025 and further clarified in June 2025.**

**The appraisal did not produce a ranked list of options or identify a preferred option.**

**Councils drew on the shared evidence base, alongside resident and stakeholder views, to inform their conclusions.**

## Overview of the approach

The appraisal process followed five key stages:

### Step 1: Selection of options for appraisal

The process began with the development of a longlist of 10 potential unitary options.

This longlist was informed by previous work carried out by local authorities, submissions to central government and extensive input from stakeholders, including council officers and Leaders.

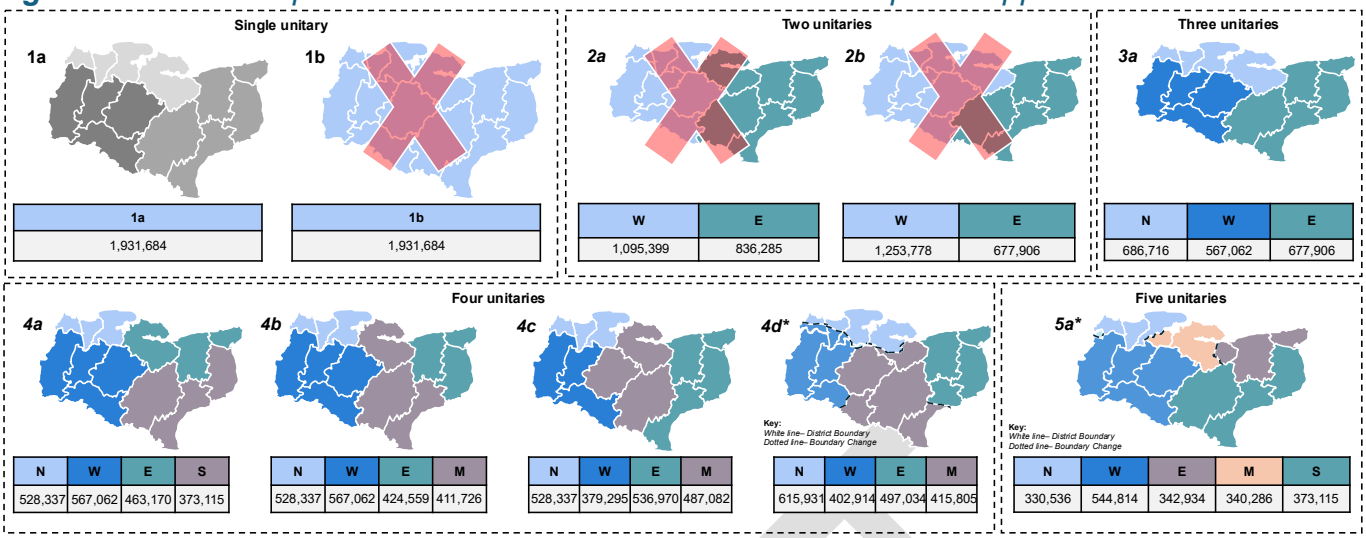
These options encompassed all permutations raised in prior discussions, including suggestions made during initial interviews and strategic workshops.

Following this initial development, a series of engagement sessions were held with Leaders from all 14 authorities.

Through these discussions, three options were jointly agreed to be out of scope for full appraisal, resulting in a refined shortlist of seven options to be taken forward for comprehensive evaluation.

This agreement marked a critical stage in the process, reinforcing the joint ownership of the appraisal exercise.

***Figure X:*** *Potential options that were raised at the start of the options appraisal*




| 1a |
|---|
| 1,931,684 |

| 1b |
|---|
| 1,931,684 |

| W | E |
|---|---|
| 1,095,399 | 836,285 |

| W | E |
|---|---|
| 1,253,778 | 677,906 |

| N | W | E |
|---|---|---|
| 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 |

| N | W | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 528,337 | 567,062 | 463,170 | 373,115 |

| N | W | E | M |
|---|---|---|---|
| 528,337 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 |

| N | W | E | M |
|---|---|---|---|
| 528,337 | 379,295 | 536,970 | 487,082 |

| N | W | E | M |
|---|---|---|---|
| 615,931 | 402,914 | 497,034 | 415,805 |

| N | W | E | M | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |

**To match the current total population of 1,931,684, we applied a proportional multiplier to the original figures for options with boundary changes. This preserves the relative population distribution across the four areas while ensuring the total aligns with up -to-date data.*

## Step 2: Data collection and modelling

To assess each option, a comprehensive dataset was compiled using both publicly-available data sources and specific submissions from individual councils.

This ensured that the appraisal drew from a consistent and authoritative evidence base. Data was initially collected for each existing local authority and then aggregated or modelled to create a coherent picture of each potential new unitary configuration.

For options that involved redrawing boundaries, most notably options 4D and 5A, additional modelling was required.

This included the use of Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)-level population estimates to produce reliable approximations of how existing data would translate to proposed future geographies.

Where appropriate, other datasets not available at LSOA level, were looked at on a pro-rata basis and were based on population estimates to align with the proposed unitary boundaries.

The methodology applied population-weighted approaches and, where possible, consistent assumptions across datasets.

This modelling ensured the integrity and comparability of data across all options.

## *Figure X: Example metrics*

*Example metrics gathered across all current authorities*

| Metric | Medway (unitary) | District councils | | | | | | | | | | | Kent County Council | Total / Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Ashford | Canterbury | Dartford | Dover | Folkestone and Hythe | Gravesham | Maidstone | Sevenoaks | Swale | Thanet | Tonbridge and Malling | Tunbridge Wells | |
| Population (mid-2024) | 292,655 | 140,936 | 162,100 | 125,011 | 119,768 | 112,411 | 110,671 | 187,767 | 122,748 | 158,379 | 142,691 | 136,853 | 119,694 | 1,639,029 | 1,931,684 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 194 | 581 | 309 | 73 | 315 | 357 | 99 | 393 | 370 | 373 | 104 | 240 | 331 | 3,545 | 3,739 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 1,509 | 243 | 525 | 1,712 | 380 | 315 | 1,118 | 478 | 332 | 425 | 1,372 | 570 | 362 | 462 | 517 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023) | 7,657 | 3,939 | 4,352 | 4,343 | 3,277 | 2,802 | 2,206 | 5,550 | 5,098 | 3,633 | 2,588 | 5,406 | 4,114 | 47,308 | 54,965 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 26,164 | 27,949 | 26,848 | 34,741 | 27,361 | 24,926 | 19,933 | 29,558 | 41,532 | 22,939 | 18,137 | 39,502 | 34,371 | 28,863 | 28,454 |

*Metrics consolidated by potential future unitary authority for options in scope*

| Metric | Option 1A | Option 3A (example) | | | Option 4A (example) | | | | Option 5A (example) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | N | W | E | N | W | E | S | N | W | E | M | S |
| Population (mid-2024) | 1,931,684 | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 | 528,337 | 567,062 | 463,170 | 373,115 | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 3,739 | 739 | 1,334 | 1,666 | 366 | 1,334 | 786 | 1,253 | 287 | 1,267 | 503 | 429 | 1,253 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 517 | 929 | 425 | 407 | 1,444 | 425 | 589 | 298 | 1,151 | 430 | 682 | 793 | 298 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023) | 54,965 | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 | 14,206 | 20,168 | 10,573 | 10,018 | 9,373 | 19,244 | 7,815 | 8,515 | 10,018 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 28,454 | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 | 26,888 | 35,566 | 22,827 | 26,850 | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |

## Step 3: Development of evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'

The appraisal was structured around fourteen evaluation criteria, developed directly in reference to the government's six tests for LGR, as outlined in its correspondence dated 6 February 2025 and subsequent guidance issued in June 2025.

These criteria reflect key considerations such as efficiency, local identity, capacity to deliver sustainable services and readiness for devolution.

For each of the 14 evaluation criteria, a set of specific metrics was identified to enable detailed assessment.

Alongside each metric, a definition of 'what good looks like' was agreed to provide a consistent standard against which all options were evaluated.

While some elements of government guidance were treated as threshold requirements, e.g. minimum standards for all options, others were differentiating factors and thus formed part of the comparative framework.

## *Figure X: Evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'*

***Evaluation criteria defined to structure options analysis***

| Headline Government Criteria | Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance |
|---|---|
| 1. Establishing a single tier of local government | 1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base |
| | 1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs |
| | 1.3 Single tier governance structures |
| 2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks | 2.1 Appropriate population size |
| | 2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money |
| | 2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities |
| | 2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing |
| 3. High quality and sustainable public services | 3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation |
| | 3.2 Public service reform and better value for money |
| | 3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness |
| 4. Working together to understand and meet local needs | 4.1 Local identity, culture and historical importance |
| | 4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns |
| 5. Supporting devolution arrangements | 5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority |
| 6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment | 6.1 Enabling strong community engagement |

***Example of metrics to be assessed***

| 1.1: Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base | |
|---|---|
| **Metrics/factors** | **What does good look like?** |
| **Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita (2023) (£)** | Balanced GVA per capita between unitaries, suggesting balanced levels of productivity and positive implications for the distribution of economic prosperity among residents |
| **Total Gross Value Added (GVA) (2023) (£m)** | Each unitary has a sufficient GVA to generate tax and there is balance between unitaries, meaning good long-term prospects for all future authorities |
| **Council tax base (number of properties at Band D equivalent)** | All authorities with a sufficient number and profile of properties to provide a council tax base which can sustainably support services, with a reasonable balance between authorities |
| **Council Tax harmonisation / difference in Band D rates** | District areas within a unitary have low to no difference between council tax rates. The least difference between councils within a unitary would provide minimal administrative and resident disruption in harmonising rates |
| **Alignment to major Kent industries** | Unitaries demonstrate alignment to one or more of the key industries |

## Step 4: Assessment parameters and scoring methodology

Each metric was assessed using a standard three-point scale: high, medium or low.

For most metrics, this scoring was determined through statistical balance analysis i.e. evaluating the degree of variation in outcomes across the proposed unitary authorities under each option.

The underlying principle was that a more balanced distribution of characteristics-, e.g. population size, financial resilience, service demand- across new authorities would indicate greater equity and resilience.

The scoring process followed a clear sequence:

1. Identify the range of values between councils under each option for each metric.
2. Determine percentile thresholds for categorising those ranges:
    - High = below 33rd percentile (most balanced)
    - Medium = 33rd to 66th percentile
    - Low = above 66th percentile (least balanced)
3. Assign scores for each option accordingly.

In cases where balance was not a relevant concept, i.e. for county-wide service considerations or unique single-unitary configurations such as Option 1A, bespoke scoring definitions were applied.

Additionally, to allow for further nuance in interpretation, intermediate scores such as Medium/High or Medium/Low were used where appropriate.

No weighting was applied to either the criteria or the metrics. Each was treated as equally important for the purposes of the appraisal.

The model is explicitly comparative: the scores for each option reflect how they perform relative to others in the shortlist, rather than against an absolute benchmark.

## Step 5: Assessment and presentation of results

Each option was scored against every metric, producing an average score for each of the 14 evaluation criteria.

The results were presented via a visual dashboards, supplemented with detailed narrative and commentary to contextualise the findings and highlight key trade-offs or assumptions.

In some cases, particularly for Option 1A, which envisages a single county-wide unitary authority, additional analysis was undertaken to ensure comparability, given that balance metrics were not applicable in the same way as for multi-unitary options.

# Options appraisal results

**All 14 councils worked together to complete an options appraisal prior to business case development. Following joint analysis, review and discussion, the options being put forward are those that Leaders believe are both workable and offer the best value for Kent.**

Following the completion of the appraisal, Council Leaders convened to review the evidence presented.

During this meeting, they collectively identified preferred options to proceed to business case development.

This decision was informed both by the technical appraisal and by the views of their individual councils and local residents.

While the options appraisal itself did not rank or recommend a preferred outcome, it provided the objective foundation upon which political judgements and democratic input could be made.

**Figure X**: Summary assessment by evaluation criteria

| Headline Government Criteria | Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance | Summary assessment by option | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1A* | 3A | 4A | 4B | 4C | 4D | 5A |
| 1. Establishing a single tier of local government | 1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base | M | H | M/L | M | M/H | M | M/L |
| | 1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs | M | H | M | M | L | M | M |
| | 1.3 Single tier local government structures | L | L | M | M | M | H | M |
| 2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks | 2.1 Appropriate population size | M | H | M | H | M | L | L |
| | 2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money | H | H | M/L | M/L | M/L | M/L | L |
| | 2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities | H | H | M | M | M | M/L | L |
| | 2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing | H | M | M/L | M/H | M/H | M/L | M |
| 3. High quality and sustainable public services | 3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation | M | H | M | M/H | M/L | M/L | M/L |
| | 3.2 Public service reform and better value for money | M | M | M | M | M/L | M/L | M |
| | 3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness | M | M | M/H | M | L | L | M |
| 4. Working together to understand and meet local needs | 4.1 Issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance | M/L | M | M | M | M | M | M |
| | 4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 5. Supporting devolution arrangements | 5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority | L | H | H | H | H | M | M |
| 6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment | 6.1 Enabling strong community engagement | L | M | L | H | M | H | L |

**Option 1a appraised separately due to it proposing a single unitary and an innovative model of local government which is not suited to the appraisal methodology.*

Notes:

- Each evaluation criterion was scored as High, Medium, or Low, based on an average score derived from multiple metrics.
- For most metrics assessed, the process evaluated how well each option achieves balance across all proposed unitary authorities.
- The model is comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed, rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad.
- Minor differences between options still resulted in at least one option scoring High and one Low, due to the comparative nature of the model.

# Appendix 2: Financial modelling

This section includes:


## Financial context

## Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling

## Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model

## Financial modelling summary outputs

## Implementation costs

## Reorganisation savings

## Disaggregation costs

## Phasing and payback period


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# Financial context

**Councils across Kent are under pressure from rising costs and demand. LGR can help to address these challenges, but in itself will not address the scale of the financial challenge.**

### National financial context

The local government sector faces a major financial challenge with an estimated £4 billion funding gap over the next two years.

Demand for critical services is increasing because of population growth and ageing populations.

Councils are also facing rising costs, with adult social care costs estimated to have increased by 9% and children's social care costs by 18% in real terms over the past five years.

There continues to be uncertainty over long term funding arrangements, which have placed many councils in increasingly fragile financial positions. The growing number of Section 114 notices in recent years highlights the systemic strain across the sector, with pressures in Social Care, Housing and Temporary Accommodation, and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits now common drivers of instability.

At the same time, the absence of clarity on the Fair Funding Review, ongoing uncertainty over business rates reform and reset, and the limited scope of multi-year settlements have constrained council's ability to plan sustainably. Against this backdrop, LGR offers an opportunity to strengthen financial resilience through streamlined structures, integrated service delivery, and more sustainable use of resources over the long term.

### The Kent financial context

Combined net revenue expenditure across the 14 Kent councils is £2,337m, with 73% in Kent County Council and 15% within Medway - the authorities delivering statutory adult social care and children's services.

Across Kent, councils are facing sustained financial pressures.

Rising demand in adult social care, children's services and SEND, alongside inflationary cost pressures and debt, are placing significant strain on budgets.

The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery.

### Reserves and funding the reorganisation

Across all Kent councils combined there are forecast Total Usable Reserves of **£959m by 2028/29.**

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the future councils post reorganisation.

It will be the decision of each new council to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

### Debt across Kent councils

Total external debt across Kent stands at £1,730m. Due to the provision of upper tier services, 26% of borrowing stands in Medway and 41% in the County Council. Three districts, (Dartford, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells) report no general fund borrowing.

### Gross budget gap of existing councils

The forecast total gross budget gap for all 14 councils by 2028/29 of **£138.3m**, has therefore not been included within the breakeven analysis.

However, there is recognition that if there were any budget gaps post vesting day, the recurring savings projected from our proposal could contribute to closing any future gross budget gaps across the new authorities.

The financial modelling does not take direct account of existing council budget gaps, which will need to be managed regardless of LGR.

### Impact of Fair Funding 2.0 on Gross Budget Gap

The Fair Funding Review is ongoing nationally. While considered by all councils across Kent, the complexity and uncertainty of the review mean it has not been modelled in detail.

There is recognition that Fair Funding 2.0 is likely to have an impact on councils' financial positions.

There are distinct additional needs in the county related to deprivation which are expected to benefit with the Fair Funding formula but no assumptions have been made within the gross budget gap assumptions above as it is not possible to quantify at this stage.

### Dedicated Schools Grants

The financial analysis assumes that all existing councils will manage their Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG) positions regardless of LGR, therefore DSG surplus or deficits (if any) have not been included within the breakeven analysis.

It will be the decision of each new authority to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation against any funding pressures observed from DSG.

The combined DSG deficit position as at 31 March 2025 was £150.1m (Medway Council had a £16.4m deficit and Kent County Council had a deficit balance of £133.7m).

Kent County Council entered the Department for Education's "Safety Valve" process in Summer 2022, which involves the local authority reforming its high needs systems and associated spending in return for additional funding to contribute to the historic deficit.

Deficits on the DSG is a national problem affecting county and unitary authorities.

At the present time these are being managed through a statutory override which enables a technical adjustment in the statutory statement of accounts to hold these deficits without recognising the impact against General Fund resources.

A consultation is expected by the government in 2026/27 on reforms to SEND, the root causes of deficits and to invite proposals for a resolution.

Members of the Shadow Authorities for the proposed unitary authorities will need to carefully consider proposed reforms in light of their local circumstances.

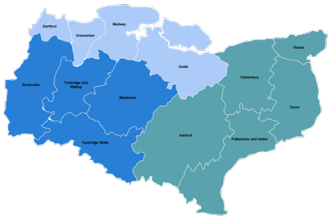
# Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling

**Financial modelling is a key component of the LGR proposal. Its purpose is to evaluate the financial implications of local government reorganisation across Kent in a consistent way across all LGR options.**

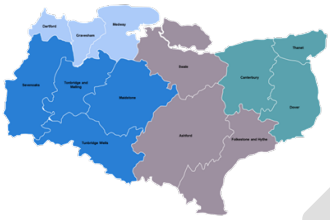
## The LGR options in scope for financial modelling

A single approach to estimating financial impact of LGR was taken across four options for LGR:

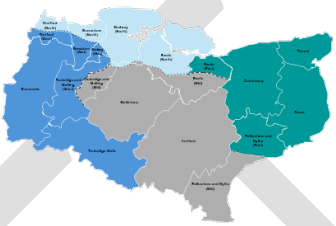
Three unitaries (3A)



Four unitaries (4B)



Four unitaries (4D)*



Five unitaries (5A)*



## Purpose of financial model

The financial modelling aims to:

- estimate the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options
- compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings costs, and payback

## Limitations of scope to date

Whilst being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all Kent finance officers agree that LGR does not in itself provide the solution to the scale of the financial challenge faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG) have collectively agreed on the following position on the analysis carried out:

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.
- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.

- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be funded.
- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new authorities may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new authorities.

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# Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model

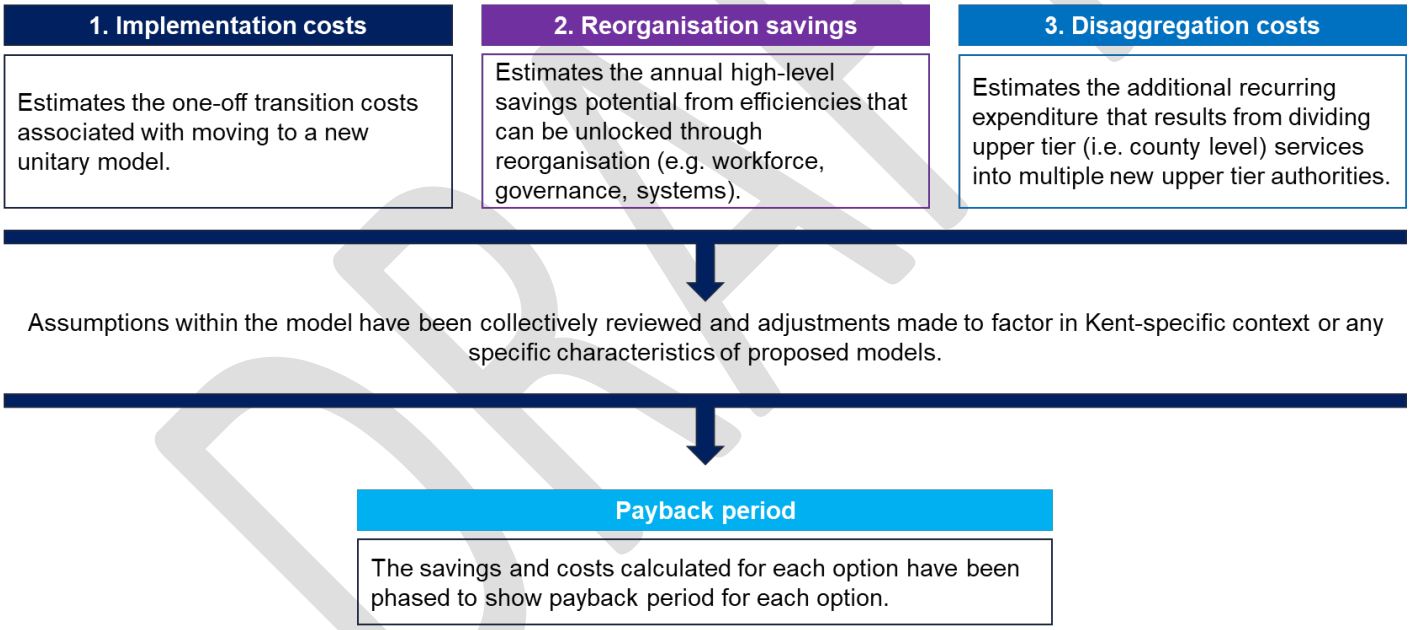
**All finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have reviewed and adjusted financial modelling in order to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to Government.**

## Baselining

1. **Standardised data requests** were completed by all 14 councils, covering revenue budgets, reserves, capital plans, balance sheets and key service metrics. Alongside numerical data, contextual narrative was gathered to support understanding of pressures, risks, and transformation plans.
2. **A consolidated financial baseline** was created, using data returns to combine district, unitary and county budgets into unified figures based on agreed assumptions.
3. Baseline information was then used to create a **financial view of all proposed councils** under each of the five options being submitted to government.

## Three elements of the financial modelling

The financial model is made up of three calculators, which have been applied to all options:




Financial calculations are underpinned by benchmarking of previous LGR proposals and the estimated costs and benefits modelled in those reports, adjusted for the budgets, populations and current local government structures within Kent.

Adjustments have been made to reflect experience of local government reorganisation implementation and through discussion with all Section 151 Officers across Kent.

## Further detail of methodology

The calculation of each element of the model applied is explained separately within this section of the report.

# Financial modelling summary outputs

**The key driver of difference between options are the number of councils being proposed. Due to the assumptions applied within the modelling, implementation costs and recurring costs of disaggregation increase as the number of councils proposed increases.**

Our financial modelling shows:

- **Option 4B, a four unitary model built on existing boundaries,** has higher disaggregation costs and marginally higher one-off implementation costs, resulting in an estimated payback period of 7.8 – 14.3 years.

***Table 29:*** *Summary of financial modelling*

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4B** | (130.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) - (48.6) | 18.9 – 34.6 | 7.8 – 14.3 years |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

**Further analysis**

The calculation of each element of the financial model is explained in the following pages.

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# Implementation costs

**Implementation costs definition:** The estimated one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model.

**Method of calculation**:

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of implementation costs per capita.
- Multiplied the benchmarked costs per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total implementation cost per unitary model.
- Applied an uplift of costs per additional unitary authority being created, due to additional costs through establishing governance structures, IT systems, administrative frameworks, etc.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. A specific uplift of £5m was added to reflect the additional complexity and implementation effort to deliver boundary changes.

## Implementation costs

***Table 30:*** *Implementation cost summary*

| Option | Implementation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **4B** | (130.9) | Implementation complexity and costs rise compared to 3A due to the additional unitary authority being proposed, |

## Categories of implementation cost

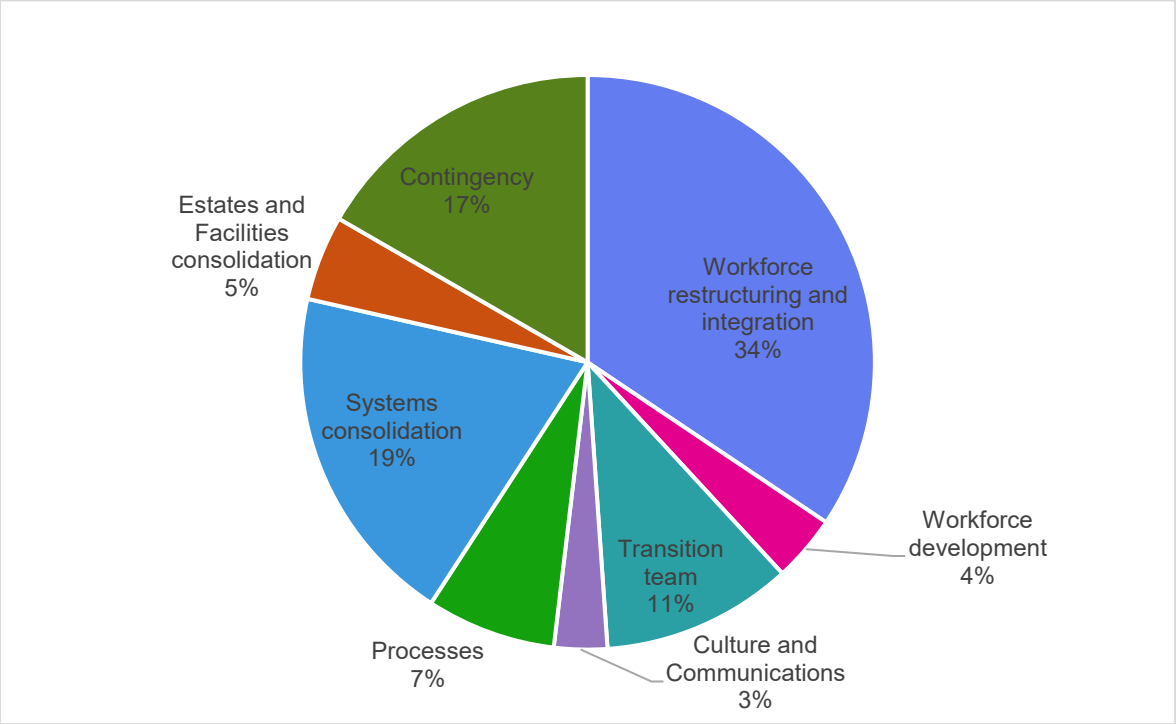
As part of implementation cost benchmarking, categories of implementation costs have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of costs, for any of the LGR options.

***Table 31:*** *Implementation cost categories*

| Implementation cost category | Description |
|---|---|
| **Workforce restructuring and integration** | Costs associated with delivering TUPE and salary harmonisation processes. Compensation paid to employees as a result of any redundancies and pension strain. ***Note: no decisions have been made regarding the size of the future workforce and the potential need for redundancies. A significant proportion of staff reductions could be delivered through staff naturally leaving the organisations.*** |
| **Workforce development** | Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities. |
| **Transition team** | Transition and implementation programme teams including programme management, legal, finance, contract management, finance and other specialist support. |
| **Culture and Communications** | Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Processes** | Harmonising processes and facilitating effective service transition, including specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition and new policies and procedures. |
| **Systems consolidation** | Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration and cyber security. |
| **Estates and Facilities consolidation** | Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases. |
| **Contingency** | Additional 20% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates. |

***Figure 18:*** *Implementation cost distribution*




## Phasing of implementation costs

One-off implementation costs have been assumed to start ramping-up from the shadow year and build up by Year 4. The majority of costs are incurred in year 2 and year 3, where the most staff exit costs are expected to be incurred. The phasing of the contingency reflected the overall phasing of costs.

***Table 32:*** *Implementation cost summary*

| Implementation cost category | Shadow Year (FY27/28) | Year 1 (FY28/29) | Year 2 (FY29/30) | Year 3 (FY30/31) | Year 4 (FY31/32) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Workforce restructuring and integration** | 5% | 15% | 20% | 60% | - |
| **Workforce development** | 10% | 50% | 40% | - | - |
| **Transition team** | 25% | 30% | 30% | 15% | - |
| **Culture and Communications** | 20% | 50% | 30% | - | - |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Processes** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 30% | 20% |
| **Systems consolidation** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 30% | 20% |
| **Estates and Facilities consolidation** | - | 5% | 25% | 30% | 40% |
| **Contingency** | 10% | 25% | 30% | 25% | 10% |

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# Reorganisation savings

**Reorganisation savings (gross) definition:** The estimated annual savings from efficiencies achieved through reorganisation, moving from two tiers to one tier of local government, by removing duplication, consolidating services and operating at greater scale.

**Method of calculation:**

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of savings per capita achievable through LGR.
- Multiplied the benchmarked savings per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total saving for per unitary model.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. This included a reduction in the total savings achievable and contingency being added to the model.
- Applied a dilution of savings for the number of unitary authorities being created, due to reduced ability to operate at scale.

**Reorganisation savings**

***Table 33:*** *Reorganisation savings summary*

| Option | Gross reorganisation savings (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **4B** | 67.5 | Gross savings marginally lower than 3A and higher than 5A due to economies of scale. |

**Categories of reorganisation saving**

As part of benchmarking LGR revenue savings, categories of savings have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of savings.

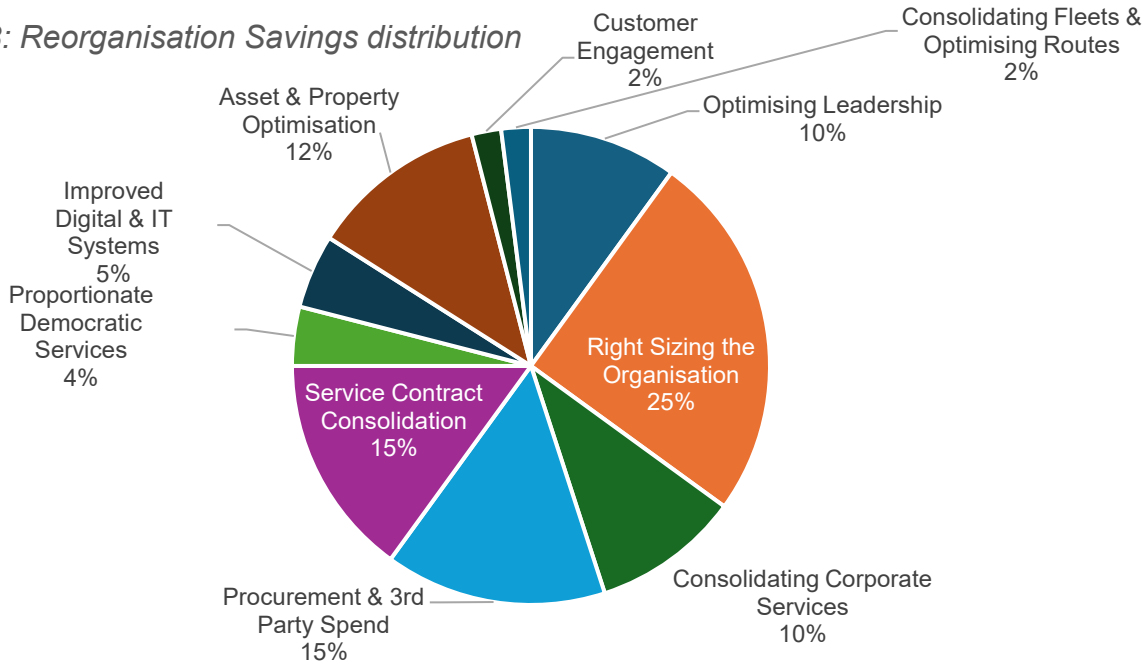
***Table 34:*** *Savings categories*

| Savings category | Description |
|---|---|
| **Optimising Leadership** | Reducing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication by merging similar responsibilities into fewer positions. |
| **Right Sizing the Organisation** | Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation. |
| **Consolidating Corporate Services** | Consolidating back-office functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT). |
| **Service Contract Consolidation** | Implementing new sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced, potentially leading to financial and operational efficiency. |
| **Procurement & 3rd Party Spend** | Centralising procurement, leading to an increase in relative purchasing power and renegotiating terms with suppliers. |
| **Democratic Services** | Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (eg committees, elections). |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Improved Digital & IT Systems** | Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes. |
| **Asset & Property Optimisation** | Reducing asset and property portfolio to align with council needs. |
| **Customer Engagement** | Enhancing customer contact facilities and developing a combined approach to managing customer contact centre, where appropriate including digital self-service. |
| **Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes** | Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs. |
| **Contingency** | 10% contingency applied to reflect risks to savings being achieved. |

The exact proportion of savings may vary by option, and will be considered in greater detail in the next phase of LGR.

*Figure 23: Reorganisation Savings distribution*




*Note: a 10% contingency is also applied but has not been reflected in the graph above*

### Phasing of reorganisation savings

Savings are realised to their entirety by Year 6 and are then ongoing. Most savings are achieved in year 3. A 10% negative contingency has been applied to reflect risk and has been phased in line with when other savings are achieved.

***Table 35:*** *Savings summary*

| Reorganisation savings category | Year 1 (FY28/29) | Year 2 (FY29/30) | Year 3 (FY30/31) | Year 4 (FY31/32) | Year 5 (FY32/33) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Optimising Leadership** | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| **Right Sizing the Organisation** | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| **Consolidating Corporate Services** | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| **Procurement & 3rd Party Spend** | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Service Contract Consolidation** | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |
| **Democratic Services** | 80% | 20% | - | - | - |
| **Improved Digital & IT Systems** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 25% | 25% |
| **Asset & Property Optimisation** | 10% | 15% | 25% | 25% | 25% |
| **Customer Engagement** | 20% | 40% | 40% | - | - |
| **Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes** | - | 20% | 45% | 35% | - |
| **Contingency** | 15% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 15% |

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# Disaggregation costs

**Disaggregation costs definition:** The estimated additional recurring expenditure that results from dividing upper tier (i.e. county level) services into multiple new unitary authorities.

### Method of calculation:

- Identified core service categories where disaggregation will drive cost increases as: adult social care, children's services, housing, place services, and corporate and support services.
- Allocated Kent County Council net revenue spend against cost categories defined.
- Applied percentages of additional spend to each cost category to uplift total costs in line with benchmarking from previous LGR cases, to estimate the future level of spend of each cost category.
- Applied an additional uplift to the level of disaggregation costs for each additional unitary being proposed.

### Disaggregation costs

Disaggregation costs are the most significant differentiator between financial model outputs for each option. For each additional council proposed there are assumed to be additional costs, including those associated with management, commissioning and corporate services.

Whilst the costs are significant, it is important to view these within the context of the overall cost of delivering these services. The Kent County Council net revenue expenditure is budgeted to be £1,699m, including £722m for adult social care and £280m for children's services[36].

***Table 36:*** *Disaggregation costs*

| Option | Disaggregation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **4B** | (32.9) - (48.6) | Two additional sets of 'upper tier' services means higher disaggregation costs than a three-unitary model. |

### Categories of disaggregation costs

As part of calculating disaggregation costs, costs increase by category of spend have been calculated, as summarised below.

A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.

***Table 37:*** *Disaggregation cost categories and uplift percentages*

| Disaggregation cost category | Description | Disaggregation cost uplift (one additional upper tier authority) % |
|---|---|---|

[36] 2025/26 RA return and Financial returns submitted by Kent County Council

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Adult social care | Duplication of some current adult social care management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend. | 0.7% - 1.8% |
| Children's services | Duplication of some current children's services management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend. | 2.5% - 3% |
| Place services | Duplication of some current place services including management and staffing costs, and additional costs of commissioned spend. | 3.5% |
| Corporate and support services | Duplication of corporate & support services management, staffing and systems. | 3.8% |

### Phasing of disaggregation costs

All disaggregation costs are assumed to be incurred annually from Day 1 of the new authorities.

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# Phasing and payback period

**Payback period definition:** the period taken to reach a net positive financial impact of LGR, once all one-off and recurring savings have been considered.

## Cumulative financial benefit and payback period

Set out below is the year-by-year breakdown of the financial impact of LGR, considering both one-off costs and recurring benefits / costs.

The payback period is driven by the outputs of the three calculators (reorganisation savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs), and the phasing assumptions explained earlier in this Appendix.

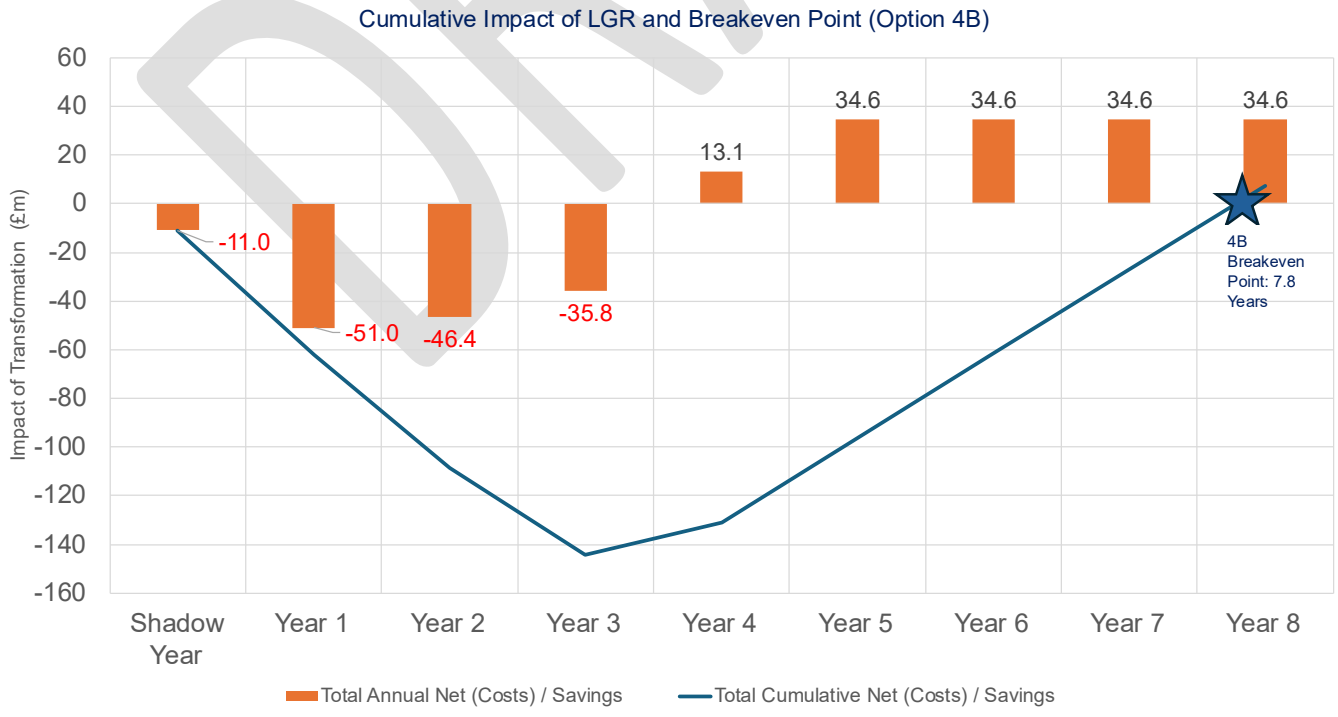
***Table 38:*** *Payback period summary*

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m) | Estimated payback period | Commentary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4B** | (130.9) | 18.9 – 34.6 | 7.8 – 14.3 years | Implementation complexity and costs increase |

### Payback period over an 8-year period

Set out in the figure below is the estimated cumulative financial impact of LGR for the 4B model.

***Figure 19:*** *Payback over an 8-year period*




*The chart shows payback period with dissagregation costs at the lowest point in the range.

# Appendix 3: Key data sources

Figure 8.1 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Economy and Demographics

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Population Size (mid-2024)[37] | 1,931,684 | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 | 528,337 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 | 615,931 | 374,269 | 523,642 | 417,842 | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024)[38] | 3,739.2 | 738.9 | 1,335.1 | 1,665.3 | 365.4 | 1,335.1 | 727.7 | 1,311.0 | 648.6 | 881.7 | 1,020.6 | 1,188.4 | 286.9 | 1,268.0 | 502.3 | 429.2 | 1,252.9 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 516.6 | 929.4 | 424.7 | 407.1 | 1445.8 | 424.7 | 583.4 | 314.1 | 949.7 | 424.5 | 513.1 | 351.6 | 1152.1 | 429.7 | 682.7 | 792.9 | 297.8 |
| 65+ Population (mid-2024)[37] | 384,033 | 113,951 | 113,406 | 156,676 | 83,544 | 113,406 | 99,972 | 87,111 | 102,437 | 74,636 | 123,715 | 83,245 | 52,329 | 108,477 | 77,559 | 59,227 | 86,440 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023)[39] | 54,965 | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 | 14,206 | 20,168 | 10,217 | 10,374 | 16,011 | 13,924 | 12,634 | 12,396 | 9,373 | 19,244 | 7,815 | 8,515 | 10,018 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023)[39] | 28,454 | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 | 26,888 | 35,566 | 24,065 | 25,196 | 25,995 | 37,204 | 24,127 | 29,666 | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |
| Unemployment Rate (%) Apr 24-March 25[40] | 3.7% | 4.0% | 3.0% | 4.0% | 3.8% | 3.0% | 4.3% | 4.0% | 3.5% | 2.5% | 4.2% | 3.5% | 3.9% | 3.1% | 4.7% | 4.0% | 3.5% |

Figure 8.2 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Financials

[37] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales
[38] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
[39] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities
[40] LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (FY28/29)[41] | 703,525 | 225,749 | 231,972 | 245,804 | 173,700 | 231,972 | 151,628 | 146,225 | 202,762 | 156,102 | 187,882 | 156,779 | 111,995 | 222,260 | 120,136 | 110,931 | 138,203 |
| Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes)[41] | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,812 | 1,907 |
| General Fund Borrowing (FY26/27) (£m)[41] | 1,730.4 | 812.0 | 289.1 | 629.2 | 740.3 | 289.1 | 387.0 | 314.0 | 761.3 | 175.9 | 460.0 | 333.1 | 336.8 | 278.4 | 257.2 | 468.7 | 389.3 |
| Financing Costs (Q2 FY26/27) (£m)[41] | 123.6 | 56.1 | 29.2 | 38.3 | 46.7 | 29.2 | 24.8 | 22.9 | 51.8 | 18.0 | 31.0 | 22.8 | 22.4 | 28.1 | 20.6 | 32.5 | 19.9 |
| Net Revenue (Q2 FY26/27) (£m)[41] | 2,313.4 | 1,104.6 | 548.2 | 660.5 | 947.7 | 548.2 | 415.2 | 402.3 | 1,024.7 | 376.0 | 521.9 | 390.8 | 432.7 | 526.6 | 338.0 | 655.7 | 360.4 |
| Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream %[41] | 5.3% | 5.1% | 5.3% | 5.8% | 4.9% | 5.3% | 6.0% | 5.7% | 5.1% | 4.8% | 5.9% | 5.8% | 5.2% | 5.3% | 6.1% | 5.0% | 5.5% |
| Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£m)[41] | 138.2 | 84.9 | 25.8 | 27.5 | 76.6 | 25.8 | 18.6 | 17.2 | 79.4 | 23.3 | 23.1 | 12.5 | 30.6 | 25.0 | 13.3 | 53.1 | 16.2 |
| Total Usable Reserves (FY28/29) (£m)[41] | 959.7 | 394.2 | 258.9 | 306.6 | 338.4 | 258.9 | 175.2 | 187.2 | 359.1 | 178.2 | 215.0 | 207.5 | 189.0 | 247.8 | 137.3 | 202.8 | 182.8 |
| General fund balance | 186.4 | 68.7 | 59.8 | 58.0 | 58.3 | 59.8 | 33.5 | 34.8 | 63.1 | 31.7 | 43.0 | 48.6 | 30.6 | 58.0 | 26.6 | 37.4 | 33.8 |

[41] Financial data return submitted by councils

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (FY28/29) (£m)[41] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[42] | 364.6 | 137.7 | 113.2 | 113.7 | 108.1 | 113.2 | 70.1 | 73.3 | 121.3 | 79.4 | 85.4 | 78.5 | 74.3 | 109.5 | 51.7 | 60.0 | 69.1 |
| Net revenue expenditure (£m)[41] | 2,273.8 | 833.2 | 651.0 | 789.6 | 645.8 | 651.0 | 494.3 | 482.7 | 748.0 | 432.1 | 609.8 | 483.8 | 397.2 | 625.4 | 405.2 | 416.4 | 429.5 |

Figure 8.3 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Housing and Homelessness

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Income deprivation rate (2019)[43] | 0.12 | 0.13 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.12 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.14 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.13 |
| Homelessness Rate per 1,000 Households (Jan-Mar 2025)[44] | 1.5 | 6.6 | 4.1 | 8.4 | 5.3 | 4.1 | 5.5 | 4.2 | 5.8 | 2.4 | 6.5 | 4.3 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 2.4 | 4.4 |
| Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement %[45] | 87.2% | 84.4% | 91.9% | 86.2% | 73.8% | 91.9% | 76.2% | 109.9% | 83.3% | 67.6% | 79.3% | 120.4% | 72.9% | 93.9% | 72.6% | 89.5% | 103.8% |
| Number of Households in TA per 1,000 (Jan-Mar 25)[46] | 3.9 | 22.6 | 9.2 | 18.0 | 18.0 | 9.2 | 11.9 | 10.8 | 29.0 | 23.0 | 18.0 | 17.1 | 19.3 | 9.2 | 10.9 | 9.6 | 11.7 |
| Area of land that is protected, including land designated as Green Belt (%)[47] | 47.9% | 41.0% | 67.0% | 35.7% | 46.3% | 67.0% | 27.0% | 40.5% | 40.8% | 82.7% | 32.8% | 38.9% | 68.0% | 65.5% | 29.1% | 32.3% | 38.3% |

Figure 8.4 – Children's Services and Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

| Metric | 1A | 3A | 4B | 4D | 5A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

[42] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[43] Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics
[44] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[45] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK
[46] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[47] Local authority green belt statistics for England: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK

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| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of children in children's social care as % total population (2023-2024)[48] | 0.40% | 0.50% | 0.18% | 0.47% | 0.49% | 0.18% | 0.50% | 0.48% | 0.44% | 0.18% | 0.52% | 0.28% | 0.37% | 0.18% | 0.52% | 0.61% | 0.44% |
| Children's services total spend (£m)[49] | 298.1 | 152.4 | 43.8 | 101.8 | 124.3 | 43.8 | 64.1 | 65.8 | 140.3 | 31.2 | 82.3 | 44.3 | 55.4 | 42.3 | 56.6 | 91.8 | 51.9 |
| Number of registered pupils with SEND as % total population (2023-2024)[50] | 5.0% | 5.0% | 4.3% | 5.7% | 4.3% | 4.3% | 6.0% | 6.2% | 4.9% | 4.2% | 6.0% | 4.8% | 4.4% | 4.3% | 6.1% | 5.3% | 5.5% |
| Proportion of children in relative low-income families (under 16s) (FYE24) (%)[51] | 17.8% | 18.7% | 13.2% | 21.1% | 18.4% | 13.2% | 22.3% | 19.4% | 18.7% | 12.6% | 22.2% | 16.4% | 17.3% | 13.3% | 21.7% | 19.5% | 20.5% |
| Proportion of children in absolute low-income families (under 16s) (FYE24) (%)[51] | 15.1% | 15.8% | 11.3% | 17.9% | 15.7% | 11.3% | 18.9% | 16.4% | 15.9% | 10.8% | 18.7% | 14.0% | 14.8% | 11.3% | 18.3% | 16.4% | 17.4% |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received (2024/2025)[49] | 24,750 | 7,619 | 6,353 | 10,778 | 5,886 | 6,353 | 7,275 | 5,236 | 6,833 | 3,830 | 8,918 | 5,169 | 3,680 | 6,102 | 5,374 | 3,772 | 5,821 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received Per 100,000 Population (2024/2025)[49] | 261 | 1,452 | 1,444 | 1,985 | 1,467 | 1,444 | 2,129 | 1,613 | 1,452 | 1,326 | 2,117 | 1,581 | 1,471 | 1,443 | 1,953 | 1,440 | 1,957 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced (2024/2025)[49] | 8,470 | 2,505 | 2,254 | 3,711 | 1,849 | 2,254 | 2,516 | 1,851 | 2,210 | 1,423 | 3,189 | 1,648 | 1,304 | 2,160 | 1,789 | 1,136 | 2,080 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced Per 100,000 Population (2024/25)[49] | 562 | 478 | 512 | 683 | 461 | 512 | 736 | 570 | 470 | 493 | 757 | 504 | 521 | 511 | 650 | 434 | 699 |
| Active Education, Health and Care plan (EHCPs) by Home District (As of Jan 2025)[49] | 20,687 | 5,951 | 6,005 | 8,731 | 2,949 | 6,005 | 5,715 | 6,018 | 4,938 | 3,847 | 7,054 | 4,849 | 3,199 | 5,755 | 4,871 | 2,279 | 4,583 |
| Active EHCPs by Home District rate per 10,000 (mid-2024)[49] | 360 | 277 | 361 | 451 | 176 | 361 | 464 | 511 | 257 | 347 | 470 | 399 | 303 | 360 | 474 | 219 | 448 |

[48] KCC analysis (districts) & ONS data (Medway) - https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2024
[49] Data from individual councils
[50] KCC analysis (districts) & LG inform data (Medway) - https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/search/26797?text=Number+of+total+EHCP
[51] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2024

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Active EHCPs by School District (as of Oct 2025)[49] | 22,247 | 8,169 | 5,641 | 8,437 | 6,155 | 5,641 | 6,021 | 4,430 | 7,404 | 3,396 | 6,967 | 4,480 | 3,293 | 5,446 | 5,222 | 4,586 | 3,700 |
| Active EHCPs by School District rate per 10,000 (as of Oct 2025)[49] | 387 | 381 | 339 | 436 | 368 | 339 | 488 | 376 | 385 | 306 | 465 | 369 | 312 | 341 | 508 | 441 | 362 |
| No. of Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) Y12&Y13 (2024)[49] | 1,689 | 658 | 420 | 611 | 476 | 420 | 447 | 346 | 590 | 245 | 521 | 333 | 279 | 405 | 357 | 350 | 298 |
| NEET Rate per 10,000[49] | 348 | 385 | 283 | 370 | 360 | 283 | 425 | 351 | 385 | 237 | 404 | 335 | 329 | 285 | 415 | 422 | 337 |
| Child in Need Plans (Mar 2025)[49] | 3,706 | 1,487 | 820 | 1,399 | 1,195 | 820 | 865 | 826 | 1,347 | 534 | 1,052 | 773 | 659 | 793 | 675 | 784 | 794 |
| Child in Need Plans Rate per 10,000[49] | 87 | 92 | 65 | 104 | 94 | 65 | 104 | 95 | 93 | 62 | 103 | 85 | 82 | 65 | 100 | 100 | 105 |
| Child Protection Plans (Mar 2025)[49] | 1,428 | 582 | 324 | 522 | 465 | 324 | 333 | 306 | 531 | 190 | 427 | 280 | 247 | 317 | 259 | 314 | 291 |
| Child Protection Plans Rate per 10,000[49] | 34 | 36 | 25 | 39 | 37 | 25 | 40 | 35 | 37 | 22 | 42 | 31 | 31 | 26 | 38 | 40 | 38 |
| Looked After Children (LAC) by placement address (Mar 2025)[49] | 1,967 | 838 | 228 | 901 | 658 | 228 | 631 | 450 | 768 | 155 | 755 | 289 | 294 | 219 | 533 | 509 | 411 |
| LAC by placement address - Rate per 10,000[49] | 46 | 65 | 22 | 82 | 65 | 22 | 94 | 64 | 66 | 22 | 91 | 39 | 46 | 22 | 97 | 81 | 67 |
| Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) looked after (Mar 2025)[49] | 328 | 114 | 30 | 184 | 92 | 30 | 119 | 87 | 100 | 25 | 141 | 61 | 62 | 30 | 103 | 47 | 86 |
| UASC looked after - Rate per 10,000[49] | 8 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 14 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 15 | 6 | 11 |
| Kent LAC Starts (2024/25)[49] | 745 | 353 | 93 | 299 | 271 | 93 | 205 | 176 | 320 | 77 | 245 | 103 | 131 | 90 | 156 | 205 | 163 |
| Kent LAC Starts Rate per 10,000[49] | 22 | 27 | 9 | 27 | 27 | 9 | 30 | 25 | 28 | 11 | 29 | 14 | 21 | 9 | 28 | 33 | 27 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Other Local Authority Looked After Children (OLA LAC) placed in Kent (Mar 2025)[49] | 1,611 | 799 | 219 | 593 | 603 | 219 | 424 | 365 | 717 | 162 | 501 | 231 | 315 | 206 | 358 | 449 | 282 |
| OLA LAC placed in Kent Rate per 10,000[49] | 38 | 62 | 21 | 54 | 60 | 21 | 63 | 52 | 62 | 23 | 60 | 32 | 49 | 21 | 65 | 72 | 46 |

Figure 8.5 – Adult Services

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Number of older adults in adult social care as % total population (2023-2024)[52] | 0.90% | 0.68% | 0.73% | 1.17% | 0.64% | 0.73% | 1.14% | 1.06% | 0.73% | 0.65% | 1.21% | 0.91% | 0.63% | 0.74% | 1.12% | 0.70% | 1.18% |
| Number of adults in adult social care as % total population (2023-2024)[52] | 2.60% | 2.41% | 2.27% | 2.98% | 2.36% | 2.27% | 3.06% | 2.73% | 2.14% | 2.28% | 3.03% | 1.49% | 2.68% | 2.29% | 2.93% | 2.12% | 2.99% |
| Adult social care total spend (£m)[53] | 634 | 202.8 | 162.3 | 268.9 | 159.7 | 162.3 | 162.9 | 149.2 | 185.6 | 109.1 | 214.8 | 124.5 | 83.6 | 155.3 | 117.4 | 115.7 | 162 |
| No. of people aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year (2024-2025)[53] | 405 | 92 | 81 | 232 | 47 | 81 | 157 | 120 | 77 | 41 | 197 | 91 | 47 | 81 | 109 | 34 | 134 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year - rate per 100,000 population (2024-2025)[53] | 27 | 18 | 18 | 43 | 12 | 18 | 46 | 37 | 16 | 14 | 47 | 28 | 19 | 19 | 40 | 13 | 45 |
| No. of people aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing | 4,212 | 1,369 | 922 | 1,921 | 1,053 | 922 | 1,184 | 1,053 | 1,251 | 565 | 1,540 | 856 | 529 | 896 | 870 | 790 | 1,127 |

[52] KCC analysis (districts) & LG inform data (Medway) - https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=23182&mod-area=E06000035&mod-group=AllUnitaryLaInCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup

[53] Data from individual councils

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| long term support during the year (2024-2025)[53] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year - rate per 100,000 population (2024-2025)[53] | 279 | 261 | 210 | 354 | 262 | 210 | 346 | 324 | 266 | 196 | 366 | 262 | 211 | 212 | 316 | 301 | 379 |
| Number of people accessing short term support during the year (18-64) (2024-2025)[53] | 4,363 | 1,111 | 993 | 2,259 | 674 | 993 | 1,490 | 1,206 | 947 | 663 | 1,827 | 926 | 605 | 958 | 1,114 | 436 | 1,250 |
| People accessing short term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-2025)[53] | 46 | 27 | 30 | 58 | 21 | 30 | 62 | 51 | 19 | 6 | 61 | 38 | 31 | 31 | 56 | 21 | 59 |
| Number of people accessing short term support during the year (65+) (2024/2025)[53] | 13,876 | 3,883 | 3,724 | 6,269 | 2,739 | 3,724 | 4,055 | 3,358 | 3,423 | 2,459 | 5,058 | 2,936 | 1,979 | 3,565 | 3,126 | 1,787 | 3,419 |
| People accessing short term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (65+) (2024/2025)[53] | 413 | 341 | 328 | 400 | 328 | 328 | 406 | 385 | 334 | 329 | 409 | 353 | 378 | 329 | 403 | 302 | 396 |
| Number of people accessing long term support during the year (18-64) (2024/2025)[53] | 8,750 | 2,947 | 1,955 | 3,848 | 2,298 | 1,955 | 2,375 | 2,122 | 2,683 | 1,196 | 3,060 | 1,810 | 1,210 | 1,901 | 1,863 | 1,635 | 2,141 |
| People accessing long term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-2025)[53] | 92 | 56 | 44 | 71 | 57 | 44 | 70 | 65 | 57 | 41 | 73 | 55 | 48 | 45 | 68 | 62 | 72 |
| Number of people accessing long term | 14,833 | 4,995 | 3,693 | 6,145 | 3,876 | 3,693 | 3,929 | 3,335 | 4,489 | 2,469 | 4,887 | 2,988 | 2,283 | 3,549 | 3,041 | 2,586 | 3,373 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| support during the year (65+) (2024/2025)[53] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| People accessing long term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (65+) (2024-2025)[53] | 442 | 438 | 326 | 392 | 464 | 326 | 393 | 383 | 438 | 331 | 395 | 359 | 436 | 327 | 392 | 437 | 390 |

Figure 8.6 – Democratic

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Size of electorate[54] | 1,348,857 | 477,468 | 407,167 | 464,222 | 367,424 | 407,167 | 298,941 | 275,325 | 428,883 | 269,662 | 362,685 | 287,626 | 228,839 | 390,803 | 238,205 | 238,491 | 252,519 |
| Councillor numbers (including District and County)[54] | 658 | 205 | 214 | 239 | 151 | 214 | 149 | 144 | 180 | 154 | 181 | 143 | 118 | 203 | 123 | 85 | 129 |
| Councillor to electorate ratio (current)[54] | 2,043 | 2,329 | 1,903 | 1,942 | 2,433 | 1,903 | 2,006 | 1,912 | 2,385 | 1,755 | 2,001 | 2,008 | 1,947 | 1,924 | 1,937 | 2,794 | 1,958 |
| Level of civic participation (2023-2024) (%)[55] | 40.6% | 35.6% | 43.9% | 42.1% | 20.4% | 25.1% | 24.0% | 26.4% | 21.2% | 27.5% | 25.2% | 22.6% | 24.0% | 25.0% | 22.1% | 19.0% | 28.1% |

[54] Publicly available data
[55] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202324-annual-publication

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# Kent LGR Business Case: Option 4D V2.0

## Four New Councils, One Bold Future for Kent

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# Foreword (placeholder)

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# Executive summary

## Introducing Option 4D

This option is supported by Medway Unitary Authority and the District and Borough Councils of [insert]. The Option 4D business case sets out a four-unitary model that balances local identity with strategic capacity.




| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 615,931 | 374,269 | 523,642 | 417,842 |
| Current council areas | • Medway (98%)<br>• Gravesham (87%)<br>• Swale (81%)<br>• Dartford (78%)<br>• Small sections of Tonbridge and Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%) | • Sevenoaks<br>• Tunbridge Wells<br>• Tonbridge and Malling (61%)<br>• Dartford (22%)<br>• Gravesham (13%)<br>• Medway (2%) | • Canterbury<br>• Dover<br>• Thanet<br>• Folkestone and Hythe (64%)<br>• Swale (Faversham area 17%) | • Ashford<br>• Maidstone (98%)<br>• Folkestone and Hythe (36%)<br>• Tonbridge and Malling (36%)<br>• Swale (3%) |
| | A strategically vital growth corridor, defined by its dynamic mix of urban regeneration, industrial innovation, and world-class connectivity along the Thames Estuary. Anchored by Medway, Gravesham, Dartford, and Swale, it will drive economic opportunity, while celebrating a rich | A prosperous, knowledge-driven region with a highly skilled workforce, strong commuter links to London, and a landscape of historic market towns and rural villages. The area will leverage its high quality of life, green infrastructure, and cultural assets to attract investment and serve as a centre for | A distinctive coastal and rural economy, acting as the UK's gateway to Europe through its major ports and international transport links. The area will focus on regeneration, tourism, green energy, and creative industries, underpinned by strong educational institutions, a vibrant cultural scene, and a | The historic heart of the county, combining the county town of Maidstone, the growth hub of Ashford, and rural and coastal communities. With excellent transport connectivity and a balanced economic base, it will drive infrastructure-led growth, innovation and sustainable development, while |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | heritage and diverse, youthful communities. | innovation, education, and environmental stewardship. | commitment to delivering quality services across its diverse communities. | retaining its strong identity and civic traditions. |

## **Purpose and approach** (see section 1)

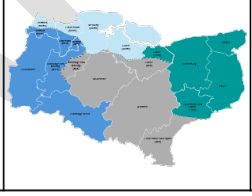
The reorganisation of local government presents a valuable opportunity to redesign a system that better serves the diverse needs of Kent and Medway's residents.

The 14 councils of Kent have collaborated to develop a model reflecting established population and economic centres as well as community and workplace patterns.

Through this joint effort, the councils have developed five business cases addressing the government's six reform criteria, proposing to replace the current two-tier system with more efficient and resilient unitary authorities.

These authorities aim to support devolution, enhance service delivery and strengthen community engagement.

Each proposal is underpinned by a shared evidence base, robust governance, transparent appraisal and extensive stakeholder and public consultation to form a united and evidence-led vision for the future of local government in Kent and Medway.

| | Option 1a | Option 3a | Option 4b | Option 4d | Option 5a |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Approach to drafting** | Kent County Council leading with some shared input around finance and services. | Common approach to drafting with input from councils. | | | |
| **Structure, formatting and branding** | Separate structure, formatting and branding. | Single approach to structure, formatting and branding across four business cases. A significant proportion of content across the four cases will be shared and clearly highlighted within the cases. | | | |

## **The Kent context** (see section 2)

Kent, located in the south east of England, is a geographically diverse and economically important area.

Known as the Garden of England and the UK's Gateway to Europe, it covers 3,739 sq. km with a population of about 1.93 million.

The county combines densely populated urban centres with extensive rural areas.

Its landscape includes the North Downs, The Weald, and a long coastline featuring the White Cliffs of Dover. Rivers like the Thames, Medway and Stour support trade and settlement.

Economically, Kent has evolved from its agricultural roots into a modern, mixed economy encompassing manufacturing, logistics, life sciences, tourism and digital industries.

Major assets include the Port of Dover, the Discovery Park science and technology hub and excellent transport links.

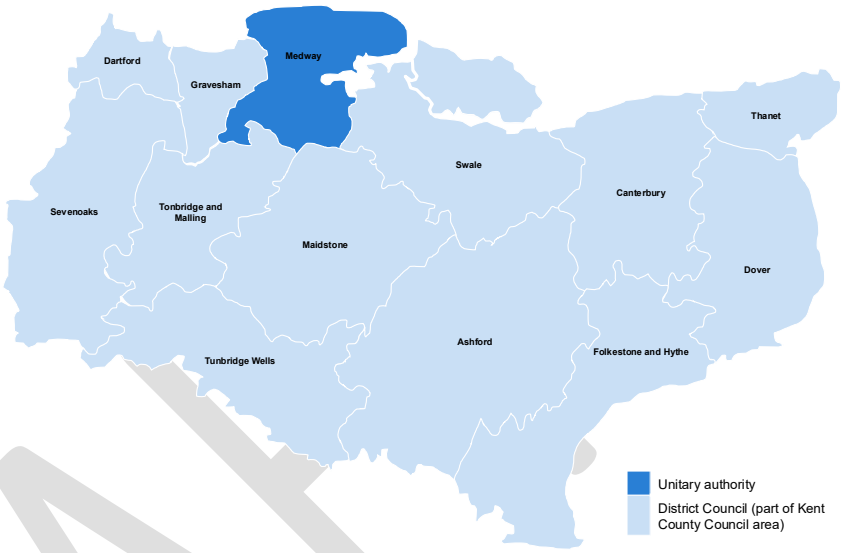
Kent's strategic location, skilled workforce and innovation hubs drive regional growth and support its case for devolution and local government reform.

Kent currently has a two-tier local government system.

At the upper tier is Kent County Council, while the lower tier consists of 12 district and borough councils.

Medway Council functions separately as a unitary authority.

In addition, there are more than 300 town and parish councils handling local-level services.




The current mixed model of service delivery creates complexity and all 14 councils recognise the potential benefits of moving towards a single-tier system with fewer organisations and a more unified governance structure.

**Challenges and opportunities** (see section 3)

Councils across the county face financial pressures and rising demand.

In Kent, key pressures include:

- uneven funding and tax bases
- escalating social care and border-related costs
- workforce shortages and morale issues
- fragmented governance across the two-tier system

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) offers a unique opportunity to create a more efficient, resilient and sustainable model.

By simplifying structures and pursuing devolution, Kent can streamline service delivery, strengthen financial stability, enhance collaboration across sectors, attract investment and build a greater sense of place to ensure more cohesive, accountable and community focused local government services.

**Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation** (see section 4)

Our vision for local government in Kent is:

**Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially-sustainable and accountable local public services delivered in partnership with communities**.

LGR is the catalyst for transformation and reform, creating resilient, digitally-enabled councils rooted in local identity and strong partnerships.

It is crucial that devolution and LGR are linked: structural reform unlocks the powers, funding and flexibility needed to make decisions locally and drive growth.

Kent's ambition is to deliver better outcomes for all residents through sustainable, accountable and community-focused public services.

All councils in Kent are united in their support for devolving powers to a single strategic authority.

This will ensure decisions about Kent are made in Kent, by those who know its communities best.

LGR and devolution are intrinsically linked. To fully realise our vision, we need the powers, funding and countywide collaboration that only a devolution deal and a new strategic Kent authority can provide.

We are committed to securing a devolution deal for Kent at the earliest possible opportunity.

**Option 4D: Four New Councils, One Bold Future for Kent**

Option 4D is a modern, locally attuned model for Kent and Medway which offers a forward-thinking approach to local government, combining financial resilience and efficiency with a deep respect for community identity and heritage. By restructuring Kent and Medway into four strong, locally focussed unitary authorities, it brings decision making closer to the people it affects, ensuring services are designed around real lives rather than distant structures . Boundaries are drawn around natural geographies, economic corridors, and historic communities, creating councils that are functional, recognisable, and locally accountable.

This simpler, stronger structure empowers communities, protects Kent's distinct character, and unlocks the full potential of devolution. Each council – serving between 375,000 and 625,000 residents – balances scale with local voice, aligns with government guidance, and provides capacity for sustainable growth.

**The case for Option 4D (see section 5)**

Option 4D's boundaries are carefully drawn to reflect Kent's natural growth and transport corridors, such as the M2/A2, Thames Gateway, M20/HS1 and geographic landmarks, ensuring that each council is both functional and recognisable to residents. It ensures coherent service delivery, preserves historic civic centres and cultural assets, maintains partnerships across health, policing, education, and voluntary sectors, and creates a robust platform for a future Kent & Medway Combined Authority. It is premised on the strong belief that efficiency arises from integration, simplification, and accountable local government.

Together, these features make Option 4D the most balanced, future-ready model for Kent and Medway - delivering scale without sacrificing identity. Key strengths include:

- Balanced population and fiscal scale: Each council is of optimum size for long-term sustainability, with robust tax bases and economic output. Council tax rates are closely aligned, minimising disruption and supporting fiscal resilience across all councils.
- Functional economic and transport corridors: Boundaries reflect Kent's natural economic and travel patterns, supporting coherent policy implementation and efficient service delivery.
- Preservation of local identity and heritage: The model respects historic communities, civic centres, and cultural assets, retaining a strong sense of place and pride.
- Continuity of partnerships and institutions: The geography aligns with existing economic, health, policing, education, transport, emergency, and voluntary-sector partnerships, enabling effective partnership working.
- Devolution readiness: Four balanced, functional councils form the ideal platform for a future Kent & Medway Combined Authority, meeting government expectations for scale, parity, and collaboration.

Summarised below are the key arguments for why option 4D is the best model for Kent and Medway.

| Key theme | Arguments |
|---|---|
| **Balanced population and fiscal scale** | Four councils, each serving **375,000–625,000 residents**, meet the optimum size for a viable council. This ensures:<br>• A strong resident voice<br>• Financial resilience<br>• Sustainable budgets<br>Each area is designed to be economically robust within its geography, supporting financial resilience and growth. GVA and council tax bases are balanced.<br>*Criteria 1, 2, 5, 6* |
| **Functional housing, economic and transport geographies** | Boundaries follow Kent's natural transport and travel routes, as well as key infrastructure sites, supporting economic development and service delivery. The coherent geographies will enable environmental financial management to take place at scale. Boundaries follow natural and defined features such as rivers, transport and economic corridors:<br>• **North Kent** – Thames Gateway growth and port economy<br>• **East Kent** – coastal regeneration and health equality<br>• **Mid Kent** – M20/HS1 corridor and balanced rural-urban growth<br>• **West Kent** – rural, commuter and environmental heartland<br>Option 4D will enable a more coherent approach to housing strategy across the region.<br>*Criteria 1, 2, 3* |
| **Financial Sustainability** | Local government reorganisation will require investment in the short term, however if implemented well, the net annual savings could result in a payback period of around 7.9 years, resetting local government for the |

| | |
|---|---|
| | next fifty years, delivering public service reform and leading to longer term financial sustainability.<br><br>*Criteria 2* |
| **Preservation of local identity and heritage and a sense of community** | Boundaries respect historic communities and cultural assets, retaining a strong sense of place and pride.<br>The model is explicitly designed to reflect and reinforce local community identities, fostering stronger relationships with voluntary, community, and faith sectors (VSFS), and enabling more effective public engagement and regeneration initiatives.<br><br>*Criteria 1, 4, 6* |
| **Efficient and representative democratic arrangements** | Option 4D achieves enhanced accountability and a strong local focus, with democracy and fairness at its core. Each council will have 65-91 councillors, with a ratio of roughly 1 councillor per 4,500-5,000 residents.<br><br>*Criteria 1, 2, 5, 6* |
| **Targeted, high-quality public services & Public Service Reform** | Creating councils with a closer proximity to their citizens will enable the targeted, community-led delivery of statutory services, with resources managed more effectively and services tailored to local needs. Option 4D aims to create a balanced, place-based approach to services delivery and embeds the principles of community-first, prevention, collaboration, and digital innovation, enabling services designed around residents, not organisations.<br><br>*Criteria 3* |
| **Alignment with health and care systems** | The model builds on Kent and Medway's strong collaborative networks, with alignment to the ICB health and care partnerships. Furthermore, it builds on regional collaborations to drive growth, skills and strategic infrastructure. This is demonstrated through the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) and through the Transport for the South East (TfSE) arrangement.<br><br>*Criteria 3, 6* |
| **Devolution readiness** | Four balanced councils provide a strong foundation for future devolution and regional collaboration. A balance in population and fiscal strength will provide parity of influence and shared governance within a devolution deal.<br><br>The four council model is sufficiently large to act strategically and efficiently yet remain connected to local communities.<br><br>*Criteria 5* |

**Implementation plan** (see section 6)

Kent's LGR implementation plan aims to follow a phased and collaborative approach across all councils, leveraging a well-established shared programme with strong governance and joint planning.

The process is structured into preparation, foundational, shadow authority, officer leadership and go-live phases, each with clear priorities to ensure a smooth transition while driving ambitious public service reform alongside devolution.

The programme builds on Kent's history of joint working and lessons from previous LGR efforts, supported by targeted governance, workstreams and stakeholder engagement to mitigate risks related to service disaggregation, aggregation, ICT and working together, aiming for a seamless, efficient transition that benefits residents and public services over the long-term.

## **Options appraisal** (see Appendix 1)

A rigorous and collaborative process undertaken by the 14 Kent local authorities to appraise potential council governance options. The aim was to provide a robust, consistent, and evidence-based foundation to support local decision-making on which options should advance to full business case development.

The appraisal followed national guidance and was aligned with the Government's six criteria for local government reorganisation, as set out in correspondence from the Secretary of State in February and June 2025. Importantly, the process did not rank or recommend any preferred option but provided a shared evidence base to inform council decisions.

**Key stages of the appraisal process:**

**Selection of options**

A longlist of ten potential unitary options was developed based on past work, stakeholder input, and strategic discussions.

After joint engagement, three options were removed from consideration, resulting in a shortlist of seven options for detailed appraisal.

**Data collection and modelling**

Comprehensive datasets were compiled from public sources and council submissions.

For options involving boundary changes, additional modelling (e.g. using LSOA-level data) ensured accuracy and comparability across new configurations.

**Development of evaluation criteria**

Fourteen criteria were developed in line with the Government's six LGR tests.

Each criterion included specific metrics and clear definitions of "what good looks like" to enable consistent evaluation across options.

**Scoring methodology**

A standard three-point scale (High, Medium, Low) was applied to each metric, primarily based on balance across proposed authorities.

No weighting was applied; all criteria were treated equally.

Where appropriate, nuanced scoring (e.g. Medium/High) or bespoke approaches were used for single-unitary scenarios.

**Assessment and presentation of results**

Each option was scored across all metrics, and results were summarised through visual dashboards and narrative commentary.

Special consideration was given to ensure comparability for unique configurations, such as a single-county unitary authority.

Council Leaders reviewed the appraisal findings, supported by resident and stakeholder views. While the appraisal did not determine a preferred option, it served as an objective and structured basis for informed political judgement and democratic decision-making on which options should proceed to business case development.

## **Financial modelling** (see Appendix 2)

Finance officers across all 14 Kent councils have reviewed and adjusted the financial modelling in order to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to government.

The key driver of difference between options are the number of councils being proposed.

Due to the assumptions applied within the modelling, implementation costs and recurring costs of disaggregation increase as the number of councils proposed increases.

The headline numbers for Option 4D are set out below:

| LGR option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Option 4D** | (135.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) – (48.6) | 18.9 – 34.6 | 7.9 – 14.5 years |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

**Data sources** (see Appendix 3)

A common data set was used for all analyses presented in this case.

Details of the data set including its source, structure and variables, are provided in Appendix 3.

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# Section 1: Purpose and approach

This section includes:

**Purpose of the business case**

**A collaborative approach across all Kent councils**

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# Purpose of the business case

## Responding to the Government's request

On 5 February, the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, wrote to all leaders within Kent inviting them to submit options for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The letter reiterated the government's ambition to see the current two-tier system replaced with larger unitary authorities that are better able to deliver services, support economic growth and operate effectively within a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).

The government's letter set out six criteria for successful LGR which informs the structure and content of business cases submitted by Kent councils.

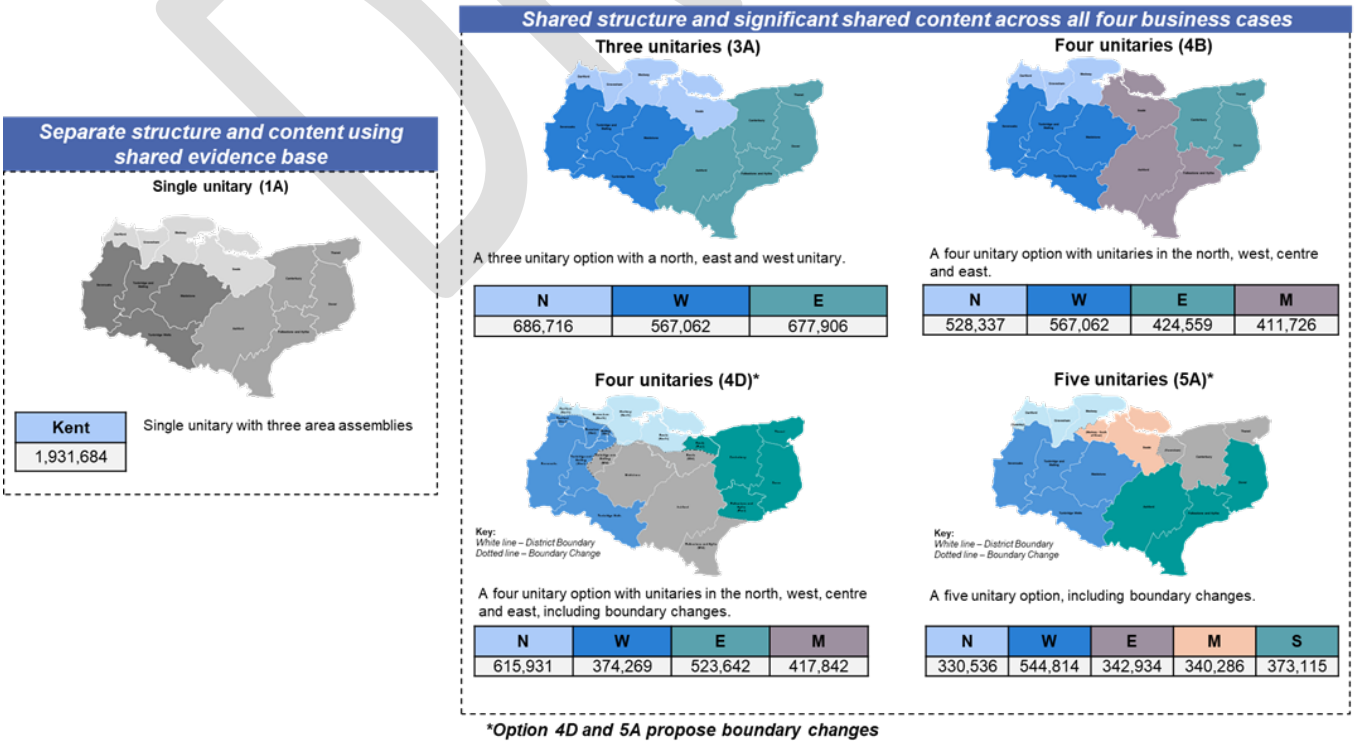
1. Establishing a single tier of local government
2. Efficiency, capacity and resilience to shocks
3. High-quality, sustainable public services
4. Collaboration to meet local needs
5. Enabling devolution
6. Strengthening community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

## Five business cases across Kent

This document is one of five business cases developed across Kent as part of a coordinated programme involving the 14 local councils.

Each business case draws on a shared evidence base, ensuring consistency and a common understanding of the context, challenges and opportunities for public sector reform.

***Figure 1:*** *The five business cases*



Option 1A has been developed by Kent County Council with a structure which varies from the other four cases.

The narrative for the 1A case has not been shared here but the supporting evidence base used is the same.

The other four business cases follow a standard structure aligned with government criteria.

Each document contains a significant amount of shared content as well as option-specific elements. That shared content is clearly marked throughout the documents.

Content that is all or primarily shared across the four cases includes:

- **Section 1:** Purpose and approach
- **Section 2:** The Kent context
- **Section 3:** Challenges and opportunities
- **Section 4:** Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation
- **Section 5:** Case for change
  - **Criteria 5:** Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities
  - **Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement
- **Section 6:** Implementation plan
- **Appendix 1:** Options appraisal
- **Appendix 2:** Financial modelling
- **Appendix 3:** Key data sources

The case for change (section 5) makes up a significant proportion of the proposal.

Within this section the majority of content is option specific, with some shared elements.

The case for change provides a clear and evidence-based narrative for why the proposed model is the most effective option for LGR in Kent.

**Business case for Option 4D**

This proposal presents a recommended four-council model (Option 4D) for the future of local government in Kent. In response to the Government's letter and subsequent feedback, it sets out a clear case for why this model is best aligned with the Government's six criteria for reform.

***Figure 2: Population across Option 4D***




| Unitary | Area | Population |
|---|---|---|
| **North** | Medway (98%), Gravesham (87%), Swale (81%), Dartford (78%), small parts of Tonbridge and Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%) | 615,931 |
| **West** | Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling (61%), Dartford (22%), Gravesham (13%), Medway (2%) | 374,269 |
| **East** | Canterbury, Dover, Thanet, Folkestone and Hythe (64%), Swale (Faversham area 17%) | 523,642 |
| **Mid** | Ashford, Maidstone (98%), Folkestone and Hythe (36%), Tonbridge and Malling (36%), Swale (3%) | 417,842 |

This option is supported by [insert council names]. Key factors for putting forward this specific geography are outlined in Table 1 and summarised below:

- The model creates four smaller councils with balanced populations, whilst recognising this will be constrained by the distribution of population centres.
- The four councils are more aligned with the natural way the areas already work.
- Physical and geographic features act as clear and identifiable boundaries between areas.
- The bespoke four council model reflects the importance of transport corridors in respect of both their economic function for travel to work and the natural border that they create.
- The model has the lowest range of elector ratios between future councils and a reasonable average elector ratio.

***Table 1:*** *Rationale for boundary changes*

| Priority Theme | 4D Rationale |
|---|---|
| Balanced population and fiscal scale | Four councils of 375,000–625,000 residents each meet optimum size for viable councils, ensuring equality of voice, financial resilience, and sustainable budgets (as per MHCLG guidance).<br><br>Each area is designed to be economically robust within its geography, supporting financial resilience and growth. GVA and council tax bases are balanced. |
| Functional housing, economic and transport geographies | Boundaries follow Kent's natural transport and travel routes (M2/A2 Thames Gateway, M20/HS1, A21 and coastal corridors), as well as key infrastructure sites such as the Dungeness power station in Mid Kent, supporting economic development and service delivery. The coherent geographies will enable environmental financial management to take place at scale.<br><br>Boundaries follow natural and defined features such as rivers, transport and economic corridors:<br><br>• **North Kent** – Thames Gateway growth and port economy<br>• **East Kent** – coastal regeneration and health equality<br>• **Mid Kent** – M20/HS1 corridor and balanced rural-urban growth<br>• **West Kent** – rural, commuter and environmental heartland<br><br>Option 4D will enable a more coherent approach to housing strategy across the region. |
| Financial Sustainability | Local government reorganisation will require investment in the short term, however if implemented well, the net annual savings could result in a payback period of around 7.9 years, resetting local government for the next fifty years, delivering public service reform and leading to longer term financial sustainability. |
| Preservation of local identity and heritage | Boundaries respect historic communities and cultural assets (e.g. Canterbury, Rochester, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone) retaining a strong sense of place and pride. |

| | |
|---|---|
| and a sense of community | The model is explicitly designed to reflect and reinforce local community identities, fostering stronger relationships with voluntary, community, and faith sectors (VSFS), and enabling more effective public engagement and regeneration initiatives. |
| Efficient and representative democratic arrangements | Option 4D achieves enhanced accountability and a strong local focus, with democracy and fairness at its core. Each council will have 65-91 councillors, with a ratio of roughly 1 councillor per 4,500-5,000 residents. |
| Targeted, high-quality public services & Public Service Reform | Creating councils with a closer proximity to their citizens will enable the targeted, community-led delivery of statutory services, with resources managed more effectively and services tailored to local needs. Option 4D aims to create a balanced, place-based approach to services delivery and embeds the principles of community-first, prevention, collaboration, and digital innovation, enabling services designed around residents, not organisations. Transition costs are minimised by using existing district boundaries wherever possible, reducing complexity and safeguarding service continuity during transition. |
| Alignment with health and care systems | Each area matches one of the four existing Kent & Medway Health and Care Partnerships, supporting integrated delivery across NHS, public health, and social care. Geography aligns with existing economic, education, transport, emergency, and voluntary-sector partnerships, minimising disruption and ensuring delivery continuity. This is demonstrated through the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) and through the Transport for the South East (TfSE) arrangement. |
| Devolution readiness | Four balanced councils provide a strong foundation for future devolution and regional collaboration. A balance in population and fiscal strength will provide parity of influence and shared governance within a devolution deal.<br><br>The four-council model is sufficiently large to act strategically and efficiently yet remain connected to local communities. |

*Note: For the purposes of proposals to Government, future council names are referred to geographically (e.g. as 'East Kent'). These are holding names which are subject to change following confirmation of the option to be implemented.*

# A collaborative approach across all Kent councils

**All Kent councils have prioritised working together, sharing information and full transparency throughout the LGR process. While five business cases are being submitted, we have minimised duplication and continually emphasised what we agree on over our differing views on specific council geographies.**

## Building on strong relationships

The Kent LGR governance framework is firmly rooted in established joint working among the 14 councils across Kent.

This longstanding tradition of partnership underpins every stage of the LGR process, ensuring inclusive and coordinated decision-making.

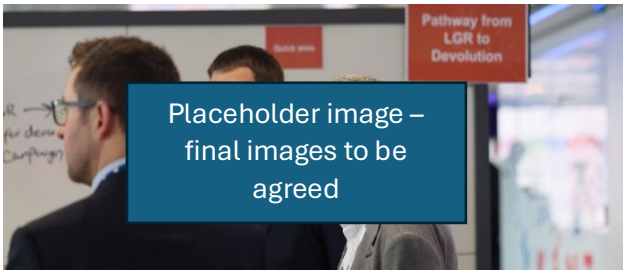
Our governance structure includes several key components:

- **Programme Board:** comprising the 14 Chief Executives, this board meets weekly to oversee progress, maintain strategic alignment and address emerging challenges across all councils.
- **Steering Group:** a smaller group of Chief Executives, Directors and Finance officers convene weekly to provide focused guidance on the development of the business cases, ensuring thorough evaluation and robust planning for reorganisation.
- **Leaders' meetings:** Held monthly, these sessions bring together Council Leaders to discuss and reach consensus on decisions, represent the voices of their communities and ensure residents' interests remain central throughout the process.
- **Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG):** All 14 Kent Finance Officers (S151s) across Kent have held regular meetings and worked together on all LGR related matters, including meeting on a weekly basis to review and challenge financial modelling.

We take pride in the collaborative spirit that has been sustained throughout the options appraisal and the development of multiple business cases.

This collective approach not only strengthens governance but also builds confidence among all stakeholders that decisions are made with shared commitment and mutual respect.

Importantly, this strong foundation will continue to serve us well beyond the decision point and the making of the Structural Changes Order, preparation for the shadow authorities and into the establishment of the successor authorities.






## Options appraisal process

The options appraisal was designed to provide a structured, evidence-based assessment of potential unitary options for Kent, helping to identify the options that should proceed to full business case development.

The approach included the following key steps:

1. **Option selection**: an initial longlist of 10 options was developed based on previous analysis submitted to government and local discussions regarding potential options. Through political engagement across Council Leaders, this was refined to a shortlist of seven options for full appraisal.

2. **Data collection and modelling**: data was gathered from publicly-available sources and direct council submissions which was used to model the potential structure and characteristics of each option, including assumptions where boundary changes were involved.

3. **Evaluation framework**: 14 evaluation criteria were developed, aligned to the government's six LGR criteria. For each criterion, specific metrics and definitions of "what good looks like" were agreed to enable consistent assessment.

4. **Scoring methodology**: each metric was assessed using a three-point scale (high, medium, low), based primarily on balance or distribution across proposed new councils. Additional guidance was applied where balance was not a relevant factor.

5. **Assessment process**: all options were scored against all metrics with results presented in dashboards and supported by narrative commentary. The output was comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad. No weighting was applied and the appraisal did not rank or recommend a preferred option.

Following the completion of the appraisal, Council Leaders met to consider the results alongside the views of their own councils and communities.

At this meeting, they agreed on a set of preferred options to proceed to the next stage, recognising both the evidence from the appraisal and the broader political and public context.

This consistent and transparent methodology ensured a shared evidence base to inform this proposal.

**Appendix 1** of this document outlines the step-by-step process, evaluation criteria and scoring methodology in detail for the options appraisal exercise.

## Stakeholder and public engagement

To ensure local voices have been central to the process, a coordinated, countywide programme of public and stakeholder engagement was carried out between 8 September and 6 October 2025.

This proactive engagement aligned with MHCLG guidance and reflected Kent's political commitment to meaningful community involvement.

A standardised resident survey, agreed across all 14 councils, captured views on local identity, service expectations and future priorities.

Alongside this, a joint stakeholder programme involved talking to key organisations across sectors, with each council engaging its local networks including residents, town and parish councils, voluntary groups and businesses.

Insights from both the survey and stakeholder discussions have directly informed the development of the business case and continue to guide local decision-making. Further details can be found in **Section 5, Criteria 4**.

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# Section 2: The Kent context

This section includes:

**Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy**

**Existing local government structures**

**Partnership landscape**

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# Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy context

**Kent is a diverse and strategically-located county in the south east of England and serves as the UK's gateway to continental Europe. 'Kent' is used to describe the geographical area covered by Kent County Council, Medway Unitary Council and all 12 district councils. The county features a mix of urban and rural settlements such as the Weald and Romney Marsh spread across a large geographic expanse. Kent has a population of approximately 1.9 million with a varied demographic profile. The economy includes key sectors such as construction, life sciences, agriculture, manufacturing, logistics and tourism, supported by major transport links including ports, motorways and railways with high-speed routes into London. The county's geography encompasses coastline, countryside, including national landscapes, and historic towns and villages, contributing to its unique regional identity.**

***Figure 3:*** *Map of Kent*




## Kent geography

Kent is a geographically diverse and economically significant county in the south east corner of England, often referred to as the UK's gateway to continental Europe.

It borders Greater London to the north west, Surrey and East Sussex to the west and south west, and is flanked by the Thames Estuary, the North Sea, the Strait of Dover and the English Channel.

This strategic location, coupled with major transport infrastructure, positions Kent as a vital hub for national and international trade and connectivity.

Covering approximately 3,739 sq. km, the county is home to around 1.93 million people, distributed across a varied landscape of urban and rural settlements.

High-density urban centres such as Medway, Dartford and Thanet (with more than 1,300 people per sq. km) contrast with more sparsely populated, rural districts like Sevenoaks and Ashford, reflecting a population profile in which 73.9% live in urban areas and 26.1% in rural communities.

The county's physical geography is marked by several distinct features.

The North Downs, a prominent chalk ridge, runs west to east through the county.

To the south, The Weald offers rolling, wooded terrain shaped by clay and sandstone.

Kent's extensive and evolving coastline, from the iconic white cliffs of Dover and Thanet to the low-lying landscapes of Romney Marsh and the shingle headland of Dungeness, continues to be shaped by erosion, sedimentation and land reclamation.

Situated in north Kent, Medway forms one of the county's most significant urban areas defined by its estuarine setting and close proximity to London.

Principal rivers such as the Medway and the Stour help define the county's natural geography.

The Medway, in particular, has long served as a vital route for trade and transport, linking inland settlements with the Thames and the North Sea.

Economically, Kent balances its rural heritage with increasing urbanisation and diversification.

Historically celebrated as the Garden of England for its orchards, hop gardens and fertile farmland, agriculture remains a cultural hallmark even as its economic influence has declined.

The region's rich heritage is a significant asset, reflected in its array of listed buildings, historic landmarks and world-renowned sites such as Canterbury Cathedral, Dover Castle, The Historic Dockyard Chatham and the Archbishop's Palace in Maidstone.

These heritage features not only reinforce the county's cultural identity but also enhance its attractiveness as a destination for visitors and investment.

In recent decades, the county's economy has shifted towards manufacturing, logistics, retail, tourism and life sciences, anchored by major hubs such as Discovery Park, Kent Science Park, and the North Kent Enterprise Zone.

This expanding economic base is supported by strong transport links including the ports of Dover and Sheerness, the M2 and M20 motorways and international high-speed rail connections.

This combination of rich natural assets, historic identity and modern infrastructure underpins Kent's evolving role and capacity to deliver sustainable growth within the regional and national economy.

*Table 22: Population and geography data for Kent*

| Council area | Population (mid-2024)[1] | Geography (sq.km)[2] | Population density[3] |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Medway*** | 292,655 | 193.7 | 1,510.7 |
| ***Ashford*** | 140,936 | 580.6 | 242.7 |
| ***Canterbury*** | 162,100 | 308.7 | 525.0 |
| ***Dartford*** | 125,011 | 72.7 | 1,718.8 |
| ***Dover*** | 119,768 | 315.4 | 379.8 |
| ***Folkestone and Hythe*** | 112,411 | 356.9 | 315.0 |
| ***Gravesham*** | 110,671 | 99.0 | 1,118.0 |
| ***Maidstone*** | 187,767 | 393.3 | 477.4 |
| ***Sevenoaks*** | 122,748 | 370.3 | 331.5 |
| ***Swale*** | 158,379 | 373.4 | 424.1 |
| ***Thanet*** | 142,691 | 103.6 | 1,377.2 |
| ***Tonbridge and Malling*** | 136,853 | 240.1 | 569.9 |
| ***Tunbridge Wells*** | 119,694 | 331.3 | 361.3 |
| ***Total*** | **1,931,684** | 3,739.2 | 516.6 |

## Kent population

Kent has a population of approximately 1.9 million, making it one of the largest counties in England by population.

The demographic profile of the county is varied and reflects significant differences in age structure, ethnicity and population growth trends across its 13 council areas.

Kent's population includes a balanced mix of age groups but with distinct patterns across the county.[4]

- Children and young people (0–19 years) make up around 22% of the population. The largest numbers are found in Medway (75,236), Swale (38,217), and Maidstone (44,943).

- Working-age adults (20–64 years) represent the majority of the population at around 59%. Medway (169,350), Maidstone (107,212), and Canterbury (88,840) have the largest working-age populations, reflecting their roles as employment and commuter hubs.

- Older people (65+ years) comprise approximately 19% of Kent's population. Coastal and rural districts such as Canterbury (36,194), Dover (29,736), and Folkestone & Hythe (28,903) have proportionately larger older populations, highlighting the appeal of these areas for retirement and the resulting demand for health and social care services.

Compared to the national average, Kent has a slightly higher proportion of older residents, particularly in its coastal communities, while areas closer to London, such as Dartford and

[1] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[2] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about

[3] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[4] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

Gravesham, are experiencing population growth among younger and working-age adults due to ongoing housing development and improved transport links.

Kent continues to see strong population growth, driven by both internal migration from other parts of the UK and international migration.

The availability of more affordable housing, good transport connectivity and lifestyle factors attract young families, professionals and retirees alike.

Inland districts such as Ashford and Maidstone have experienced significant growth through planned housing developments, while urban centres such as Gravesham and Dartford are seeing demographic change shaped by proximity to London and regeneration schemes.

Kent remains a predominantly White British county with 83.2% of residents identifying as such.

However, the population is becoming increasingly diverse.

Minority ethnic groups now represent 16.8% of the total population with Asian communities being the largest minority group making up 4.4% of the population.

Ethnic diversity is most pronounced in urban areas and towns close to London.[5]

Gravesham has nearly one in three residents identifying as non-White British and is home to one of Europe's largest Sikh Gurdwaras.

In Dartford, 52% of school-age children are now classified as non-White British, highlighting generational change.

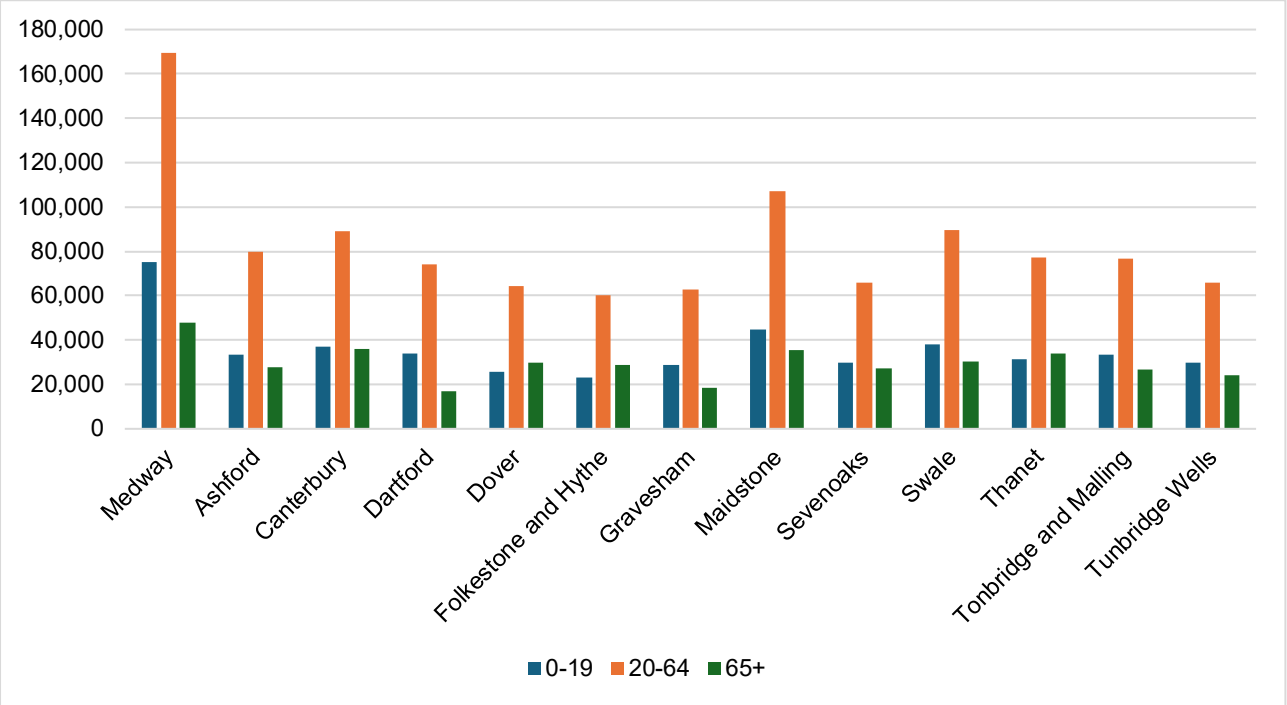
Elsewhere, local factors shape distinct community profiles: Maidstone and Folkestone and Hythe have significant Nepalese communities linked to the nearby barracks and the Gurkha regiment, alongside a growing Eastern European population.

Together, these patterns reveal a complex and locally-varied picture of diversity across Kent.

***Figure 4:*** *Population across Kent (mid-2024)*[6]

[5] https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-kent/summary-of-kent-facts-and-figures/people

[6] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales




## Kent economy

Kent is a dynamic and strategically-important region, often referred to as the UK's Gateway to Europe.

Located in the south east and bordering London, it plays a vital role in national trade, economic growth and innovation.

It is home to thriving sectors including agriculture, logistics, advanced manufacturing, food and drink, life sciences, tourism and the creative and digital industries.

Annual trade through the Port of Dover exceeds £122 billion[7], underscoring Kent's importance as a national and international logistics hub.

Kent is also a centre for innovation. Discovery Park in Sandwich, one of the UK's leading science parks, contributes an estimated £324 million[8] annually to the UK economy through its cluster of life sciences and technology businesses.

Other major business clusters include Kent Science Park in Sittingbourne, Kings Hill in West Malling and Innovation Park Medway, each providing high-value jobs and fostering collaboration with universities and research institutions.

The county's growing network of business parks, enterprise zones and research institutions further strengthens its innovation ecosystem.

[7] https://www.locateinkent.com/why-kent/kent-economy/

[8] https://www.insidermedia.com/news/south-east/kents-discovery-park-provides-324m-of-value-to-uk-economy

Kent's economic vibrancy is matched by strong civic leadership. The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) drives the region's long-term growth strategy, focused on infrastructure, innovation, skills, productivity and the ambition for inclusive prosperity.[9]

Housing and construction are fundamental to Kent's economic vitality, not only by generating significant employment within the sector but also by directly contributing to the government's national target of 1.5 million new homes this parliament[10].

This ambition is intrinsically linked to broader economic growth, as new housing and infrastructure projects stimulate productivity and prosperity, aligning with initiatives like the Kent and Medway Growth Deal.

While the industry faces challenges such as skill shortages and past insolvencies, Kent's specific demographic and economic projections underscore the critical need to strategically plan for and support continued growth in housing and infrastructure to meet future demands.

With excellent transport links to London and mainland Europe, a high quality of life and a strong track record in regeneration and investment, Kent continues to attract residents, businesses and investors.

As the UK's primary trade gateway to the continent, Kent is well-positioned to drive forward regional and national economic priorities.

These strengths also make Kent a compelling candidate for a future devolution deal, enabling greater local control to unlock further growth, tailor investment and deliver on long-term ambitions for the region.

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[9] https://www.kmep.org.uk/

[10] https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-07-30/hcws48

# Current local government structures

**All 14 councils across Kent and Medway recognise the opportunities that arise from moving towards a standardised single tier of local government with significantly fewer separate organisations, each with their own elected members, leadership and governance.**

Kent currently operates under a two-tier local government system comprising Kent County Council as the upper-tier authority, 12 district and borough councils and one separate unitary authority, Medway Council, which operates independently of the county structure.

Additionally, more than 300 town and parish councils take responsibility for delivery at a more local level.

***Figure 5:*** *Current boundary lines in Kent*

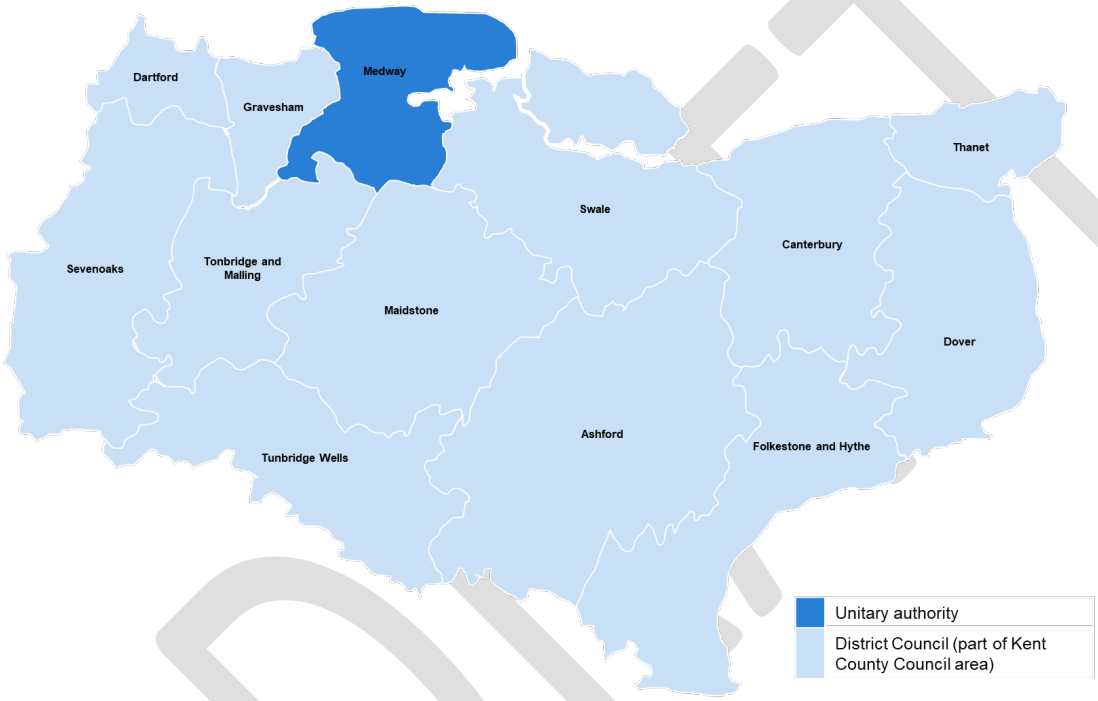



***Table 3:*** *Characteristics of areas in current boundary lines*

| Council | Population (mid-2024)[11] | Geography (sq.km)[12] | Councillors | Net Revenue Budget (£m)[13] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Medway*** | 292,655 | 193.72 | 59 | 346,727 |
| ***Ashford*** | 140,936 | 580.64 | 47 | 26,710 |
| ***Canterbury*** | 162,100 | 308.74 | 39 | 23,580 |
| ***Dartford*** | 125,011 | 72.73 | 42 | 29,009 |
| ***Dover*** | 119,768 | 315.35 | 32 | 28,274 |
| ***Folkestone and Hythe*** | 112,411 | 356.91 | 30 | 22,886 |
| ***Gravesham*** | 110,671 | 98.99 | 39 | 17,943 |
| ***Maidstone*** | 187,767 | 393.34 | 49 | 28,323 |

[11] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[12] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about

[13] FY2025/26 data received from KFOG

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Sevenoaks*** | 122,748 | 370.34 | 54 | 21,978 |
| ***Swale*** | 158,379 | 373.44 | 47 | 30,335 |
| ***Thanet*** | 142,691 | 103.61 | 56 | 21,979 |
| ***Tonbridge and Malling*** | 136,853 | 240.12 | 44 | 22,521 |
| ***Tunbridge Wells*** | 119,694 | 331.29 | 39 | 17,909 |
| ***Kent County Council*** | 1,931,684 | 3,739.22 | 81 | 1,698,857 |
| ***Total*** | **1,931,684** | **3,739.22** | **658** | **2,337,031** |

The current mixed model of service delivery presents ongoing challenges for strategic coordination, financial sustainability and service reform.

In two-tier areas, district councils are responsible for services such as planning, housing, waste collection and leisure while Kent County Council oversees county-wide functions including adult social care, children's services, public health, education, highways, waste disposal and libraries.

By contrast, Medway Council, as a unitary authority, delivers the full range of local government services directly.

The complexity of this system can result in lack of alignment, duplication, inefficiencies and inconsistencies in service provision, making it harder to respond effectively to cross-cutting challenges and to plan strategically at scale.

All 14 councils across Kent recognise the opportunities that arise from moving towards a standardised single tier of local government with significantly fewer separate organisations, each with their own elected members, leadership and governance.

Further details on challenges and opportunities can be found in **Section 3.**

The councils also recognise the need for a strategic authority to enable effective planning for sustainable economic growth.

It is essential preparations for this are dovetailed with the preparations and implementation of unitary local government across the Kent geography to avoid the need and additional cost and complexity of two phases of organisational change.

# Partnership landscape

**Local Government Reorganisation presents an opportunity to further strengthen joint working across the public sector and support partners in addressing long-standing challenges more effectively.**

Across Kent, there is an established culture of joint working between Councils and a wide range of public sector organisations including Kent Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the NHS and colleges and universities.

These partnerships provide a strong foundation for taking forward a more integrated and system-wide approach to service delivery.

There is a complete, coterminous boundary for all public sector bodies within the Kent and Medway area, the importance of which is set out in the government's white paper on devolution.

***Table 4:** Key partners across Kent*

| Key partners | Description |
|---|---|
| **NHS Kent and Medway** | Provides healthcare services across Kent and Medway. It oversees hospitals, GP practices, community and mental health support as well as and public health programs for the region's 1.9 million residents, ensuring accessible and high-quality care throughout both urban and rural communities. Sub county collaboration is achieved through distinct Health and Care Partnerships the geography of which is broadly reflective of local health economies. |
| **Kent Fire and Rescue Services** | Operates across Kent and Medway, delivering emergency response, fire prevention, and safety education. The service protects people, property and the environment by responding to fires, road traffic collisions, rescues and other critical incidents while promoting safety through community outreach. |
| **Kent Police and PCC** | Responsible for law enforcement and public safety across Kent and Medway. Kent Police handle crime prevention, investigation and emergency response while the PCC sets policing priorities, manages budgets and ensures the force remains accountable to the public. Service delivery comprises both pan Kent (and Essex) specialist activities with operational policing based on local divisions. Borough commands collaborate with partners in community safety partnerships to address crime and disorder challenge aligned to local needs and priorities. |

Through early engagement with partners during the interim submission phase, a number of consistent themes emerged.

Stakeholders expressed a clear desire to be involved meaningfully in shaping the future of local government and recognised the potential of reorganisation to enable improvements in service

quality and outcomes for the public including through greater alignment of public services, driving efficiency and enhancing preventative approaches.

Partners emphasised the importance of maintaining stability in frontline services, particularly in health and social care, through any period of transition.

Our Kent partners have also consistently supported devolution for Kent and recognise the importance of securing a devolution deal alongside and at the same time as delivering LGR.

Feedback gathered through a range of existing forums, including strategic partnerships, parish networks, business improvement districts (BIDs) and sector-specific meetings, highlighted the need to ensure any future model supports delivery at the right geographic level.

The importance of sustaining local identity, improving responsiveness to community needs and maximising public sector investment were also key messages.

Engagement with staff and elected members across Kent councils has highlighted several practical considerations including concerns about uncertainty, capacity and skills shortages, challenges that LGR could help to address through more streamlined structures and clearer career pathways.

Nonetheless, careful change management will be essential to support staff through any transition.

The feedback from the interim engagement phase has directly informed the development of LGR proposals.

All models seek to build on existing partnerships, promote more joined-up decision-making and integrated service delivery, reduce silo working and ensure future structures are fit for purpose, both in meeting local needs and supporting strategic collaboration across the public sector.

They also provide a strong foundation for potential devolution arrangements, including the opportunity to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority where appropriate, aligning local governance with long-term ambitions for greater powers and funding.

# **Section 3:** Challenges and opportunities

This section includes:

**Key challenges to be addressed by Kent Councils**

**Opportunities through local government reorganisation**

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# Key challenges to be addressed by councils across Kent

**The government's White Paper highlights the challenges facing local government – challenges that are strongly felt in Kent. Maintaining the status quo is not a viable option and has been discounted due to the urgency and scale of the pressures on the current system and the need for structural reform to enable long-term sustainability.**

Local government in Kent is under growing pressure from financial constraints and rising demand for services. There is also a need for structural reform: the current two-tier system, comprising Kent County Council, Medway Council and 12 district councils has inbuilt duplication and inefficiency impacting service delivery, governance, workforce stability and community representation.

These issues are compounded by the county's unique geographic and demographic context.

Kent's financial landscape mirrors national challenges but is intensified by its strategic position and diverse councils.

Wide variation in council debt levels, taxbase strength and income capacity creates uneven financial baselines and sustainability risks.

Higher border-related costs present operational challenges to the county further straining the system.

Protecting existing government investment and identifying a more resilient model is essential.

Below is a summary of the key challenges for Kent, relevant to any future model.

***Table 53:*** *Challenges for Kent*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Funding & financial** | • Persistent financial constraints and the challenge of fair funding, especially when all councils are seeking additional resources.<br>• Rising social care costs, which threaten to consume budgets at the expense of other vital services.<br>• Managing the distribution of debt and services during disaggregation.<br>• Equalising tax bases and service levels across diverse areas ("levelling up, not down").<br>• Ensuring financial resilience in the face of uncertainty and change.<br>• Significant variation in financial viability across councils.<br>• Risk of councils being unable to meet rising demand in adult social care, children's services, school transport, homelessness and contract inflation.<br>• High and unpredictable costs linked to Kent's role in managing border and asylum-related responsibilities.<br>• Unequal Council Tax rates, taxbase strength and income-generating capacity across councils. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Risk of losing central government investment in coastal regeneration, public health, infrastructure and border-related services during transition. |
| **Workforce** | • Recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly for social care roles and in areas close to London.<br>• An ageing workforce with the risk of significant staff losses.<br>• Uncertainty and anxiety among staff during restructuring and transition.<br>• Cultural differences between councils, making it hard to realise opportunities and harmonise working practices.<br>• Staff morale and concerns about job security. |
| **Structure & governance** | • Fragmentation and disaggregation of services leading to inefficiencies and duplication.<br>• Siloed approaches between upper and lower tiers of government.<br>• Strategic misalignment and lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, both internally and for residents.<br>• Loss of identity for town and parish councils and the erosion of local democracy due to fewer councillors.<br>• Branding and image challenges for local government.<br>• Systemic complexity, overlapping responsibilities and inconsistent service delivery across Kent's 14 councils. |
| **Community & identity** | • Maintaining local character and identity amid large-scale restructuring and in future geographies for successor authorities.<br>• Ensuring continuity and quality of services for diverse and geographically dispersed communities.<br>• Meeting the needs of communities with different priorities and expectations.<br>• Addressing the risk that smaller voluntary and community sector organisations may not survive the transition.<br>• Variation in identity, demographics and economic conditions making consistent representation and service access more difficult. |
| **Service delivery** | • Protecting and enhancing key services (adults, children, SEND, homelessness) while managing demand and costs.<br>• Ensuring continuity of services during and after organisational change.<br>• Establishing the culture of the successor councils.<br>• Overcoming skill shortages and ensuring the right talent is in place.<br>• Managing the complexity of integrating services and delivering holistic support.<br>• Challenges arising from Kent's role as a gateway to Europe, including managing transport, borders and asylum-related services across multiple tiers. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Lack of coordinated response for critical functions such as small boat arrivals and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.<br>• Inconsistent stages of Local Plan development leading to disjointed housing delivery and varied approaches to shared planning challenges.<br>• Fragmentation of Housing Revenue Accounts across councils raising concerns about tenant equity and service consistency. |
| **Change & devolution** | • Managing the pace and uncertainty of change including delays in achieving devolution agreements.<br>• Achieving timely and effective restructuring without losing momentum.<br>• Navigating different cultures and leadership styles across councils and creating new cultural norms.<br>• Ensuring that future devolution delivers real benefits and is not just a structural change. |

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# Opportunities through local government reorganisation

**Regardless of the model selected by government, all future Kent councils will work together to maximise the opportunities arising from the simplification of local government structures and the devolution of powers and funding to a new strategic authority.**

Kent faces a pivotal moment to reshape its future through structural reorganisation.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) presents a strategic opportunity to streamline governance, tackle long-standing inefficiencies and build a more resilient, effective and financially sustainable system.

By moving toward a more unified model, Kent can unlock greater accountability, improve service delivery and position itself to fully capitalise on future opportunities for sustainable growth, investment and devolution.

Below is a summary of the key opportunities for Kent. These are discussed in relation to the proposed model.

***Table 6:** Opportunities for Kent*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Public service reform** | • Implementing whole-system approaches to public service reform (e.g. better integration with partners in health) and a more joined-up approach to council services (e.g. integrating adult social care with housing, children's services with cultural services, public health with wellbeing and housing, placemaking and custodianship services including highways maintenance and street cleansing and spatial planning with transport strategy.<br>• Streamlining and digitising processes across currently separated services, including AI, and creating data and evidence hubs to improve efficiency and support collaboration with partners.<br>• Aggregating services to build resilience and enable more holistic strategies across education, housing, skills and job creation.<br>• Creating a single front door for residents to access services, improving accessibility and user experience.<br>• Delivering structural reform that improves financial sustainability through economies of scale, streamlined service delivery and harmonised tax and income strategies. |
| **Growth and devolution** | • Securing devolution deals to unlock new powers and funding, enabling councils to drive growth and shape their own destinies.<br>• Developing a compelling sustainable growth narrative and pipeline to attract investment.<br>• Planning for growth in key areas such as ports, distribution depots, the Thames Estuary and leveraging proximity to London.<br>• Leveraging structural reorganisation as a platform for a more ambitious devolution deal. A strategically-aligned unitary structure would support the establishment of a Strategic Authority, enhancing control over inward investment, tourism and infrastructure planning, providing successor arrangements to Visit Kent and Locate in Kent which are now in administration. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Workforce and culture** | • Attracting and retaining top talent, especially in competitive areas near London and Essex.<br>• Succession planning and supporting staff development to address an ageing workforce.<br>• Empowering staff and fostering a positive, proactive culture.<br>• Supporting staff through change, enabling career development and building resilience in the face of organisational restructuring.<br>• Taking the opportunity for a strategic cultural reset to focus more on prevention and the transformation opportunities that come with partner alignment and systems working. |
| **Community and place** | • Focusing on resident-centred approaches including early intervention and impactful prevention.<br>• Enhancing place-shaping by planning places, infrastructure and services more holistically.<br>• Redesigning the sense of place and local identity, reconnecting people with their councils.<br>• Improving accessibility to councils and services for all communities, including those in larger or more diverse geographies.<br>• Designing governance arrangements that better reflect Kent's diverse communities, strengthening local accountability and enhancing trust between residents and local government. |
| **Collaboration and integration** | • Building wider partnerships across health, housing, policing, education and the voluntary/community and faith sector (VCFS).<br>• Sharing knowledge and best practice across Kent and beyond.<br>• Integrating services to deliver more holistic support and strategy.<br>• Creating a one-team culture around place, breaking down silos and enabling more inclusive, joined-up working.<br>• Enabling more cohesive sustainable economic development through unified Local Planning Authorities, ensuring continuity for major projects such as Otterpool Park near Folkestone and Heathlands near Maidstone, while improving cross-boundary management of shared constraints like nutrient neutrality and infrastructure viability. |
| **Trust and engagement** | • Re-establishing trust and confidence in local government.<br>• Improving engagement with politics and public perception of councils.<br>• Adopting fair funding models and ensuring best practice is shared and implemented.<br>• Enhancing local accountability and trust by designing governance arrangements that are more representative of Kent's diverse communities. |

# **Section 4:** Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation

This section includes:

**A shared vision for future local government in Kent**

**Design principles for reorganisation**

**How the vision and principles were co-developed**

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# A shared vision for future local government in Kent

**Our shared vision for Kent is:**

**Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially-sustainable and accountable public services delivered in partnership with communities.**

All Leaders recognise that LGR in itself will not deliver the change required. It must be the catalyst for fundamental reform in how we deliver our services, how we work with our partners and how we deliver for all communities across Kent.

Our ambition for Kent's future is bold and resident-focused. We will deliver local government that is financially resilient, community-rooted and digitally enabled, delivering services that are simpler, smarter and more joined up.

Over the next five years, our shared aspiration for Kent is to:

1 **Strengthen identity** and maintain a deep sense of place and belonging.

2 **Build trusted, transparent relationships** with residents through open communication and active engagement.

3 Provide **seamless, resident-first experience** with easy, secure access to services.

4 Deliver **place-based, people-centred services**, focused on early intervention, prevention and improving life chances.

5 **Use data and technology smartly** to personalise support, anticipate needs and improve outcomes.

6 **Work in strong partnership** with statutory partners including health, education and the police as well as community organisations to meet residents' needs.

7 **Build community resilience** to social, economic and environmental challenges through inclusive, forward-thinking services.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment to residents, staff and place, balancing ambition with stability, innovation with identity and change with care.

## LGR and devolution

All of the councils in Kent are supportive of devolving powers to a strategic authority to ensure decisions about the county are made in the county.

We do not underestimate the vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport and the benefits it would bring in terms of public service reform.

This is an opportunity to improve life chances for all.

Aligning the timeline of the strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation, by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services or to reaggregate services to go into a strategic authority shortly after.

This approach would require additional cost and create further disruption to staff as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government.

All councils in Kent support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority in April 2028 to operate alongside the future councils.

This will enable a seamless transition, enable synergies in programme management and leadership capacity and provide clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government in Kent will work.

Clarity for partners is critical given our ambitions regarding public service reform.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving service outcomes.

Our ambitions for devolution and the link to LGR is articulated further against Criteria 5.

**Why Option 4D is best placed to deliver on our vision**

Option 4D proposes a four-unitary authority model across Kent. This model is best placed to deliver on the vision of the future of Kent due to its alignment with key principles of localism, community identity, and effective governance. By establishing four distinct unitary authorities, the model balances strategic capability and alignment with a strong sense of community identity and belonging. The 4D model provides the strongest and most coherent foundation to deliver Kent's shared vision for the future. It does this, by creating a system of local government that is financially resilient, community-rooted, and digitally enabled, offering services that are simpler, smarter, and more joined-up. The model maintains a strong sense of community by preserving local identities and encouraging active civic participation, which is vital for social cohesion and stimulating economic growth.

The 4D model creates four geographically balanced councils for North, East, Mid and West Kent, each serving approximately 375,000–615,000 residents, thus enabling effective scale for strategic services while maintaining strong local identity. The four proposed areas reflect natural travel-to-work patterns, housing market areas, and established service corridors, ensuring coherent local leadership and planning, for example:

- North Kent (including Medway and Thames Gateway): Anchored in manufacturing, ports, and logistics, with strong higher education and innovation capacity.
- Mid Kent: Centred around Maidstone and Tonbridge, combining a growing rural economy with major transport interchanges and housing growth.
- East Kent: Defined by coastal regeneration, tourism, and life-sciences growth linked to Discovery Park and the Port of Dover.
- West Kent: Encompassing prosperous commuter towns and rural landscapes, supporting high-value professional and service industries

Governance under this model remains accessible and closely connected to local communities. Furthermore, democratic accountability is significantly enhanced through the creation of four equal-sized councils. The 4D model creates councils that promote fair representation, shared leadership, and balanced regional influence, helping to build trust and strengthen engagement with local communities. Additionally, the model enables more targeted prevention and early intervention strategies. Smaller, locally aligned councils are better equipped to co-design and deliver neighbourhood-based services, allowing for greater flexibility and agility.

Finally, the model supports stronger people centred, place-based delivery and more effective partnership working. It enables a deeper understanding of community needs, which is difficult to achieve at a larger scale, and ensures that services are tailored and responsive to the unique characteristics of each area.

As Kent Leaders have emphasised, Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution are intrinsically linked; Option 4D allows both to progress in parallel, maximising local powers and investment. Option 4D establishes the optimal foundation for devolution with a future Kent and Medway Strategic Authority, enabling local delivery through the four councils while retaining strategic capacity at a county-wide level. The model supports devolution in practice by aligning local boundaries with functional economic areas and the NHS Integrated Care System. This will enable joined-up investment in skills, transport, and housing, providing a clear, Kent-wide structure capable of negotiating and delivering a devolution deal. Option 4D positions the region to realise the greatest impact from partnerships and service integration. Kent and Medway already benefit from mature multi-agency partnerships such as the:

- **Kent and Medway Health and Care Partnerships (HCPs)**
  Working with Medway and District Council's to deliver more joined up working not just with social care and public health colleagues, but also education, planning, housing, environmental health and leisure services.
- **Kent and Medway Safeguarding Boards (Adults and Children)**
  Multi-agency partnerships bringing together councils, NHS, and police to coordinate safeguarding strategy and oversight.
- **Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP)**
  The primary business and local government partnership, it drives economic strategy, skills, infrastructure investment, and productivity across Kent and Medway.
- **Higher Education Partnership**
  Universities of Kent, Greenwich, Canterbury Christ Church, and the University for the Creative Arts collaborate with councils and industry to drive innovation, research, and skills development.
- **Kent Voluntary Sector Leaders Group (VSLG)** and **Medway Voluntary Action (MVA)**
  Umbrella bodies supporting voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations to collaborate with councils on social impact, health inequalities, and community resilience.
- **Kent Resilience Forum**
  A partnership of organisations and agencies who work together to improve the resilience of Kent and Medway, and to ensure a coordinated response to emergencies that could have a significant impact on communities.

Option 4D builds on these foundations rather than fragmenting them. It creates councils that are the right size for efficiency and resilience. It will enable continued collaboration across key sectors including health and social care integration through aligned footprints; strategic infrastructure

planning through shared transport and environmental partnerships; and economic and skills growth via established pan-Kent mechanisms. Devolution will be key to delivering strategic growth and support regional tourism across Kent. This ensures service reform and improvement can be achieved through continuity, not disruption, as well as providing much needed stability during transition.

In terms of democratic accountability, Option 4D provides the best balance between strategic capability and local accountability. With an average councillor-to-resident ratio of 1:4100–1:4700, it maintains strong democratic representation and safeguards local responsiveness. The 4D model will allow delegated decision-making through Neighbourhood Area Committees; a greater empowerment of Town and Parish Councils; and meaningful engagement with communities to strengthen trust and transparency as well as improve the design and delivery of services. This approach protects local identity while enhancing inclusivity and responsiveness in decision-making. Comparative evidence from the Hampshire and Solent four-unitary model shows that a 4UA configuration provides the most stable and credible platform for reform, balancing financial savings with lower implementation risk.

Like Hampshire, the 4D model will deliver:

- manageable transition costs and a realistic implementation timetable;
- a balanced population and financial profiles across the four areas;
- clear accountability for statutory and place-based services;
- and the ability to adapt to changing demand through data-driven service design.

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# Design principles for future Kent Councils

**To achieve our shared vision for Kent, a set of guiding principles have been agreed by its Leaders. While decisions on the detailed design and delivery models of future councils will be a matter for the respective leadership teams, these principles provide a blueprint for future council design.**

***Table 7:*** *Future council design principles*

| Design principles | Description |
|---|---|
| **Service and resident-centric** | • Design services around resident needs with a resident-first mindset.<br>• Maintain strong community identity and accountability.<br>• Ensure equity in service access and outcomes across Kent. |
| **Integrated and joined up** | • Enable seamless, joined-up service delivery across public services.<br>• Build on existing partnerships and promote shared responsibility, and budgets and co-locate where appropriate.<br>• Embed co-production and community-based service design. |
| **Data-driven and digitally enabled** | • Invest in modern digital infrastructure which allows our service delivery and enabling activity to be joined up, and automated where appropriate.<br>• Leverage data and AI to support early intervention, improve decision-making, and target resources effectively.<br>• Ensure transparency and open data to build trust and inform priorities. |
| **Financially resilient and efficient** | • Adopt place-based financial planning and maximise asset efficiency.<br>• Create efficient systems with flexible resource allocation based on demand.<br>• Secure long-term funding and manage transition costs carefully. |
| **Empowered and future-focused workforce** | • Retain and support skilled staff through predictable roles and strong leadership.<br>• Break down silos with collaborative problem-solving structures.<br>• Modernise terms and conditions for a more agile and attractive public service offer. |
| **Clear, consistent and bold leadership** | • Be brave, honest and aspirational in setting direction and expectations.<br>• Deliver clear, shared vision and values, internally and externally.<br>• Ensure messages on devolution, change and local ambition are well understood. |

These principles will be fundamental to navigating the transition, enabling Kent to go beyond safe and legal to deliver world-class public services and a better everyday experience for residents.

## How the vision and principles were developed

The vision for Kent was developed through extensive work with local government leaders, reflecting a shared commitment to addressing key challenges and seizing future opportunities.

On 17 September 2025, Leaders and Chief Executives from across the 14 councils of Kent and Medway came together to co-create a shared vision for the future of local government.

This moment marked a significant step in the LGR journey, recognising LGR and devolution as unique shared opportunities to fundamentally reshape the way local public services are delivered.

The full-day event was carefully designed to help everyone work together, learn from each other and foster strategic thinking among senior leaders.




The aim was to better understand the current landscape of challenges and opportunities, to hear from others who have been through LGR and devolution journeys, and to begin developing a long-term, unifying vision for the future of Kent.

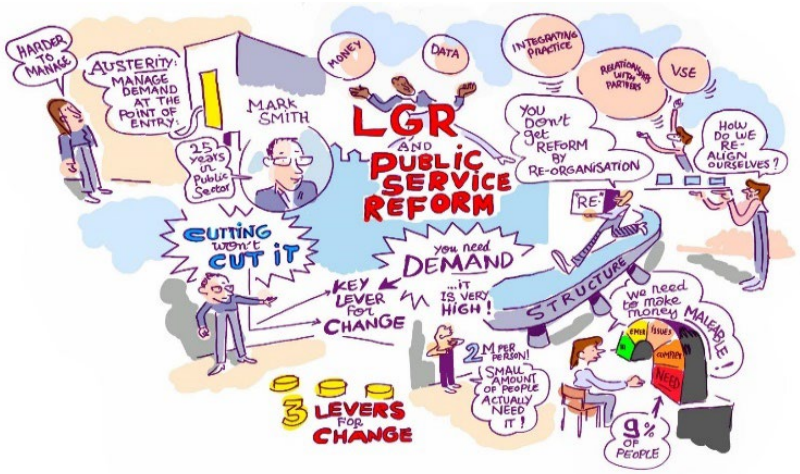
Participants were supported throughout by a facilitation team which guided discussions, captured key insights and ensured all voices were heard.

The vision for Kent emerged through genuine collaboration and a shared desire to improve outcomes for residents regardless of the final council configuration that is chosen for LGR.

The conversations acknowledge ongoing challenges such as financial constraints, workforce uncertainty and service fragmentation, with a shared commitment to tackling these as we progress through LGR.

***Figure 6:*** *Sketches from workshop on 17th September*



## How the vision and design principles will be used

The outputs from the event serve as the foundation for continued work on Kent's LGR journey.

They will inform more detailed design work, engagement with stakeholders and the development of a compelling case for change.

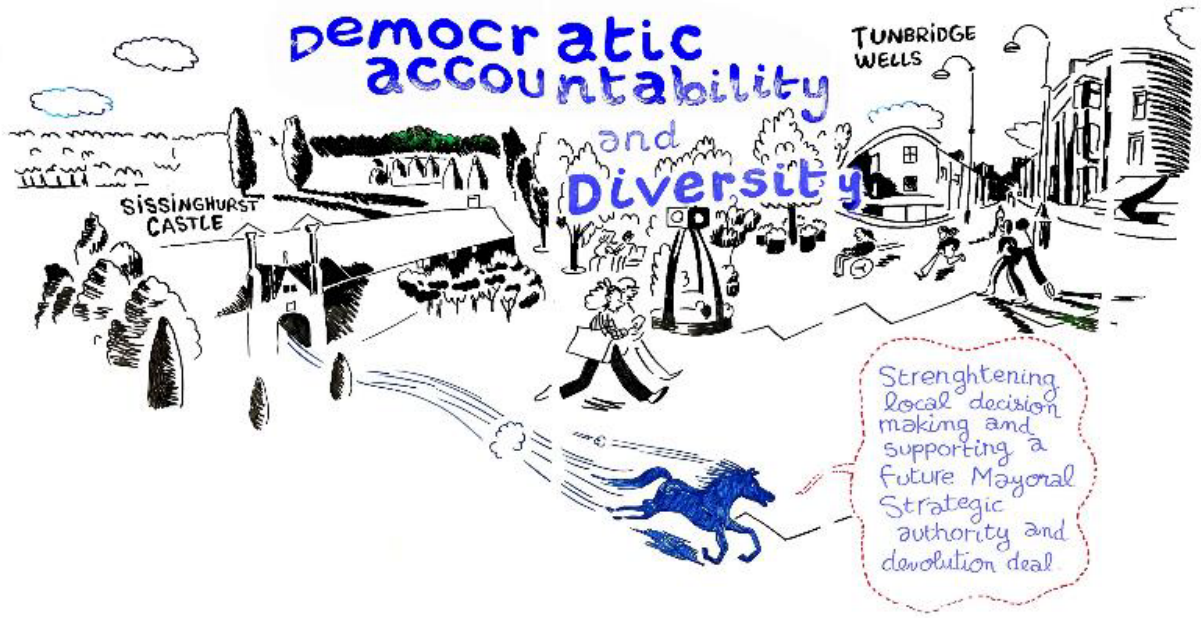
Most importantly, they represent a shared commitment by Kent's leaders to act collectively in the interests of residents, staff, and communities.

This forward-looking framework sets a foundation for a more resilient, responsive and cohesive Kent by 2028.

This vision provides a clear strategic direction for the future of local government in Kent.

It will guide future design discussions, inform service transformation and tie in with the region's approach to devolution.

It will be used to align decision-making, support engagement with residents and partners and ensure implementation remains focused on outcomes for people and communities.



# Section 5: The case for Option 4D

This section includes:


## The base case

## The summary case for Option 4D

- Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local Government
- Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience
- Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services
- Criteria 4: Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)
- Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities
- Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment


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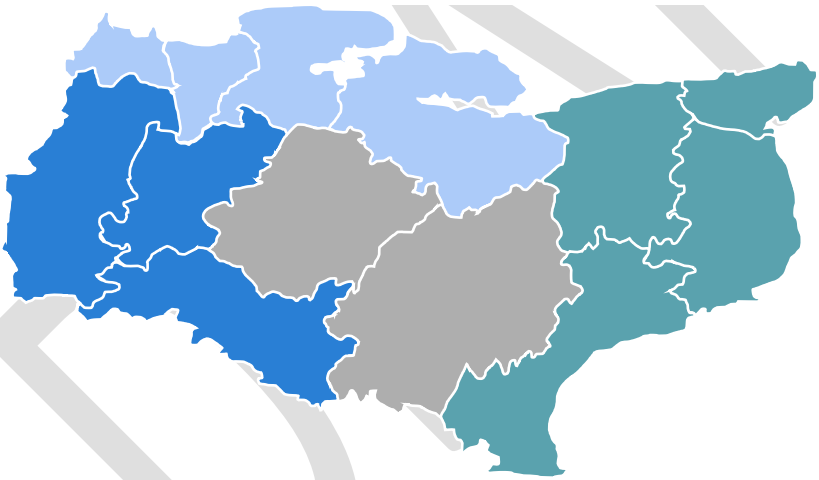
# The base case

This is a Type B modification entailing modifications to existing Kent council boundaries under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This section details the base case from which the modification has been developed.

Our modification, based on unmodified council boundaries, is for four new councils using the existing boundaries of:

- **North council:** Medway, Swale, Gravesham and Dartford (Population 686,716)
- **West council:** Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling (Population 379,295)
- **East council:** Canterbury, Dover, Thanet and Folkestone & Hythe (Population 536,970)
- **Mid council:** Ashford and Maidstone (Population 328,703)

***Figure 7: 4D unmodified council boundaries and key metrics by unitary***



| Metric | North | West | East | Mid |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population Size (mid-2024) | 686,716 | 379,295 | 536,970 | 328,703 |
| Geographic Area (sq km) (2024) | 739 | 941 | 1,085 | 974 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 25,977 | 38,540 | 24,245 | 28,868 |

We submit the above in line with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Option 4D, a modification of 4B is the only configuration that meets all six Government criteria while maintaining balance between scale, identity and capability. It meets the government criteria as follows:

**Criteria 1:** Establishing a single tier of local Government

- The base case has four community-based councils with balanced and aligned economic strength and tax bases, supporting sustainable growth.
- Each unitary has a rich and unique industry, thereby supporting economic growth and localism.

**Criteria 2:** Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience

- The base case facilitates well-balanced population sizes, supporting effective service delivery and building resilience.
- Financial metrics (fund balances, debt ratios) are healthy, with significant savings from integration.
- Achieves balanced scale with stable revenue bases and realistic implementation costs.

**Criteria 3:** Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services

- The base case supports localised service delivery by strengthening alignment with existing partner organisations and shared infrastructure.
- Population sizes support localised reform whilst also maintaining economies of scale.

**Criteria 4:** Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)

- The base case is aligned with our shared vision and creates smaller councils to better reflect the diverse nature of Kent communities.
- Strengthens local democracy through proportionate representation and area-based governance.

**Criteria 5:** Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

- The base case creates balanced population ratios across councils, which enables strong, equal partnership in regional governance and therefore robust decision-making capacity for a future strategic authority.
- Establishes a coherent structure for a future Kent and Medway strategic authority.

**Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

- The base case creates smaller councils better linked to communities which will enable community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment building on a culture of partnerships and coproduction.

**Request for modification**

However, and in line with government guidance and wider provision within the Act, we request that the Secretary of State immediately modifies this submission and replaces it with the modified proposal contained in this document which is the submission we are seeking to implement.

The proposal uses the existing District boundaries of Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, Canterbury, Thanet, Dove and Ashford

- **North council:** The parts of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale north of the M2 and small parts of Tonbridge & Malling and Maidstone (Population 615,931)

- **West council:** Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, parts of Tonbridge and Malling, and the remaining parts of Dartford, Gravesham and Medway (Population 374,269)
- **East council:** Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, parts of Folkestone and Hythe and parts of Swale (Faversham) (Population 523,642)
- **Mid council:** Maidstone, Ashford, parts of Tonbridge and Malling (Kings Hill, East and West Malling, Ditton, New Hythe and Aylesford), parts of Swale and parts of Folkestone and Hythe (Population 417,842)

The proposal requests the following boundary modifications:

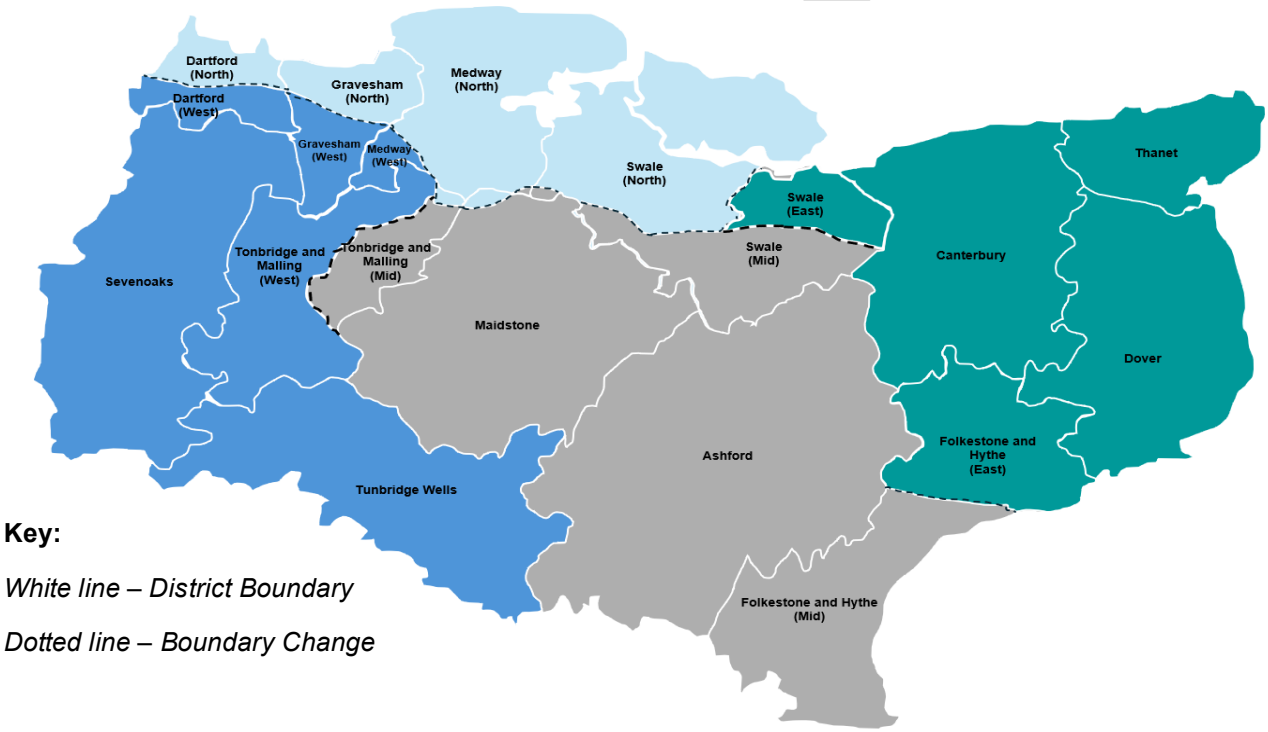
1) Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale split following the M2 / A2, with the northern parts creating the North unitary;
2) A further split to Swale to align Faversham with the East unitary;
3) The remaining parts of Swale to be included in the Mid unitary;
4) Darenth, Longfield, Joyden's Wood, New Barn, South Darenth and areas to the south of the A2 currently part of Dartford, included within the West unitary
5) Isted Rise, Meopham, Cobham, Sole Street, Vigo and areas to the south of the A2 / M2 currently part of Gravesham to be included in the West unitary
6) Blue Bell Hill Village and parts of Walderslade, currently part of Tonbridge and Malling, included with the North unitary;
7) Lords Wood and parts of Walderslade, currently part of Maidstone, to be included in the North unitary;
8) Kings Hill, East and West Malling, Ditton, New Hythe, Eccles and Aylesford areas currently Part of Tonbridge and Malling bordering Maidstone currently part of Tonbridge and Malling to be part of the Mid unitary rather than West
9) Folkestone and areas to the east to remain part of the East unitary
10) Hythe, Dymchurch, St Mary's Bay, New Romney, Lydd and rural areas currently part of Folkestone and Hythe to be part of Mid unitary rather than East

**Definitions**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Faversham and surrounding area** | Encompasses the wards of Priory, St Anns, and Abbey, parts of the wards of Boughton and Courtenay, East Downs, and Watling north of the M2/ A2, and part of the ward of Teynham and Lynsted east of Tenyham. |
| **Wards south of Swale** | Encompasses parts of the wards of Boughton and Courtenay, East Downs, Hartlip, Newington and Upchurch, Teynham and Lynsted, and West Downs south of the M2 / A2 |
| **Ward south of Medway** | Part of the ward of Rainham South East south of the M2. |
| **Ward west of Medway** | Encompasses parts of the wards of Cuxton, Halling & Riverside and Rochester West & Borstal south of the M2. |
| **Wards south of Gravesham** | Parts of the wards of Cuxton, Halling & Riverside and Rochester West & Borstal south of the M2. |
| **Wards south of Dartford** | Encompasses the wards of Joyden's Wood, Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet and Maypole & Leyton Cross, and parts of the wards of Bean & Village Park, Darenth and Wilmington, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley south of the A2. |
| **Wards to the north-east of Tonbridge and Malling** | Encompasses the wards of Aylesford South & Ditton and Kings Hill, and parts of the wards of Aylesford North & North Downs, Birling, East Malling, West Malling & Offham, East and West Peckham, Mereworth & Wateringbury and Leybourne & Ryarsh, Larkfield. |

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| **Folkestone and surrounding areas** | Encompasses the wards of Broadmead, Cheriton, East Folkestone, Folkestone Central, Folkestone Harbour, parts of the wards of Hythe east of Seabrook and Horn Street, and parts of the wards of Hythe, North Downs East and North Downs West north of the mainline / HS1 rail line and M20. |
| **Hythe and surrounding areas** | Encompasses the wards of Hythe Rural, New Romney, Romney Marsh, and Walland & Denge Marsh, parts of the wards of Hythe west of Seabrook and Horn Street, and parts of the wards of Hythe, North Downs East and North Downs West south of the mainline / HS1 rail line and M20. |

***Figure 8: Proposed councils (Option 4D) and key metrics by unitary, including existing council names***




**Key:**

*White line – District Boundary*

*Dotted line – Boundary Change*

| Metric | North | West | East | Mid |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population Size (mid-2024) | 615,931 | 374,269 | 523,642 | 417,842 |
| Geographic Area (sq km) (2024) | 649 | 881 | 1,021 | 1,188 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 25,995 | 37,204 | 24,127 | 29,666 |

## Rationale for modifications

### Primary Considerations

The proposed boundary arrangements under the 4D model have been developed to create four coherent, balanced and community aligned councils that meet the Government's criteria for local identity, viability and efficiency, in accordance with the following guiding principles:

1. Community Identity: Boundaries have been redrawn to establish areas that reflect and strengthen a sense of shared community identity and cohesion.

2. Physical and Geographic Boundaries and Features: To utilise clear, recognisable physical and geographic features – such as major roads, rivers, and landscape changes – as defining boundaries between areas. The model follows travel to work, housing market, and service use patterns. Boundaries also reflect existing partnerships across health, education and policing footprints minimising disruption to joint arrangements.

3. Population Balance: To achieve, as far as practicable, a balanced distribution of population across councils, recognising that this is constrained by the existing pattern and concentration of population centres as well as sufficient economic capacity to deliver sustainable services and fiscal balance across all four councils.

4. Existing Boundaries: To maintain existing principal boundaries wherever possible for continuity and to minimise disruption.

**Area-Specific Changes**

**Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale**

A division is proposed along the M2 motorway, which serves as a clear and consistent physical boundary between these areas. This alignment provides a logical and clear separation that reflects established travel patterns and community links.

**Blue Bell Hill Village**

Blue Bell Hill Village is proposed to be included within the North area due to its position and primary access via the roundabouts at the top of Blue Bell Hill. Although most of the village lies south of the M2, its proximity to the North area and relative isolation from surrounding settlements support this inclusion. While some parts of the village fall naturally with the West area, the boundary has been extended to ensure the entire village sits cohesively within North. This approach reflects both functional and geographic considerations, ensuring consistent access and connectivity.

**Swale**

A revised boundary is proposed around Teynham and Faversham, with Faversham moving to the East council and Teýnham remaining in the North, and the remainder of Swale (south of the M2) aligning to the Mid council.

This approach is consistent with existing health service boundaries and recognises the distinct social and geographic characteristics of Faversham, in contrast to Sittingbourne and Sheppey. Faversham aligns naturally with the East area, while Sittingbourne and the wider Swale area are more closely associated with Medway and the Medway Foundation Trust (MFT).

Faversham residents associate much more strongly east towards Canterbury than in the current Swale district. In response to a Boundary Commission review in 2015, Faversham Town Council commented that the “residents do not look to the villages of the proposed Mid Swale but look eastward to the rest of Faversham, which has the shopping streets, the swimming pool, the library

etc. In so far as they need to look beyond their own town for things, Faversham people tend to go not to Sittingbourne but to Canterbury for shopping, education, entertainment and healthcare."[14]

**Kings Hill, East and West Malling, Ditton, New Hythe, Eccles and Aylesford**

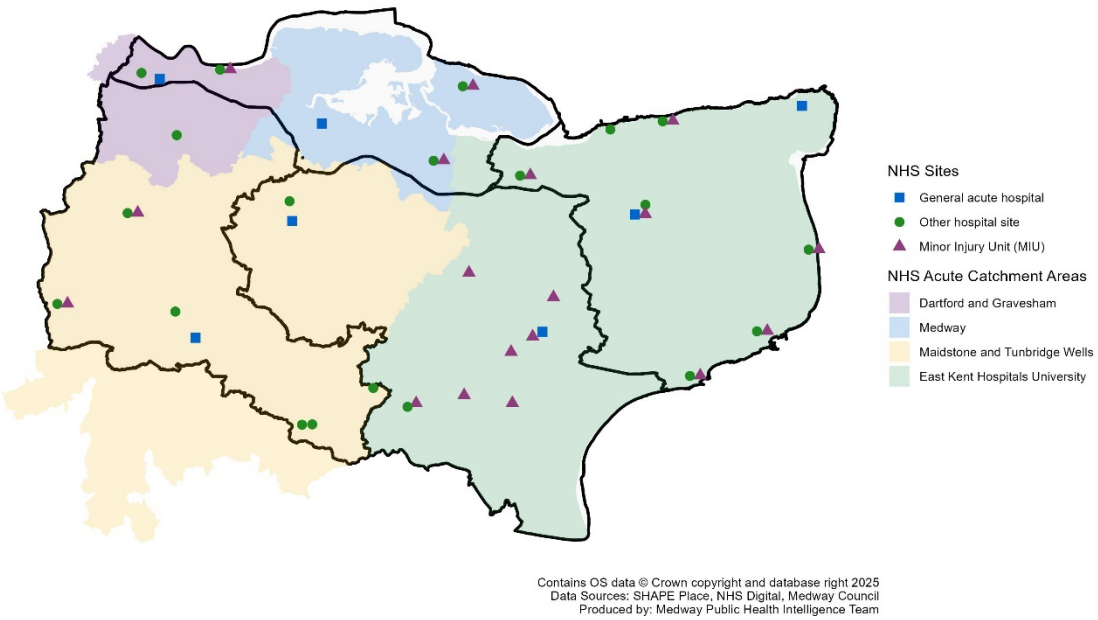
It is proposed that the Mid council boundary where Maidstone borders Tonbridge and Malling extends further west to encompass urban fringe areas adjacent to Maidstone. These areas are more closely aligned in character and function with the Mid region than with the predominantly rural remainder of Tonbridge and Malling.

**Folkestone and Hythe**

Folkestone and Hythe split based on the Folkestone area and Hythe areas, then following the mainline and HS1 rail lines and M20 up to the existing council boundaries. This reflects both the differing characteristics of Folkestone and Hythe and the relative deprivation patterns observed in western areas. Consideration has also been given to the proximity of Ashford and its connections to western settlements. The proposed split location has links to some of the existing ward boundaries amended using the town within addresses to determine the split.

This model offers the best opportunity to align local government reorganisation with the NHS's vision for integrated, community-based care. Its focus on natural communities, appropriate scale, and strategic boundaries will support the ICB's objectives for population health, service integration, and effective partnership working.

***Figure 9: 4D boundaries against NHS sites and acute catchment areas***

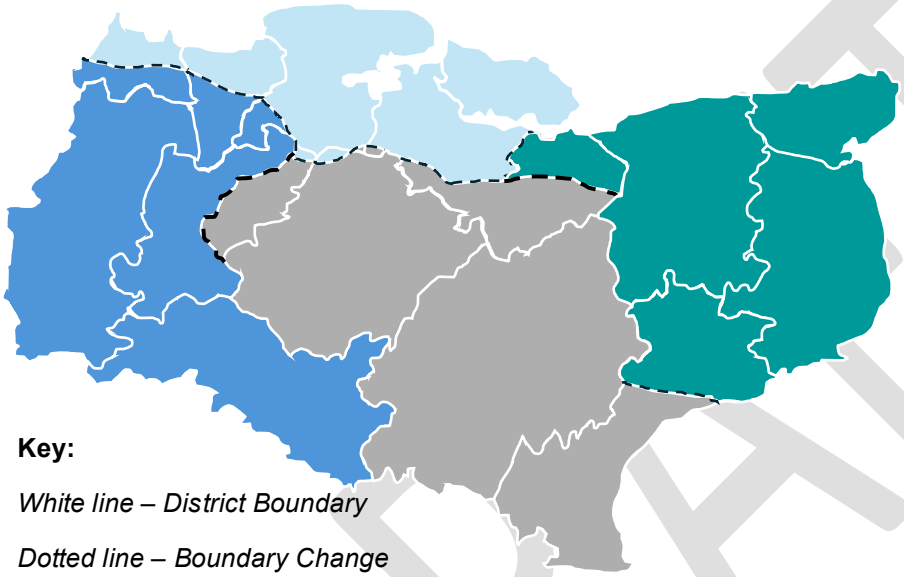



[14] https://favershamtowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Town-Council-response-to-Local-Government-Boundary-Commission-England-draft-proposals.pdf

# The summary case for Option 4D

**Option 4D offers a once-in-50-year opportunity to realign local government in Kent around boundaries that beter reflect local idenitity, sense of place, travel-to-wok patterns, and health geographies. The proposed four council model provides a balanced and locally grounded structure – sufficently large to deliver efficient, high-quality services at scale, yet local enough to preserve historic and cultural identies and strengthen community connection. It aligns with Kent's economy, supports long-term financial sustainablility and resilience, and enables strategic collaboration to enhance service provision and deliver lasting beneifts for residents.**

***Figure 10: Proposed councils (Option 4D) and key metrics by unitary***



**Key:**

*White line – District Boundary*

*Dotted line – Boundary Change*

| Metric | North | West | East | Mid |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population Size (mid-2024) | 615,931 | 374,269 | 523,642 | 417,842 |
| Geographic Area (sq km) (2024) | 649 | 881 | 1,021 | 1,188 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 25,995 | 37,204 | 24,127 | 29,666 |

The summary case for Option 4D, organised by Government's six criteria for LGR, is set out below:

***Table 4:*** *Arguments for the proposed model*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government** | **Four strong councils, large enough for delivery at scale, small enough to preserve local identity and allow manageable service delivery**<br>• Four councils that are large enough to deliver high-quality services efficiently, yet small enough to preserve local identity and maintain close connections with residents, leading to more responsive service design and closer alignment with local priorities.<br>• Largely towards the lower end of the Government's 500,000 population guideline, the size of the councils provides headroom for growth while enabling more focused and responsive service delivery.<br>• 4D demonstrates consistent alignment to major Kent industries, with strong internal industry links.<br>• Balanced council tax base and population density, geographic area and transport connectivity despite imbalance in historic housing delivery and green-belt designation.<br>**Boundaries Aligned with Identity, Movement, and Geography**<br>• The proposed boundaries are designed to better reflect local identity, sense of place, travel-to-work areas, and health geographies, creating councils that correspond to how residents live and move. This model also reflects historic and cultural geographies, balancing rural and urban areas and respects natural transport corridors.<br>• Community-based boundaries make it easier for councils and the NHS to work together. The 4D model aligns with the local healthcare system and prioritises prevention and early intervention in-line with the NHS's 10 Year Health Plan for England.<br>• Option 4D offers the best internal transport cohesion across councils – ideal for efficient service delivery and coherent policy implementation.<br>• Smaller areas such as Dartford, Gravesham, and Medway in the North unitary individually have lower travel times and well-connected infrastructure. This will lead to more manageable geographies for efficient, responsive service delivery with fewer logistical barriers.<br>**Efficient and Representative Democratic Arrangement**<br>• Option 4D achieves the lowest range of elector ratios between councils and a reasonable average elector ratio, ensuring fairness, effective governance, and stronger local democracy. |
| **Criteria 2: Efficiency, capacity and** | **Efficient Delivery at Scale**<br>• Four appropriately sized councils ensure operational resilience and efficiency. |

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| **withstanding shocks** | • Good balance in council tax and debt profiles supports fiscal resilience across all councils.<br>• The inclusion of more economically diverse areas within individual councils may offer opportunities to distribute resources more equitably and design budgets around localised needs.<br>**Financial Sustainability**<br>• Each council has a robust tax base and economic capacity, with GVA per capita ranging from £24,127 (East Kent) to £37,204 (West Kent).<br>• Council tax rates are closely aligned, minimising disruption and administrative complexity during transition.<br>**Resilience to Financial Shocks**<br>• Population and economic capacity are distributed in a manner that aligns with the local identities, economics strategies, and existing partnerships, supporting the effective delivery of core services and the ability to withstand financial shocks. |
| **Criteria 3: High quality and sustainable public services** | **Targeted Services**<br>• Smaller, focused councils enables the targeted, community-led delivery of statutory services such as Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and Public Health.<br>• Each council can focus more precisely on the specific needs of its smaller, defined population, designing services that align to local challenges. For example, East Kent can prioritise coastal services and tourism, while West Kent can focus on rural needs and agriculture. This can lead to better-tailored social care services and more efficient statutory service delivery.<br>• Resources can be managed more effectively, ensuring adequate funding and staffing for social care and statutory services.<br>• Better local knowledge – better alignment with health geographies creates opportunities to draw from examples of commissioning and partnership working over a Medway and Swale footprint.<br>**Integration with Health and Education for Resilient Service Models**<br>• The model strengthens collaboration with NHS and education partners, supporting Integrated Health Systems and local System Leadership.<br>• Place-based health and wellbeing strategies can be implemented, tackling health inequalities through prevention and early intervention. The NHS 10 Year Plan published earlier this year very clearly sets out a primary focus on prevention and early intervention. To achieve the scale of ambition contained within the plan, the NHS has expressed that it will need to forge much closer partnerships with local government and other local public services. |

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| | • Option 4D will enable the implementation of place-based health and wellbeing strategies, tackling health inequalities through prevention and early intervention. The smaller scale facilitates faster decision-making, local innovation, and targeted deployment of resources.<br>• Integrated teams spanning local authorities, NHS Trusts, and community providers can operate more effectively within manageable geographies. |
| **Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs** | **Preserving Identity and Sense of Place**<br>• Option 4D preserves the cultural, historic, and geographic identities of Kent's communities, creating boundaries that reflect real community connections. This is best evidenced in Swale, where the residents of Faversham feel a closer connection to Canterbury and Ashford than to Sittingbourne and the rest of Swale which looks more towards Medway and relies on services such as the Medway Foundation Trust.<br>• Option 4D is bold and forward-thinking. It is driven by allegiances and patterns of behaviour rather than lines on a map, aligning better with community ties and providing a solid framework for the next 50 years.<br>• The smaller council sizes help to build a sense of place and community that could be difficult to achieve on a larger scale. We know that people inherently feel a sense of pride and belonging and engagement with their immediate geographical area, championing their place which would be difficult to achieve with larger councils. There is a risk that fewer councils would be remote from the communities they serve, disconnected from residents, businesses and partners and more reactive in-service delivery.<br>• Follows logical boundaries along natural transport routes and economic corridors, such as the M2, Thames Gateway, coastal zones, and importantly also recognises distinct existing communities throughout Kent socially, culturally and economically.<br>• Keeps governance closer to residents, helping to protect local identities and maintain a stronger connection between decision-makers and their communities.<br>**Alignment with Local Preferences**<br>• Aligns with the preferences of public service partners and local organisations, emphasising proximity, local knowledge, and continuity of relationships. |
| **Criteria 5: Supporting devolution arrangements** | **Foundation for Devolution**<br>• The model's four balanced councils provide a strong foundation for future devolution, ensuring equitable representation and accountability within a Mayoral Combined Authority.<br>• Each council reflects a coherent economic geography, aligned with transport, housing, and employment patterns. This creates councils |

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| | capable of participating meaningfully in county-wide or regional strategic planning and investment.<br><br>**Efficient and Democratic Governance**<br><br>• Populations around 375,000–625,000 allow for manageable council sizes (approx. 65–91 members), supporting effective local democracy. Larger unitaries of 650,000-750,000 residents would require unwieldy councils of over 115 members, undermining effective local democracy.<br><br>• Smaller councils will fundamentally offer a more localised form of governance. It will ensure councillors and council officers remain connected to their local communities and decision making remains close to the communities served, giving residents confidence that their local authority understands their needs, and their representatives listen to their views, building trust and confidence in their council.<br><br>• A four council model will allow for a majority vote in scenarios where unanimity is not possible in a vote across the four councils and the Mayoral Strategic Authority. A three unitary council model in Kent would provide four new entities overall and would come with an inbuilt barrier to decision-making which would cause undue delay and complication.<br><br>• Our experience in Medway is that of an agile council, with minimal bureaucratic layering and an ability to make swift decisions when responding to challenge and opportunity that is representative of a population of >292,000.<br><br>• Four councils will be better able to address the specific needs of our residents, being more closely attuned, providing services that are better tailored, benefitting from a closer local knowledge.<br><br>• The Devolution assessment highlights that smaller, well-defined unitary councils provide stronger building blocks for a future MCA, a four unitary option would ensure equal-sized partners, promoting fair representation, shared leadership, and balanced influence across the region.<br><br>• Four councils will be incentivised to collaborate on shared priorities such as transport, housing, and environmental concerns. This will strengthen regional investment strategies, particularly in economic corridors like the Thames Gateway (North Kent) and the Channel Ports (East Kent). |
| **Criteria 6: Stronger community engagement and** | **Deep Community Connections**<br><br>• The model is explicitly designed to reflect and reinforce local community identities, helping people feel more connected to their local services. |

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| **neighbourhood empowerment** | • Smaller councils will foster stronger relationships with local voluntary, community, and faith sectors (VCFS).<br>• Existing partnerships such as Medway Voluntary Action and the Gillingham Task Force demonstrate the benefits of proximity, shared trust, and responsiveness.<br>• The model will enable us to hold services accountable and remain responsive to local needs. Knowing the community helps VCFS organisations advocate more effectively for citizen needs and represent local interests in discussions with policymakers and other strategic stakeholders.<br>• There will be more effective collaboration and support for community initiatives due to stronger, more personal and enhanced relationships with local voluntary organisations. This community engagement will enhance trust and cooperation between service providers and residents. This will improve the quality of care and support provided.<br><br>**Enhanced public engagement**<br><br>• Local councils of manageable scale to lead community-centred regeneration, co-designing solutions with residents and local organisations.<br>• Proximity to residents will allow smaller councils to engage more effectively with the community, ensuring that regeneration initiatives are informed by local insights and receive broader support. Our best example of this is perhaps our work in Chatham Intra, with the High Street Heritage Action Zone and the Chatham Design Code, which has delivered significant impact, revitalising Medway through heritage-led regeneration, creative industries - boosting local pride, and the wider economy.<br><br>**Supporting Growth & Regeneration**<br><br>• Smaller councils are more attuned to local needs and aspirations, supporting community-centric development and co-creation. The model will enable us to implement projects of local resonance. A good example of this is the work of the Gillingham Task Force, a forum which attracts the local MP, Cabinet Members and senior council officers and many local residents. It is difficult to conceive how this approach could be replicated across the number of towns linked to a larger 650k-750k authority.<br><br>**Strengthened community bonds**<br><br>• Smaller authorities in a four-council model can maintain a strong sense of community by preserving local identities and encouraging active civic participation, which is vital for social cohesion, inclusion and collective growth. Our best evidence of this is our Medway Place programme, where businesses and key stakeholders across Medway come together to provide insight into their business or |

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| | story, helping to shape Medway's Place Brand and opportunities across Medway.<br><br>**Tailored Services for Growth**<br><br>• As a recipient of UKSPF, Medway has been able to administer a fund for local businesses that aligns precisely with the original policy objectives and supports and celebrates the distinct characteristics of the area. In a much larger council area it would be very difficult to cater for the demand and run a process which serves the area so acutely well. In Medway, the delivery approach for UKSPF facilitated the targeted allocation of resources to projects and communities most in need, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and tangible impact of social regeneration initiatives within our communities. |

## How the case for change is structured against government criteria

What follows is the case for change detail, setting out how the proposed model meets the government's six criteria.

It is a combination of shared content across four options (3A, 4B, 4D and 5A) and content specific to the individual options.

Sections and sub-sections are set out below, including how they align to Government criteria, as stated in the letter dated 5 February 2025.

***Table 5:*** *Structure of case for change and link to Government criteria*

| Section headings | Sub-section headings | Govt criteria |
|---|---|---|
| **Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government** | Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base | 1a |
| | Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery | 1b |
| | Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure | 1d |
| **Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience** | Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency | 2a, 2b |
| | Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies | 2c |
| | Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation | 2d |
| | Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government | 2e |
| **Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services** | Improving delivery of key services | 3a, 3c |
| | Public service reform | 3b |
| **Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs** | Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design | 4a, 4c |
| | Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance | 4b |
| **Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution** | Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent | 5a, 5b |
| | Population sizes that support devolution | 5c |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **and regional priorities** | | |
| **Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent | 6a, 6b |
| | Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) | 6a, 6b |

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# **Criteria 1:** Establishing a single tier of local government

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base** | **Criteria 1a** |
| **Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery** | **Criteria 1b** |
| **Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure** | **Criteria 1d** |


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# Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base

**Criteria 1a.** Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

**Each of the four proposed councils under Option 4D is designed to be economically robust, with GVA and council tax bases that underpin long-term financial sustainability. 4D strategically groups areas with complementary economic profiles and infrastructure assets, such as major ports, international gateways, and economic centres, so that every unitary benefits from both scale and local strengths. This enables each council to participate fully in regional growth and provides a resilient, equitable foundation for Kent's long-term prosperity.**

### Aligning councils with growth opportunities

Option 4D brings together areas with diverse but complementary economic strengths and infrastructure, creating a model that aligns with Kent's distinct economic geographies while fostering collaboration for future growth.

***Table 6:*** *Growth opportunities across the four councils*

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent:**<br>• Medway (98%)<br>• Swale (81%)<br>• Gravesham (87%)<br>• Dartford (78%)<br>• Small sections of Tonbridge and Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%) | **North Kent is the South East's powerhouse for growth and connectivity**<br>North Kent, which spans Medway, Gravesham, Dartford, Swale (north of the M2) and small areas of Tonbridge & Malling and Maidstone, is a powerful economic corridor at the heart of the Thames Estuary region. It combines some of the South East's fastest-growing urban centres with nationally significant transport and industrial infrastructure.<br>North Kent's strategic position between London and continental Europe gives it unrivalled potential to anchor growth, innovation and regeneration across Kent and Medway. It is a powerful mix of waterfront regeneration, industrial innovation, and world-class connectivity, making it one of the UK's most strategically positioned growth zones. It combines the cultural energy of Medway's university city with the logistical strength of Thames Gateway ports and Freeport development zones.<br>High-growth sectors include advanced manufacturing, engineering, creative and digital industries, and professional services. Ongoing public and private sector investment is enabling accelerated growth across key sites.<br>**Strategic Infrastructure Assets**<br>• **Thames Estuary Gateway:** Incorporates the Port of Sheerness, London Thamesport, and the emerging Freeport East Kent corridor, linking river-based logistics with rail and motorway access (M2, A2, M20, HS1). |

- **Medway City Estate and Innovation Park Medway:** Priority regeneration zones driving high-value employment in advanced manufacturing, engineering, and creative industries.
- **Ebbsfleet Garden City and Thames Gateway Parklands:** Nationally recognised housing and infrastructure growth points, with transport integration to HS1 and Crossrail via Ebbsfleet International.
- **Lower Thames Crossing:** The UK's largest road-building project, expected to reshape connectivity across North Kent and significantly enhance freight and commuter movement.
- **HS1 and North Kent Line:** Enable high-speed connections to London, Ashford and Europe—supporting commuter resilience and business investment.
- **Bluewater Shopping Centre:** North Kent's strategic location attracts high-profile businesses and sustained consumer traffic from across the South-East – it is home to Bluewater, one of Europe's leading retail and leisure destinations.
- **M2 Junction 5:** £100 million improvement scheme recently completed at M2 Junction 5, enhancing safety and capacity at a critical freight and commuter junction.
-

**Growth and Regeneration Corridors**

- **Medway Regeneration Arc:** Anchored in Chatham, Strood and Gillingham, integrating brownfield renewal, waterfront housing and the Innovation Park. Focus areas include Chatham Intra, Rochester Riverside, and the Dockside University Quarter.
- **Swale Northern Arc:** Extending from Sittingbourne to Sheppey, connecting new industrial and logistics hubs with Medway's employment catchment.
- **Gravesend and Dartford Growth Zones:** Key regeneration areas leveraging Ebbsfleet's growth momentum and expanding mixed-use developments along the Thames corridor.
- **Blue Bell Hill and A229 corridor:** Strategic upgrade opportunities linking Medway Towns to Maidstone and the M20, improving freight and commuter efficiency.

**Strategic Opportunities for the Future**

North Kent will be the South East's most connected, competitive and sustainable growth corridor – a gateway where innovation, infrastructure and inclusive communities drive the future of the Kent economy.

| | |
|---|---|
| | • **Freeport and Estuary Enterprise Zone:** Driving inward investment, customs-free manufacturing, and trade with Europe and global markets.<br>• **Lower Thames Crossing Growth Corridor:** Unlocking industrial and residential expansion along the A2 corridor and supporting the "North Kent Growth Arc".<br>• **AI-enabled public services and digital infrastructure:** Opportunity to become the testbed for smart-city innovation through data-driven transport management, digital health, and predictive public-service design.<br>• **Decarbonisation and resilience:** Major opportunities in energy efficiency, retrofitting, and renewable generation aligned with the Thames Estuary Growth Board's Net Zero Plan.<br>• **Devolution and spatial leadership:** The proposed unitary council for North Kent would have the scale, coherence and assets to lead regional planning, transport integration and investment partnerships under a Kent Mayoral Strategic Authority. |
| **West Kent:**<br>• Sevenoaks<br>• Tunbridge Wells<br>• Tonbridge and Malling (61%)<br>• Dartford (22%)<br>• Gravesham (13%)<br>• Medway (2%) | **West Kent is characterised by a highly skilled workforce and strong knowledge-based sectors**<br>West Kent is a dynamic area defined by its highly skilled workforce, quality of life, and strength in knowledge-based industries. Its strategic location near London and strong sector diversity makes it a key driver of innovation and professional services in Kent.<br>• Among the most qualified populations in the South East, supporting high-value sectors and knowledge based industries.<br>• Talent pool attractive to employers in finance, legal, life sciences, and the creative economy.<br>• Well-positioned for commuter-led growth and remote-working professionals.<br>• High green infrastructure, high quality of life and heritage towns enhance appeal to investors.<br>• Regional centre for retail, culture, and business with a thriving property market..<br>**Economic Growth Opportunities**<br>• **Knowledge and innovation corridor:** The West Kent area sits within the "Golden Triangle" between London, Gatwick and the Thames Estuary, offering scope for innovation clustering in life sciences and green tech.<br>• **Creative and digital industries:** Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks host fast-growing creative, design and media sectors supported by cultural infrastructure and flexible workspace development. |

- **Life sciences and health technology:** Building on the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust footprint and links to the Kent and Medway Medical School, there is potential for co-location of research, diagnostics and med-tech firms along the A21 corridor.
- **Advanced manufacturing and logistics:** Industrial growth areas at North Farm (Tunbridge Wells), Quarry Hill and West Malling are benefitting from strategic connectivity and redevelopment of older employment land**.**
- **Rural diversification and green growth:** Opportunities to extend agritech, viticulture and tourism in the High Weald AONB and North Downs, linking with Visit Kent and South East LEP initiatives.
- **Housing and mixed-use developments:** Strategic sites around Kings Hill, Tonbridge, and Paddock Wood provide opportunities for high-quality, well-connected communities aligned with infrastructure investment
- **Strategic growth drivers:** London commuter economy, high-value business clusters, innovation corridors, rail and road connectivity upgrades

**Major Infrastructure Projects**

- **A21 Tonbridge to Pembury and A228 corridor upgrades:** Building on completed sections, current investment focuses on further capacity improvements, junction safety schemes and sustainable transport links connecting the A21 and A228 corridors to the M20, M26 and key employment areas.
- **South Eastern Main Line and High Speed 1 extensions:** Enhanced rail capacity and service frequency from Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge to London Bridge and Cannon Street. Electrification and station upgrades are central to maintaining the competitiveness of the West Kent commuter economy.
- **Digital infrastructure investment:** Rollout of gigabit broadband and 5G coverage in Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks; focus on remote-working hubs and digital inclusion to strengthen SME productivity.
- **Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge town-centre regeneration:** Public realm and mixed-use schemes designed to increase footfall, retail resilience and local cultural offer; key projects include the Amelia Scott cultural hub and redevelopment of former civic and retail sites.

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| **East Kent:**<br>• Canterbury<br>• Dover<br>• Thanet<br>• Folkestone and Hythe (64%)<br>• Swale (Faversham area 17%) | **East Kent is a gateway for innovation, tourism, and green energy**<br><br>East Kent combines coastal infrastructure, green energy capacity and cultural tourism, forming a unique, future-focused economic landscape. With direct access to continental Europe and strong institutional assets, the area is well-placed for strategic investment and innovation.<br><br>**Strategic Infrastructure:**<br>• East Kent's economic geography is defined by its ports, railways and energy infrastructure. The Port of Dover, handling over £122 billion of UK–EU trade annually, is the UK's busiest roll-on/roll-off port and a linchpin of national logistics. Continued investment in customs technology, freight processing and port access roads underpins its long-term resilience.<br>• The Channel Tunnel at Folkestone further reinforces East Kent's international gateway role, while planned improvements to the A2 and M2 corridors, the M20 and the A256 East Kent Access Road strengthen strategic connections between ports, industrial sites and London.<br>• The High Speed 1 (HS1) rail line connects Ashford, Folkestone, Canterbury, and Thanet directly to London St Pancras, cutting journey times and underpinning major housing and employment growth zones such as Ebbsfleet, Canterbury Riverside, and Otterpool Park. Continued upgrades to the A2/M2 and M20 corridors, together with the planned Lower Thames Crossing, will further improve east–west freight and commuter movement.<br>• Complementary digital and energy projects such as broadband expansion, the Cleve Hill Solar Park near Faversham (the UK's largest solar farm), and the coastal renewables programme at Ramsgate position East Kent at the forefront of the South East's clean-energy economy.<br>• Ashford International Station.<br>• High-performing universities including University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University drive economic development and innovation.<br><br>**Growth and Infrastructure Projects:**<br><br>East Kent's growth strategy is anchored by a series of major mixed-use and housing-led regeneration schemes that aim to deliver new communities, attract investment and revitalise coastal towns. Key projects include:<br><br>• **Otterpool Park Garden Town (Folkestone & Hythe):** up to 10,000 homes with integrated employment land, green corridors and sustainable transport links.<br><br>• **Canterbury Riverside and City Centre Regeneration:** a comprehensive renewal programme enhancing the university |

city's cultural quarter, public realm and active-travel connections.

- **Thanet Coastal Regeneration Programme:** focused on Margate, Ramsgate and Cliftonville, combining heritage restoration with creative-industry investment. Major renewable energy assets including the Thanet Offshore Wind Farm and emerging developments at Green Port Ramsgate.

- **Dover Waterfront and Western Docks Revitalisation:** delivering new port infrastructure, housing and commercial space.

- **Faversham Expansion Area:** strategic growth zone linking the town's historic centre with the A2 corridor and Cleve Hill renewables site.

- Major housing and commercial developments like South East Faversham and Mountfield Park will deliver thousands of new homes, jobs, and community assets.

- Coastal position supports logistics, maritime activity, and offshore innovation.

- Public investment in Margate Digital Campus and cultural assets underpin a vibrant visitor economy.

Collectively, these schemes will deliver tens of thousands of new homes, modern workspaces and sustainable transport infrastructure, supporting both population growth and economic renewal.

**Employment and Skills**

East Kent is a centre for high-value employment growth in life sciences, logistics, creative industries and green technology.

- **Discovery Park Enterprise Zone (Sandwich):** a national centre for life sciences and technology hosts more than 160 businesses and contributes over £300 million GVA per year through life-science and technology innovation.

- **Manston Business Park and Airport Redevelopment:** Manston Business Park and emerging aviation-logistics plans provide opportunities in advanced manufacturing and air-freight services.

- **London and South East University Group:** Collaboration between the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and East Kent College Group is supporting a pipeline

| | |
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| | of local skills and research partnerships through a proposed East Kent Skills Compact, forming the basis of an emerging East Kent Skills Compact to align education, training and industry demand. Importantly sitting at the<br>• **Creative and Cultural Economy:** Growth in creative sectors driven by the Turner Contemporary, Folkestone Creative Quarter and Marlowe Theatre is generating new employment in digital media, tourism and cultural production, and enhancing the visitor economy. |
| **Mid Kent:**<br>• Ashford<br>• Maidstone (98%)<br>• Folkestone and Hythe (36%)<br>• Tonbridge and Malling (36%)<br>• Swale (3%) | **Mid Kent is a regional hub for infrastructure-led growth and innovation**<br>Mid Kent is the region's engine for infrastructure-led growth and high-tech innovation. With Maidstone at its heart and strong transport links, the region offers scalable opportunities for business investment.<br>• Excellent transport connectivity via the M2, M20, and A249 corridors.<br>• A £100 million upgrade to Junction 5 of the M2 enhances safety and unlocks new logistics capacity between Maidstone, Sheppey, and the Dover-London corridor.<br>• Key sites include Sittingbourne's Kent Science Park.<br>• Home to high-value industries in biotech, advanced engineering, manufacturing, and digital, including Nobel Prize-winning research.<br>• Tonbridge & Malling's market towns support small-scale industry, logistics, and growing professional services.<br>• Balanced economic mix provides resilience and adaptability.<br>• Strong university and college networks provide a continuous talent pipeline across technical, creative, and professional sectors.<br>• Business-education partnerships foster innovation and workforce readiness.<br>• The area includes the Sevington Inland Border Facility playing a crucial role in ensuring connection with Europe, as the industrial equivalent to Ashford International for passengers and Dungeness Power Station, with it's history of nuclear power generation and the potential for a future site for small modular reactors.<br>• Lydd Airport – with plans to become a future hub for flights in and out of South East England. |

- Maidstone, the county town of Kent, is a key centre for public service delivery and regional coordination in the future council structure.
- Forms a central link between North and East Kent and the rest of the South East.
- Location and infrastructure position Mid Kent as a logistics and business hub with growth-ready capacity.

**Major Growth and Regeneration Projects**

Mid Kent's growth is characterised by large-scale, masterplanned communities and strategic employment developments that align housing delivery with innovation and sustainable transport. Key projects include:

- **Ashford Commercial Quarter and Waterbrook Park:** flagship business destinations anchored by logistics, life sciences, and high-value engineering, leveraging HS1 connectivity.
- **Otterpool Park Garden Town:** a 10,000-home, sustainable new settlement in Folkestone and Hythe, blending high-quality housing with employment, schools, and green infrastructure; a national exemplar for long-term place-making.
- **Heathlands Garden Community (Lenham):** a 5,000-home mixed-use development led by Maidstone Borough Council and Homes England, designed to deliver sustainable rural growth with integrated transport and local services.
- **Kent Medical Campus (Maidstone):** a nationally significant life sciences cluster adjoining Junction 7 (M20), part of the North Kent Enterprise Zone, specialising in healthcare, med-tech, and research collaboration with Kent's universities.
- **Ashford Designer Outlet and Repton Park Expansion:** expanding tourism, retail, and leisure infrastructure, underpinning local employment and attracting regional spend.
- **Eureka Park, Waterbrook Park Phase 2 and M20 Corridor Logistics Sites:** logistics and distribution investment zones supporting Kent's freight and e-commerce growth.

**Balanced economy and tax base**

The four-council model is designed to ensure economic viability and long-term financial sustainability across Kent. Each geography is structured around complementary strengths, with a recognised economic centre and international port (or equivalent infrastructure), enabling gateway

access to trade and growth. Whilst West Kent leads in productivity and tax base, the other three councils are sufficiently robust and balanced to avoid creating undue disparities.

***Table 7:*** *Economy and tax base metrics for Option 4D*

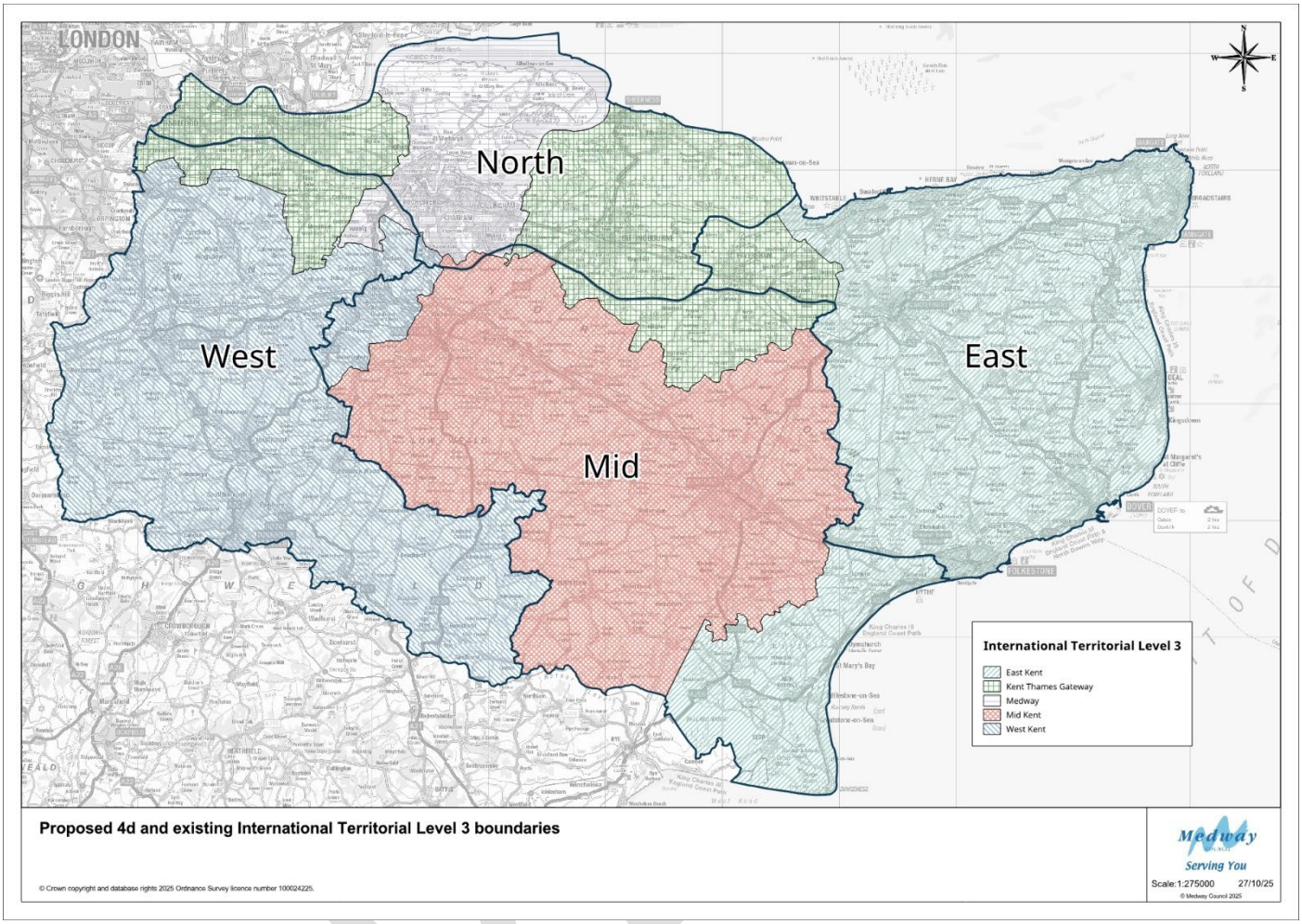
| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gross Value Added (GVA)[15] (£m)** | 16,011 | 13,924 | 12,634 | 12,396 |
| **GVA per capita (productivity)[16] (£)** | 25,995 | 37,204 | 24,127 | 29,666 |
| **Council tax base (no. of band D equivalent properties)[17]** | 197,265 | 150,602 | 180,623 | 151,161 |
| **Council tax average band D rate (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes)[18] (£)** | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,907 |
| **Gross business rates[19] (£)** | £123m | £81m | £82m | £78m |
| **Unemployment Rate (%) Apr 24-March 25[20]** | 3.50% | 2.48% | 4.21% | 3.53% |
| **Deprivation score (2019)[21]** | 0.44 | 0.24 | 0.54 | 0.29 |

**Alignment to GVA economic measurements**

Option 4D strongly aligns to the geographies for economic measurement of GVA contained in the International Territorial Level (ITL). The map clearly demonstrates that the 4D model aligns very closely to the level 3 geographies across Kent.

[15] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[16] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[17] Financial data return submitted by councils
[18] Financial data return submitted by councils
[19] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[20] LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics
[21] Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics

***Figure 11: ITL 3 in UK at January 2025 overlaid with 4D boundaries***




**Business rates**

Business rates tax bases are strong, with each unitary generating between £81 million and £123 million in retained business rates. All four councils have the economic capacity to operate independently and sustainably.

Imbalances between proposed councils are countered by strong growth potential, which will support longer-term economic growth and prosperity across the whole of Kent. Each council will be able to tailor economic and employment strategies to local needs, while aligning with the wider strategic ambitions of Kent.

**Council tax**

Each council has a sufficient council tax base to support service delivery, ranging from 151,161 to 197,265 Band D equivalent properties. Option 4D has some of the lowest differences in average band D rates between council of each of the multi-unitary options, ranging from £1,874 to £1,907. This minimises disruption for residents and reduces administrative complexity during transition.

**Council tax harmonisation**

Council tax harmonisation is an important and sensitive area. Council tax rates must be consistent by the eighth year of a unitary authority and there are currently significant disparities in council tax rates across Kent.

***Table 12:*** *Current council taxbase, rates and yield*

| Current council | 2024-25 final taxbase[22] | Current combined Band D rate[23] | Current Tax Yield |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ashford | 49,832 | £1,799 | £89,636,805 |
| Canterbury | 53,348 | £1,851 | £98,732,177 |
| Dartford | 41,029 | £1,796 | £73,679,473 |
| Dover | 40,875 | £1,825 | £74,604,137 |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 40,466 | £1,907 | £77,159,931 |
| Gravesham | 35,995 | £1,842 | £66,296,691 |
| Maidstone | 68,264 | £1,904 | £129,958,194 |
| Medway | 90,913 | £1,755 | £159,523,255 |
| Sevenoaks | 52,395 | £1,855 | £97,168,160 |
| Swale | 50,368 | £1,812 | £91,242,368 |
| Thanet | 46,454 | £1,874 | £87,054,908 |
| Tonbridge & Malling | 53,478 | £1,849 | £98,879,623 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 48,361 | £1,816 | £87,822,911 |
| **Total** | **671,778** | | **£1,231,758,633** |

The baseline council tax point to which the rates will be harmonised will be set through key decision by the shadow authorities.

This is a sensitive political decision as it is likely to result in an increase in council tax rates for residents in areas which currently charge lower rates.

Council tax harmonisation is governed by the referendum limits so the increase will be in line with what is legal and acceptable under the current system.

This also means the total council tax bill across Kent will be lower than if all current councils increased rates at the maximum allowed as would be typical in local government.

This is because residents who currently pay rates at, or higher than, the baseline rate set by the shadows will have their council tax rate frozen or potentially reduced to align with the baseline rate.

While there are many different scenarios including the baseline rate and the rate of increase, council tax harmonisation can be achieved within seven years and we have not assumed any increase in council tax rates into the financial modelling.

[22] Financial data return submitted by councils

[23] Financial data return submitted by councils

# Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery

**Criteria 1b.** Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.

**Option 4D establishes four balanced and coherent Unitary Authorities that aligns Kent's geography with its functional realities- transport corridors, environmental zones, and economic clusters – to support local needs across North, West, East and Mid Kent. It offers a pragmatic balance between localism and region-wide strategic coordination, making it well-suited for managing land, planning, infrastructure, and environmental priorities across Kent.**

## Geographies and population

The model provides the most effective framework for coordinated spatial planning, infrastructure investment, and locally responsive service delivery that achieves a strong balance of population, population density, and geographic area across the four proposed councils. This balance enables effective governance, manageable service delivery footprints, and equitable representation.

***Table 8:*** *Geographies and population in 2023 and 2032 forecasts*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Population (mid-2024)[24]** | 615,931 | 374,269 | 523,642 | 417,842 |
| **Geographic area (sq.km)[25]** | 649 | 881 | 1,021 | 1,188 |
| **Population density (people per sq.km) (mid-2024)[26]** | 949 | 425 | 513 | 352 |
| **Forecast population 2032 ONS[27]** | 634,721 | 386,102 | 543,313 | 446,622 |
| **Forecast growth** | 3.1% | 3.2% | 3.8% | 6.9% |

## Sensible geographies

The model reflects the diversity of Kent's geography, from dense urban areas to rural and coastal districts. Population densities vary from **352 people per sq km in Mid Kent** to **949 people per sq km in North Kent**, reflecting the region's natural settlement patterns. The geographic areas of the proposed councils range from **649 square km in North Kent** to **1,188 square km in Mid Kent**. This avoids the creation of overly large rural councils that would be difficult to manage operationally, or very small urban councils that lack spatial flexibility. The size of these councils

[24] Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[25] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
[26] Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[27] Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics

allows for strategic land allocation, supporting development in the most suitable locations and avoiding piecemeal or reactive planning.

This spread in population density, from 352 people per sq km in Mid Kent to 949 people per sq km in North Kent, reflects the natural variation in settlement patterns across Kent and allows each unitary to tailor its service delivery to local requirements. For example, councils with higher densities, such as North Kent, can focus on urban regeneration and transport, while lower-density areas, such as Mid Kent, can prioritise land use planning, green infrastructure, and climate resilience.

The coherent geographies of option 4D will allow environmental management to take place at scale, with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and Green Belt areas preserved and effectively managed. Climate resilience and energy generation can be embedded within each region, tailored to the specifics of each area, such as rural and coastal considerations.

These geographies support infrastructure-led planning by aligning with major transport corridors and key growth areas. Strategic transport links such as HS1, M2, A2, Dartford Crossing, and the Channel Tunnel are distributed across the four areas, ensuring each unitary has access to national and international connectivity. This distribution simplifies infrastructure delivery by aligning planning authorities with existing economic corridors and transport hubs, reducing duplication and enabling more effective capital investment.

**Alignment with Housing and Economic Geographies**

The model enables a more coherent and strategic approach to housing planning across Kent, with each geography retaining sufficient scale and diversity to support tailored housing strategies- urban regeneration in East Kent, garden communities in Mid Kent, and commuter housing in North and West Kent. Cross-boundary coordination will aid planning and housing delivery in managing shared constraints such as environmentally sensitive areas. It aligns closely with travel-to-work areas, housing market boundaries, and economic corridors, allowing each authority to plan and deliver housing growth in a way that reflects local demand and infrastructure capacity, for example:

- **North Kent** – integrates the Thames Gateway, one of the UK's largest regeneration zones, linking Ebbsfleet, Rochester Riverside and Swale's northern growth areas under one coherent authority.

- **Mid Kent** – connects Maidstone, Tonbridge and Ashford growth corridors, enabling coordinated planning across key transport hubs (M20, A229, HS1) and major housing developments such as Heathlands and Chilmington.

- **East Kent** – brings together the coastal towns of Canterbury, Dover and Thanet, aligning regeneration, heritage, and tourism with strategic housing delivery, especially along the A2/HS1 corridor.

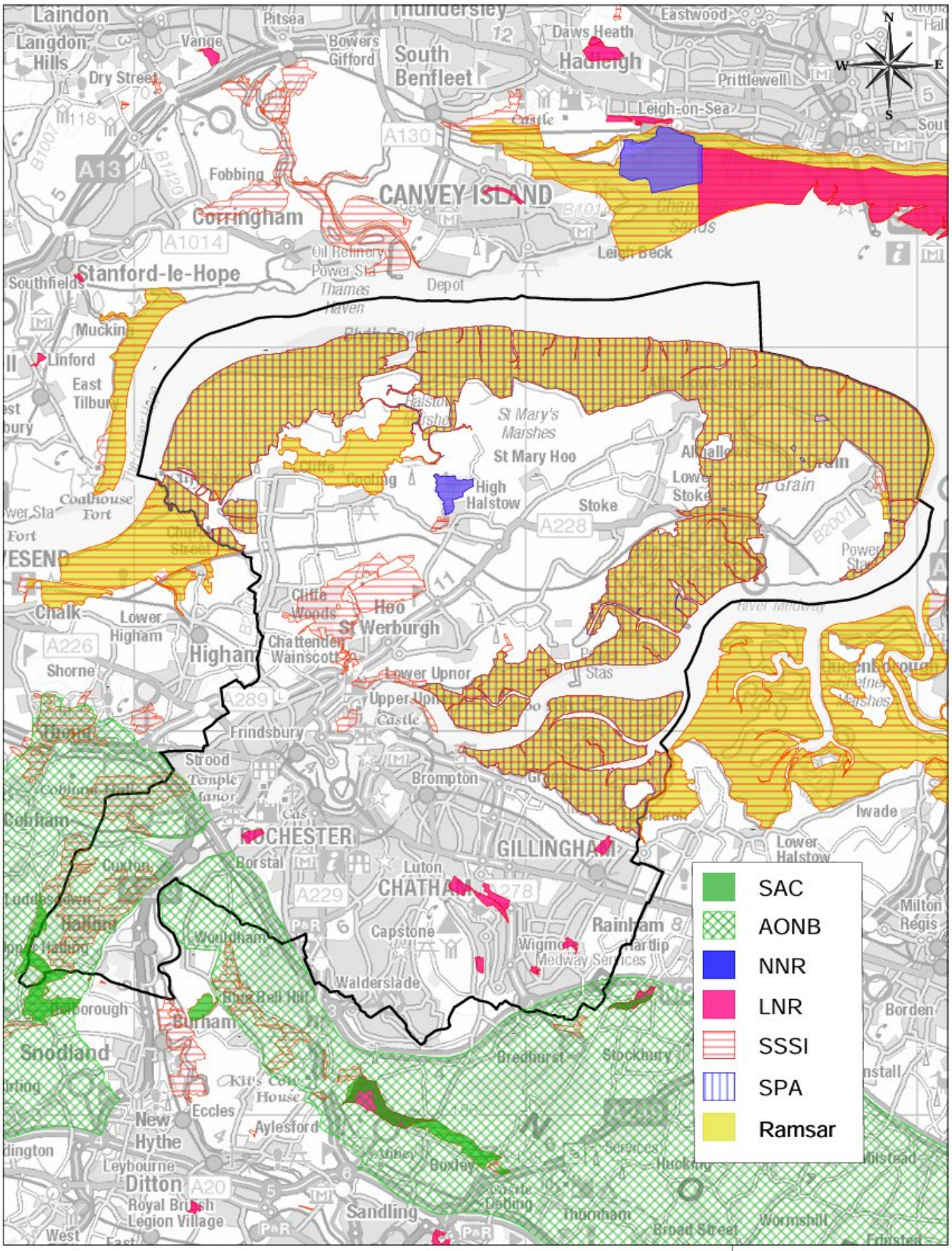
- **West Kent** – maintains the distinct rural and commuter settlement pattern of Sevenoaks, and Tunbridge Wells, safeguarding environmental assets while supporting smaller-scale, high-quality developments.

By mirroring functional housing markets, the 4D model enables more consistent, evidence-based housing need assessments and more effective cross-boundary infrastructure planning as well as

being the most capable of maintaining housing momentum while addressing barriers such as land viability, nutrient neutrality, and cross-district coordination.

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***Figure 12: Map of spatial planning constraints***




**Environmental Constraints Map**

Medway Council
Serving You
Scale:1:135000 08/10/14

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**Coordinated Infrastructure and Transport Planning**

Under the 4D model, each council is large enough to plan and deliver major infrastructure projects but small enough to ensure place-based accountability:

- Boundaries follow key infrastructure routes such as the M2, M20, HS1 and River Medway, ensuring each authority has a coherent transport network to plan around.
- The model supports integrated local transport planning, with the ability to align housing growth with public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure.
- It strengthens engagement with regional partners such as Homes England, National Highways and Network Rail, improving the alignment of investment and reducing duplication.
- Through pan-Kent collaboration mechanisms, large strategic infrastructure—such as the Lower Thames Crossing, East Kent coastal transport improvements, and Otterpool Park Garden Town—can be coordinated across the four councils and the future Kent & Medway Combined Authority.

## Travel infrastructure

Kent benefits from a comprehensive strategic transport network.

Major motorways including the M2, M20, M25, and M26 provide vital road links to London, the wider south east and key ports such as Dover and Folkestone.

These roads primarily connect Kent from the east to west through the districts and eventually into London.

While the east to west connection is strong, the north to south connection through Kent is less direct, particularly for those not commuting into London.

The county is also well-served by rail, with services operated by Southeastern on the North Kent Line, Chatham Main Line and the UK's only domestic high-speed rail service, High Speed 1 (HS1), which connects Kent to central London via St Pancras International in under 40 minutes.

The 4D model enables transport and infrastructure planning to be organised around Kent's natural movement corridors the major road, rail and port routes that shape commuting, logistics and economic growth. Each new council will encompass coherent transport geographies that connect local networks to the county's and nation's wider strategic systems.

The proposed 4D model aligns governance boundaries with Kent's five primary strategic transport corridors.

***Table 9:*** *Role and Strategic Importance of transport corridors*

| Corridor | Role and Strategic Importance |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| **M2 / A2 and HS1 (North Kent Corridor)** | Gateway between London, Medway, the Thames Gateway and Dover; carries international freight and commuter flows. |
| **M20 / A20 and HS1 (Mid-Kent Corridor)** | Core international route linking London, Ashford, Folkestone and the Channel Tunnel; major growth and logistics spine. |
| **A21 / Tonbridge–Hastings (West Kent Corridor)** | Connects commuter and rural West Kent to the London and South Coast economies. |
| **Thames Gateway & River Corridors** | Port and industrial logistics routes including the Port of Sheerness, Thames Estuary Freeport and Medway ports. |
| **East Kent Coastal Corridor (A256 / A299)** | Connects Ramsgate, Sandwich, Dover and Canterbury to the wider M2/HS1 network; key to coastal regeneration. |

Under the 4D model, each council will share an integrated housing, transport and economic corridor, enabling Local Plans, Local Transport Plans and infrastructure investment to be co-designed. Transport responsibilities are consolidated within a single tier of government, eliminating duplication between county and district layers. In the advent of Devolution, Cross-boundary strategic projects (e.g. Lower Thames Crossing, Ashford International rail interchange, Thanet Parkway, and Canterbury–Dover coastal improvements) are managed collaboratively through a pan-Kent transport board under the future Combined County Authority (CCA). Boundaries that follow the M2 and M20 corridors ensure that planning for growth and congestion management can be undertaken holistically rather than fragmented between councils.

The 4D model will allow integration with wider systems, complimenting existing partnerships and transport strategies by:

- Aligning with National Highways strategic road network boundaries and Network Rail's South East route.
- Supporting consistent engagement with Transport for the South East (TfSE) and Homes England for infrastructure funding.
- Enabling data-driven transport modelling and joint investment across corridors—particularly for decarbonisation, EV infrastructure, and modal shift programmes.
- Residents experience better-connected local transport systems, with integrated ticketing, bus reform and active-travel networks designed at the right local scale.
- Businesses benefit from improved freight and commuter reliability through coordinated investment in corridors critical to Kent's £49 billion economy.

- Councils can collectively plan for sustainable transport integration, supporting decarbonisation, growth and productivity across the Thames Gateway, Ashford International, and coastal regeneration zones.

**Strategic transport corridors across the four unitaries**

The River Medway and the M2 as a natural dividing line.

Many patterns of daily life - travel, work, schooling, and markets - are already shaped by the barrier created by the M2 and the River Medway. Education commissioning, housing markets and service delivery are often split naturally by the river. Recognising this in administrative boundaries helps reduce disruption and aligns council functions with lived geographies.

***Table 10:*** *Transport connectivity across the four councils*

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent** | • **High-Speed Rail:** 37 minutes to London via HS1; connections to Ashford and Europe.<br>• **Road Network:** M2, A2 and future Lower Thames Crossing creating new investment corridors.<br>• **River Infrastructure:** Expanding river freight and clean-energy projects along the Thames and Medway**.**<br>• **Active & Public Transport:** Integrated transport hubs at Chatham, Strood and Ebbsfleet; future opportunities for AI-enabled mobility systems.<br>• **Dartford**: The M25 runs north to south through the district, with the northern boundary along the River Thames and the southern area extending towards Sevenoaks. The North Kent rail line provides direct connections to London and Medway.<br>• **Gravesham**: Watling Street serves as the main west–east route through the district, linking eventually to the M2. The Southeastern rail network connects Gravesham with Dartford and onward to London.<br>• **Medway**: A key north–south route passes through the area and joins the M2, while the Southeastern rail line provides direct links to London. |
| **West Kent** | West Kent's accessibility is underpinned by a network of strategic transport corridors:<br>• **Road:** The M25 and M26 connect the district to London and national motorway networks; the M20 and A21 support cross-county movement between the coast, Maidstone and the capital.<br>• **Rail:** The South Eastern Main Line and Hastings Line provide high-speed access to London, while the Medway Valley Line links Maidstone, Tonbridge and Strood. Stations such as Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and West Malling handle some of the highest passenger volumes in Kent. |

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| | • **Air and International:** The area has direct road and rail access to Gatwick Airport, underpinning employment and business links, while the M20 corridor provides routes to Channel ports and Eurotunnel via Ashford.<br>• **Sevenoaks**: Well connected, with the M25 running in multiple directions through the area. The Southeastern main line provides direct rail links to London.<br>• **Tunbridge Wells**: The district has no major highways running through it, though it benefits from good rail connections to London via the Southeastern line. A high proportion of residents work from home.<br>• **Tonbridge & Malling**: Strong transport links via the M20 and M26, which run east to west through the district. The Southeastern rail network connects Tonbridge and West Malling to London and surrounding areas. |
| **East Kent** | East Kent benefits from a multi-modal transport network that supports both local mobility and international connectivity.<br>• **Road Network:** The A2/M2 corridor, A256 East Kent Access Road and M20/A20 corridor are the main arteries linking coastal towns with London and the Midlands. These routes provide direct access to the Port of Dover and Channel Tunnel, facilitating the movement of freight and workers across the sub-region. Planned upgrades at Brenley Corner, Dover TAP and junction improvements near Folkestone will enhance efficiency and reduce congestion.<br>• **Rail:** The High Speed 1 (HS1) network connects Canterbury, Folkestone and Thanet directly to London St Pancras, while the Chatham Main Line, Ashford–Ramsgate Line, and Dover–Canterbury–London routes support strong intra-Kent links. Continued investment in station accessibility and service frequency is key to supporting growth in commuter and leisure travel.<br>• **Ports and International Access:** The Port of Dover and Channel Tunnel handle the vast majority of UK–EU freight and significant passenger volumes. These assets also generate local employment and business-travel activity that radiates throughout East Kent's economy.<br>• **Active and Sustainable Transport:** The region is developing comprehensive walking and cycling networks, including the Coastal Path, Canterbury Green Loop, and Folkestone–Hythe–Dover Cycle Spine, complemented by expanded electric-vehicle infrastructure and zero-emission bus corridors.<br>• **Canterbury**: The Thanet Way runs east to west through the district, linking to the M2. Rural areas have good road access into Canterbury, and the Southeastern rail line provides direct connections to London. |

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| | • **Dover**: Most routes converge into Dover, though wider regional connectivity is more limited. The Southeastern and Chatham main lines offer direct rail services to London.<br>• **Thanet**: Canterbury Road provides the main route into Ramsgate and other key towns. The area is served by the Southeastern rail network, which offers direct links to London and operates a major train depot connecting central, southern, and northern routes. |
| **Mid Kent** | Mid Kent benefits from some of Kent's most important strategic transport infrastructure:<br>• **M20/A20 corridor** – the backbone of Kent's motorway network linking London to the Channel Tunnel and the coast, supporting freight, logistics, and business investment.<br>• **High Speed 1 (HS1)** – with stations at Ashford International and Maidstone West (via domestic links), connecting local residents to London St Pancras in under 40 minutes and to continental Europe via Eurostar.<br>• **Ashford International Station** – a regional gateway for trade, commuting, and tourism, providing multimodal interchange and extensive development potential in surrounding zones. With the potential for further enhancement should European travel open from the station.<br>• **Junction 8 (Maidstone) and Junction 10a (Ashford)** – recent upgrades improve access to key employment sites such as the Kent Medical Campus, Eclipse Park, and Ashford's Commercial Quarter.<br>• **South Eastern Mainline and Medway Valley Line** – enhancing internal Kent connectivity between Maidstone, Tonbridge, and Strood.<br>• **Future infrastructure priorities** - include dualling of the A249, improved east–west connectivity between the A21 and A249 corridors, and digital infrastructure investment to enable smart mobility and business growth.<br>• **Maidstone**: The M20 runs east to west through the district, but some regional areas remain less well connected. Three railway stations provide direct services to London<br>• **Ashford**: The district is served by the M20 motorway and benefits from high-speed rail connections linking Kent with London and beyond. |

## Travel to work patterns across Kent

The figure below shows the distribution of workers across Kent, along with commuting flows into and out of these areas.

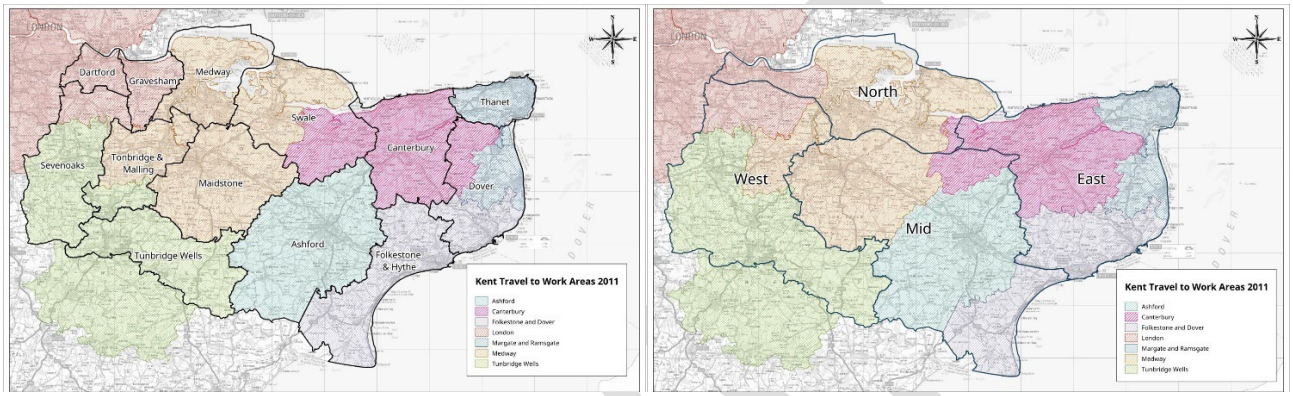
Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) are defined as geographic zones where at least 75% of residents work within the same area and at least 75% of workers also live there.

These areas represent self-contained local labour markets with boundaries statistically designed to reflect real-world commuting patterns.

The eastern Kent area has a greater local catchment of employees, with the majority of people working within 5km of their home.

In contrast, western Kent residents tend to travel, reflecting those who work locally in addition to those who travel slightly further to work in London.

***Figure 13: Map of travel to work areas against current council boundaries and Option 4D unitary boundaries***




**Functional geographies and travel to work areas**

**North:** Residents in North Kent generally commute into London. Swanley, currently part of Sevenoaks, has stronger commuting and health-care ties with Dartford and Gravesham in North Kent.

**Mid:** The river Medway acts as a natural border, shaping how people travel. Movements around Faversham show a pattern that is eastward-towards Canterbury-rather than being oriented toward the North or Mid Kent districts.

**West:** While there is some commuting northwards into Medway, most work and services usage is more locally contained, especially centred on Tunbridge Wells and neighbouring districts.

**East**: This area reflects travel-to-work and service usage patterns that include Faversham being part of East Kent. Also, community and economic flows tie areas such as the Dover-Folkestone-Thanet corridor together tightly.

The observed travel patterns show alignment with Option 4D. A summary of how each proposed unitary council corresponds with existing TTWAs is provided in the table below.

***Table 11:*** *Overview of travel to work across unitary areas*[28]

| Proposed Council | Current council areas | Key travel patterns and alignment to travel to work data |
|---|---|---|
| **North Kent** | Medway (98%), Gravesham (87%), Swale (81%), Dartford (78%), small parts of Tonbridge and Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%) | • North Kent, particularly Dartford and Gravesham, exhibits strong outward commuting flows to London and surrounding counties like Essex.<br>• Dartford stands out as a key London commuter hub, with a significantly higher proportion of residents travelling to work by train compared to the wider Kent area. Gravesham also has a strong level of train use among its workforce, reflecting its close connection to London.<br>• In contrast, Medway is more self-contained, with over half driving to work and only a marginal proportion commuting by train. Despite being well-connected, many Medway residents both live and work locally.<br>• The future Lower Thames Crossing in Gravesham will further opportunities for inward and outward commuting between North Kent and Essex |
| **West Kent** | Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling (61%), Dartford (22%), Gravesham (13%), Medway (2%) | • Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells show characteristics of a wealthier commuter belt, where over 42% of residents work mainly from home, significantly higher than the Kent average (31.1%) (note – this was from 2021 census data so COVID will impact figures).<br>• Train usage is also relatively high: Sevenoaks has 5.4% train commuters and Tunbridge Wells around 3%. |
| **East Kent** | Canterbury, Dover, Thanet, Folkestone and Hythe (64%), Swale (Faversham area 17%) | • East Kent shows lower reliance on rail and higher proportions of people walking or driving to work, indicating more localised employment or limited public transport options.<br>• In Canterbury, 10.8% of people walk to work, the highest in Kent, reflecting its compact city layout and university economy. Rail usage remains modest (2.3%) compared to other areas.<br>• Dover and Thanet have high car dependency (both around 50%) and relatively low train usage (~2.0–2.4%), suggesting fewer commuting options or jobs located closer to home. Thanet, with 3.5% using buses, has the highest bus usage in Kent, possibly reflecting socio-economic factors or transport access challenges and |

[28] https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-kent/economy-and-employment-data/kents-workforce

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | good connectivity between the main urban centres and out of town shopping centre in the district. |
| **Mid Kent** | Ashford, Maidstone (98%), Folkestone and Hythe (36%), Tonbridge and Malling (36%), Swale (3%) | • Mid Kent is marked by high car dependency, especially in Ashford (around half of residents). This reflects limited public transport access or jobs distributed across rural and suburban areas.<br>• Ashford, however, benefits from HS1 rail links, which likely contribute to ~2.5% train usage. Folkestone & Hythe shows similar patterns, although with more walking commuters, possibly linked to a denser urban core.<br>• Ashford's connectivity by major road and rail sets it as an important growth centre, linking the opportunities of the north Kent coast to the south Kent coast<br>• Car use is substantial in Maidstone (around half of residents use cars to travel to work). |

**Why the four-council model delivers on housing and homelessness**

**Local Government Reorganisation** presents an opportunity to think differently and take a more strategic, joined-up approach that looks beyond the constraints of existing district boundaries. It provides the chance to learn from areas with the strongest track records in delivery and to embed best practice across the new councils.

The four new councils will:

- Be ideally positioned to **coordinate spatial planning across wider geographies**, ensuring that growth is both deliverable and underpinned by the infrastructure residents expect.
- Offer a **stronger platform for integrated place-shaping and regional collaboration**, enabling a balanced distribution of housing and infrastructure investment across the area.
- **Reflect local housing markets** while maintaining sufficient scale to plan strategically and negotiate effectively with government, developers, and key partners to respond to distinct community needs.
- **Maintain focus and responsiveness**, avoiding the dilution that can occur within overly large geographies.
- **Prevent fragmentation risks** associated with a greater number of smaller councils that may lack the capacity to manage housing pipelines or respond effectively to homelessness.
- **Collaborate on shared delivery challenges**, such as nutrient neutrality, rather than consolidating all risks within a single larger authority.
- Ensure that **spatial planning constraints are distributed effectively** across the four areas, allowing current and future housing growth needs to be met sustainably

**Complementary housing profiles and challenges in the four-unitary model**

***Table 12:*** *Housing and homelessness metrics for 4 unitary model option*

| Metric | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024)[29]** | 6 | 2 | 6 | 4 |
| **Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement (%)[30]** | 83% | 68% | 79% | 120% |

The 4D model provides a balanced and locally responsive framework for future housing and homelessness strategy. By aligning new councils with functional housing markets and infrastructure corridors, it enables better planning, delivery, and prevention, supported by stronger local accountability and economies of scale.

The four proposed councils mirror Kent's distinct housing market geographies, enabling evidence-based planning and delivery that reflects real patterns of need and demand:

- **North Kent** – urban regeneration and affordable housing linked to the Thames Gateway and Medway Towns, integrating brownfield reuse with major growth corridors.
- **Mid Kent** – balanced rural and urban markets (Maidstone, Ashford, Tonbridge) focused on sustainable extensions, new settlements, and unlocking land viability.
- **East Kent** – coastal regeneration and heritage towns (Canterbury, Dover, Thanet) prioritising quality, affordability, and renewal of ageing housing stock.
- **West Kent** – rural and commuter areas (Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells) addressing affordability and small-scale, high-quality developments.

These coherent housing market areas allow each authority to prepare a single Local Plan covering both strategic and local policies, while the four councils will coordinate county-wide supply and infrastructure through a pan-Kent framework.

Under the current two-tier system, housing policy and delivery are split between districts (planning and homelessness) and the county (infrastructure and social care). Option 4D integrates these responsibilities within a single authority, providing:

- Joined-up planning, housing, and social care functions, improving pathways for vulnerable residents and preventing homelessness.
- Stronger local delivery capacity, through unified housing, regeneration, and environmental services teams.
- Consistent application of policy tools (affordable housing quotas, Section 106, infrastructure funding) across coherent economic areas.

[29] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[30] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK

This integration removes duplication, accelerates decision-making, and ensures that housing and homelessness strategies are fully aligned with health, education, and transport planning. Each council will have the scale and resources to address both prevention and relief effectively, supported by partnerships with voluntary and faith organisations. The 4D model will allow:

- Early-intervention approaches that connect homelessness prevention with adult and children's social care, public health, and debt advice.
- Co-ordinated rough-sleeping strategies across Kent's towns and coastal areas, ensuring outreach and accommodation are not fragmented by district boundaries.
- Specialist housing pathways for care leavers, people fleeing domestic abuse, and those with complex health needs—linked to Integrated Care Board structures.
- Shared temporary and supported housing provision, allowing efficiencies through regional procurement and management across the four councils.

By bringing together housing supply, support, and prevention functions, the 4D model promotes a genuinely person-centred system that reduces crisis demand and supports independence.

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Each council will have a balanced portfolio of development sites, enabling delivery of both market and affordable housing at scale. Unified councils can better secure infrastructure funding (e.g. Housing Infrastructure Fund, Brownfield Land Release Fund) and coordinate investment with Homes England.

**The Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP)**

The SHIP project seeks to increase the standards of support, accommodation and value for money in supported accommodation. This has been achieved so far through improved property inspections, reviews of support provided by services, additional scrutiny of new and existing Housing Benefits claims and joint working with commissioning teams to ensure value for money.

The SHIP team is a multi-disciplinary team set up to drive up the standards of Supported Accommodation and to find examples of best practice within the sector, as well as supporting providers of supported accommodation, to be ready ahead of incoming licencing regulations for supported housing schemes.

Medway SHIP currently covers the following areas:

- Medway
- Swale
- Maidstone
- Tunbridge Wells

The team focus on several core activities, including, but not limited to:

- Inspections of properties
- Reviews of the support provided to residents (including interviewing residents)
- Enhanced audit of Housing Benefit claims
- Triaging new provisions in the area

The team work closely with Welfare benefit teams, private sector housing, adult social care commissioning teams and housing options across the Medway and Mid Kent area. Key learning from this project has been presented nationally and will be used to shape implementation of the new Supported Housing Act This provides an example of where this could be scaled up across the County through the 4D Unitary model and through the opportunities presented through devolution.

**Case Study: Sunrise Foyer – Medway Council, MHS Homes and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities**

MHS Homes owned and managed a former sheltered housing property in Luton, near Gillingham that was identified as no longer being fit for purpose. This resulted in existing residents being decanted to alternative social housing in Medway.

The building fell into disrepair and became at hotspot for local anti-social behaviour. Following a strategic review of young person's accommodation, the Sunrise Foyer project was born.

MHS Homes remodelled the scheme to create a 30 bed space foyer with two fully adapted studio flats. In October 2023 Medway Council applied to the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (**DLUHC**) for Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) funding to deliver a programme to support vulnerable young people (age 18-25) at risk of or experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping in Medway.

Medway Council were successful in their bid and awarded £851,771 towards the revenue expenditure of the project over four years (2024-2028). The revenue funding has been provided to MHS Homes (via a commissioning process) to run the Sunrise Foyer to accommodation 30 young people and support from six Support Officers.

Since January 2025, MHS have received over 80 referrals from Medway, and all bed spaces have been accepted into the scheme. Some people entered the scheme after spending time in Medway's Winter shelter, others as a result of joint working between the Housing Options Team and Medway's Transitions Team who support children who are transitioning from Children's social care to adult's social care.

The enhanced number of support officers mean that the scheme is able to work with young people who are often considered "too high needs" for other general needs supported Housing in Medway. Medway's Transitions team also work closely with Sunrise Foyer to provide additional support to shared residents who are now living at the foyer**.**

Local Government Reorganisation and specifically the 4D option provides an opportunity for greater integrated and partnership working in this space to deliver significant impact.

# Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure

**Criteria 1d.** Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

**Option 4d's strategically aligned councils will streamline decision-making, clarify responsibilities, and strengthen democratic accountability. Consistent with the principle of placing residents the centre of local government, it prioritises democracy, equity and fairness through strong and even councillor-electorate ratios.**

## Current electoral arrangements

As set out in the table below there are currently a total of 658 councillors across Kent, including 81 county councillors, 518 district councillors and 59 unitary councillors in Medway.

Kent County Council is divided into 72 electoral divisions with 63 single-member divisions and nine two-member divisions.

Councillor to electorate ratios vary across Kent, but the combined ratio is 1:2,102.

| Council | District/ unitary councillors | County councillors | Total councillors | Electorate | Electorate per councillor | Divisions | Wards |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Medway** | 59 | N/A | 59 | 206,567 | 3,501* | N/A | 24 |
| **Ashford** | 47 | 7 | 54 | 100,660 | 1,864 | 7 | 39 |
| **Canterbury** | 39 | 8 | 47 | 111,160 | 2,365 | 8 | 21 |
| **Dartford** | 42 | 6 | 48 | 86,560 | 1,803 | 6 | 20 |
| **Dover** | 32 | 7 | 39 | 88,820 | 2,277 | 5 | 17 |
| **Folkestone and Hythe** | 30 | 6 | 36 | 84,940 | 2,359 | 6 | 13 |
| **Gravesham** | 39 | 5 | 44 | 77,240 | 1,755 | 3 | 17 |
| **Maidstone** | 49 | 9 | 58 | 133,960 | 2,310 | 8 | 22 |
| **Sevenoaks** | 54 | 6 | 60 | 90,200 | 1,503 | 6 | 26 |
| **Swale** | 47 | 7 | 54 | 111,460 | 2,064 | 6 | 24 |
| **Thanet** | 56 | 7 | 63 | 104,500 | 1,659 | 5 | 23 |
| **Tonbridge and Malling** | 44 | 7 | 51 | 100,240 | 1,965 | 6 | 19 |
| **Tunbridge Wells** | 39 | 6 | 45 | 87,340 | 1,941 | 6 | 14 |
| **Total** | **577** | **81** | **658** | 1,383,647 | 2,103 | **72** | **279** |

**As a unitary authority, Medway has a different governance structure, explaining its higher ratio than other areas across Kent*

### What we know about elections to new councils

Elections to shadow authorities will take place in May 2027.

The Boundary Commission (LGBCE) recommends using existing boundaries, e.g. divisions or wards, as building blocks for these first elections but the guidance is to focus on the number of councillors rather than drawing proposed electoral maps at this stage.

**As a unitary authority, Medway has a different governance structure, explaining its higher ratio than other areas across Kent*

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Between May 2027 and next elections in May 2032, there will be a review of electoral boundaries and new arrangements put in place.

We understand LGBCE's preference is to avoid significant changes in councillor numbers so arrangements for 2027 should align closely to expectations of councillor numbers from 2032 onwards.

### Reference points for councillor ratios

Set out below are some examples of councillor-to-electorate ratios for newly-formed unitary authorities in recent years, with a focus on larger authorities which are more relevant for comparison.

| Council | Established | Councillors | Electorate | Electorate per councillor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dorset** | 2019 | 82 | 297,726 | 3,631 |
| **Buckinghamshire** | 2020 | 97 | 420,610 | 4,336 |
| **North Northamptonshire** | 2021 | 68 | 263,915 | 3,881 |
| **West Northamptonshire** | 2021 | 76 | 307,611 | 4,048 |
| **Somerset** | 2023 | 110 | 446,698 | 4,061 |
| **North Yorkshire** | 2023 | 90 | 478,539 | 5,317 |

## Proposed councillor numbers for Option 4D

In calculating the proposed number of councillors for each new council, we have considered:

1. An appropriate electorate to councillor ratio in line with MHCLG guidance
2. Potential means of using current electoral boundaries for elections to shadow authorities in May 2027

Using the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance, Medway's approach has focused on three core areas:

1. **Strategic leadership** – creating strategic direction, managing the business of the council and making decisions effectively
2. **Accountability** – ensuring scrutiny, supporting the regulatory functions of the authority, and representation on outside bodies and partnerships
3. **Community leadership** – ensuring representation and engagement with local people and communities

### Strategic Leadership

A base of up to 12 members has been allocated to form the executive, providing strategic leadership and long-term direction for the authority. These members will manage the business of the council, oversee decision-making, and ensure governance of service provision. The executive structure supports clear accountability and aligns with LGBCE guidance on effective governance.

### Accountability

A further 40 members have been assigned to provide representation across up to four scrutiny committees, these may also cover regulatory functions (planning and licensing), and partnership engagement but there will be a wider scope of councillors who could deliver these functions. This ensures robust oversight and compliance with statutory responsibilities.

### Community leadership

Additional considerations are required to determine a sustainable level of community representation. From the base of 52 members, the individual characteristics of each of the four areas' needs have been considered. Using the overall electorate, levels of deprivation, and urban-rural mix. These measures are being used as proxies for caseload demand to ensure member workloads are manageable.

*Electorate*

The electorate for the proposed councils was used to determine the spread of the electorate across the whole of Kent and Medway. Providing an indicator for the spread of councillors across the region.

*Adjustments for Deprivation*

Additional weighting was applied to areas with higher levels of deprivation, recognising the increased casework and community engagement demands. North and East have the highest deprivation, Mid moderate, and West the lowest.

*Urban–Rural Mix*

Consideration was given to the geographic characteristics of each area. North and East have higher urban concentrations, while Mid and West are more rural. This influences councillor workloads and support requirements.

***Table 13:*** *Calculating proposed councillor numbers per council*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Electorate*** | 432,542 | 272,349 | 377,969 | 300,787 | 1,383,647 |
| **Proposed number of councillors** | 91 | 65 | 85 | 71 | 312 |
| **Electorate to councillor ratio** | 4,753 | 4,190 | 4,447 | 4,236 | 4,434 (average) |

* Electorate figures source: data provided by Kent County Council, based on governance petition verification number (February 2025) and Medway Council electorate (February 2025)

The proposed councillor numbers reflect a balanced approach, considering strategic leadership requirements, committee representation, electoral equality, socio-economic factors, and urban–rural dynamics. This ensures effective governance, accountability, and community engagement across all four councils.

### Caveats on proposed councillor numbers

Once the geographies are agreed, the constituent councils of each area will prepare and agree what is required for first elections to each council.

**Efficient and locally focused democratic arrangements**

Option 4D establishes a new democratic framework designed to enhance local accountability and improve efficiency. By aligning functions within strategically defined councils, the model simplifies governance structures, reduces duplication, avoids long decision chains, and ensures decision-making powers are exercised at the most appropriate level to deliver effective and transparent leadership and prevent ‘organisational remoteness’.

Under this approach, each council will hold direct responsibility for all local services in its area. This clear line of accountability will enable residents to better understand how and where decisions are made, reinforcing trust and democratic legitimacy.

The 4D option promotes efficient, digitally enabled governance designed around transparency, accessibility, and value for money. Unified digital platforms will allow residents to access council information, participate in consultations, and complete transactions online. Consolidated scrutiny and audit functions will strengthen accountability while avoiding duplication. To strengthen neighbourhood and community engagement, local democratic structures such as parish and town councils, neighbourhood area committees, or other local forums can be established or enhanced. This ensures local communities continue to have a strong voice and direct influence in decision-making. Medway already has a citizens panel, rural liaison board and resident forums, however the 4D option will present greater opportunities to codesign services in consultation with residents and communities.

This model places democracy and fairness at its core, ensuring that governance arrangements remain resident-focused while delivering greater efficiency and value for money. By streamlining decision-making and clarifying responsibilities, Option 4D provides a clear, accountable, and sustainable foundation for local democratic leadership. Each local authority will have between 65 and 91 councillors, maintaining strong representation while achieving greater proportional efficiency an average ratio of roughly 1 councillor per 4,000–4,750 residents. This is consistent with national guidance from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. The 4D model will retain and enhance local representation through the following democratic arrangements:

- Neighbourhood Area Committees or Local Boards within each authority will make decisions on neighbourhood priorities—such as planning, public realm, and community investment—retaining local identity and responsiveness.

- Town and Parish Councils will have expanded roles in neighbourhood planning, service delivery, and local engagement.

- Community engagement frameworks will ensure that residents, businesses, and voluntary groups have direct input into local strategies and budget priorities.

This combination of strategic unitary governance and devolved community mechanisms ensures that decision-making is both locally anchored and strategically coherent.

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# **Criteria 2:** Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience


| | |
|---|---|
| **Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency** | **Criteria 2a and 2b** |
| **Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies** | **Criteria 2c** |
| **Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation** | **Criteria 2d** |
| **Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government** | **Criteria 2e** |


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# Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency

**Criteria 2a.** As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.

**Criteria 2b.** There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.

**Option 4D establishes four well-aligned unitaries, bringing together areas with similar economic strategies, service delivery needs, and local priorities to support long-term sustainability and efficiency gains. The unitary sizes support optimal operational efficiency, providing sufficient scale to realise economies of scale, establish robust tax bases, and ensure manageable administrative areas. This strategy adopts a forward-thinking approach, establishing a strong foundation for future growth and enabling integrated, effective service provision tailored to local needs. Population sizes provide room for growth, ensuring the stability, operational resilience, and efficient delivery of services for the people of Kent in the years ahead.**

## Government guidance on population size

Population size can be used as a proxy for the size and scale of councils.

Government has outlined a population size of 500,000 or more as a guiding principle, not a hard target.

There is recognition there should be flexibility and all proposals, regardless of the population size being proposed, should set out the rationale clearly.

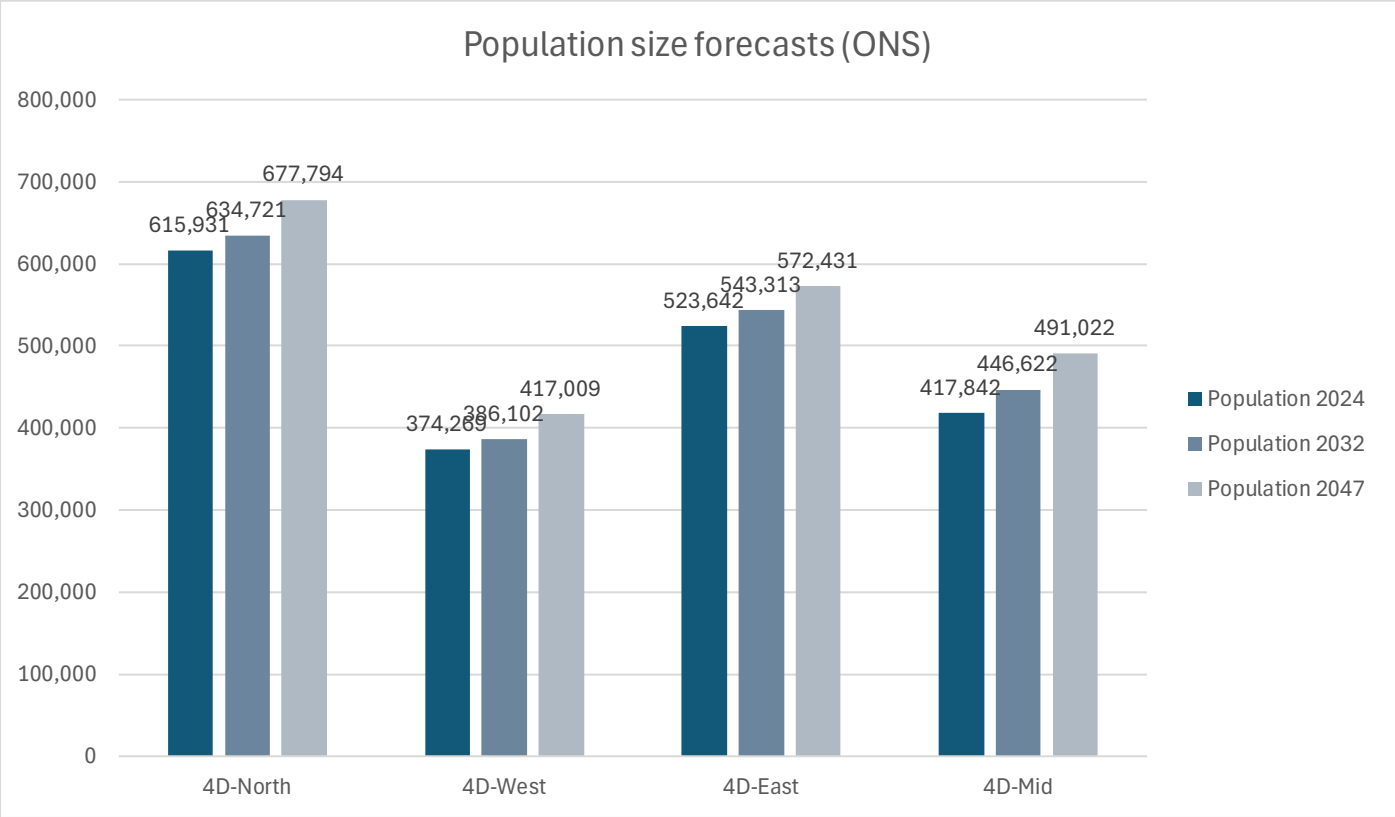
All councils across Kent agree that, given the implementation complexity of any LGR, new local government structures should be in place for generations to come.

As a result, projected future populations as well as current population sizes are considered for each proposed council.

### Populations and forward projections

Set out below are population numbers and growth projections for the four proposed councils under Option 4D.

***Figure 14: Population size forecasts***




**The argument for 4D: Balanced populations with room for growth**

Under Option 4D, all four councils will have between 374k - 616k starting population.

Option 4D stands out for its balanced population densities and effective alignment with Kent's settlement patterns. It creates regions that combine suitable size, population distribution, and strong local provision in a community-focused framework. The councils are large enough to deliver services efficiently and withstand financial shock, yet remain firmly focused on local needs. As per the 2025 National Audit Office report on Local Government financial sustainability, *"For reform to support sustainability, there must be clear local accountability for service and financial performance of each local authority".* By departing from the status quo, option 4D offers the optimal solution for balancing size, meeting local requirements, and ensuring long term efficiency and managing future service demands and challenges.

This approach needs to ensure effective local accountability for the service and financial performance of each local authority

# Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies

**Criteria 2c.** Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.

**Option 4D takes a radical approach to achieve long term financial sustainability. Each authority has a robust tax base and economic capacity. Population and economic capacity are distributed in a manner that aligns with the local identities, economic strategies and existing partnerships, supporting effective and efficient delivery of core services and withstanding financial shocks.**

## Collaborative working on finance across Kent councils

All 14 S151 officers are members of the long-standing Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG).

In relation to LGR, it has been responsible for the following key activities:

- developing working relationships and shared understanding of finances, which will be a key enabler of successful LGR;
- informing a shared financial baseline; and
- reviewing and collectively updating assumptions behind a base case model for inclusion in proposals to government.

## Approach to modelling the financial impact of LGR

Refer to ***Appendix 2: Financial modelling*** for more detailed description of assumptions, approach and results of the financial modelling.

Finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have reviewed and informed the financial modelling to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to government.

The financial model aims to:
- quantify the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options; and
- compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings, costs and payback.

The financial model estimates savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs calculated with reference to a series of benchmarked LGR business cases, the characteristics of the options being put forward and the characteristics of local government in Kent.

## Assumptions in financial modelling

While being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all KFOG agrees LGR does not provide the solution combating the scale of the financial challenge being faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The KFOG has agreed the following position:

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The

scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.

- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be paid for.
- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new councils may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new councils.

**Financial modelling results**

The results of the financial modelling are shown below.

Option 4D will have one off implementation costs of £135.9m, recurring disaggregation costs of between £32.9m and £48.6m and recurring reorganisation savings of £67.5m. This suggests a phased payback period of between 7.9 and 14.5 years. However, there is no compelling evidence to support the model's assumption that disaggregating the upper tier county service into a number of councils has a material impact on the cost of care packages for adults and children in receipt of social care. Indeed, as the only existing unitary council in the Kent and Medway area, our experience demonstrates that commissioning care packages across a smaller geographical area and a population more aligned to the Government's view of the optimal population size for a unitary authority allows it to better work with the local care market and achieves greater efficiencies. If we were to take a prudent approach and assume neither an increase nor decrease in the cost of commissioned care packages, the payback period for Option 4D reduces to 7.9 years.

***Table 14:*** *Financial modelling summary results*

| LGR option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Option 4D** | (135.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) – (48.6) | 34.6 – 18.9 | 7.9 – 14.5 years |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

**Payback period**

***Figure 15: Payback period***

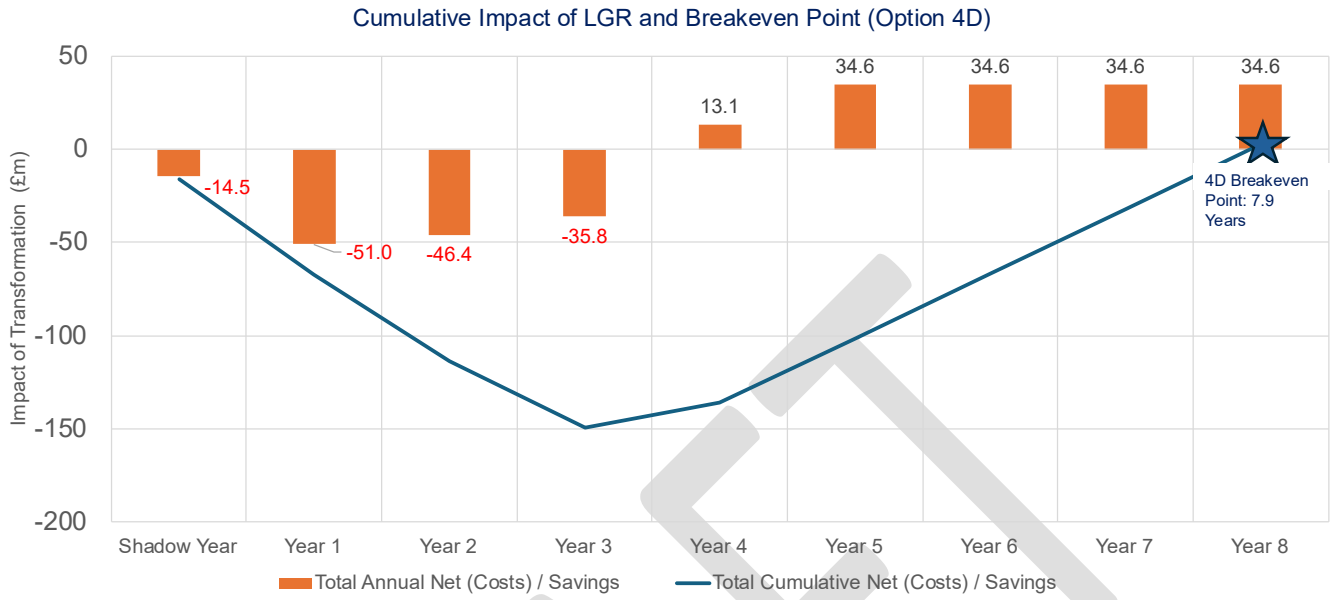



*Chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest end of the range

As shown in the chart above, if implemented well, Option 4D is estimated to pay back the early investment over 7.9 years. The profile of costs and benefits have been developed collaboratively across all LGR options.

**Savings and financial efficiency: the argument for Option 4D**

Transitioning from 14 to just four local councils, will inevitably deliver ongoing savings in terms of leaner management structures and other economies of scale. It is acknowledged that where there are currently only two upper tier authorities, under these proposals there would be an increase in the cost of managing social care and other upper tier functions, however national benchmarking has demonstrated that unitary authorities typically have lower per capita spend and lower average unit costs for both children's and adult commissioned social care services. Medway Council is an example of this.

# Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation

**Criteria 2d.** Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets and from the flexible use of capital receipts to support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

**Although transition costs resulting from local government reorganisation may increase expenditure in the short term, the opportunity for radical public service reform in a four unitary model which meets the Government's optimum characteristics, means greater scope to achieve long term financial sustainability.**

## A complex transition regardless of the option selected

LGR is inherently complex, and the size and number of councils in Kent means the Kent LGR programme will be one of the most complex implementations nationally, regardless of the option selected.

This has the potential to impact public service delivery in the short term if transition is not managed effectively.

The 14 councils have made progress on transition planning, including considerations of quick wins and capturing of key joint actions. Refer to 'Section 6: Implementation Plan' for further details.

### Transition: the argument for option 4D

Medway Council and other unitary councils have demonstrated that commissioning and delivering services at a more local level, allows commissioners to better understand and work with the provider market to reduce unit costs and provide better services.

In most cases, the transition from 14 authorities to just four will deliver greater efficiencies in terms of strategic support services and in the management of lower tier services. Rationalisation of property and ICT systems should also deliver savings.

## Opportunities for transformation

All councils across Kent have taken steps to modernise, including more effective use of data and introducing digital approaches to service delivery.

This transformation activity has already improved outcomes and enabled cost savings.

However, all councils recognise LGR presents an opportunity to transform services and ways of working more fundamentally.

On 17 September 2025, Kent councils met to discuss the future vision for Kent.

As part of these discussions, the below key ambitions for service transformation were captured:

1. Clear focus for transformation on the needs of residents.
2. Establish a consistent, whole-council approach and culture across services, breaking down silos and joining up the experience for residents accessing multiple services.

3. Digitise and automate resident journeys for more transactional services, while maintaining alternative routes for those who need them.
4. Increase focus on prevention and a more holistic person-centred approach, especially for those with more complex needs (see Criteria 3: Public service reform).

To enable this transformation the below enablers were discussed:

- continual focus on cultural change and effective communications;
- joining up key data sources across services to support seamless working across services, better understand resident needs and achieve better, more proactive decision-making;
- meaningful transformation strategies and wider approach to public service reform in advance of Day 1, informing meaningful corporate plans with clear ambitions and actions; and
- linking transformation to a shared Kent-wide approach to public service reform (see Criteria 3).

Specific transformation plans, including funding arrangements for investment will need to be agreed as part of the budget-setting process and Medium Term Financial Strategy for each new council.

Across Kent, capital receipts are expected to support this to some extent.

However, investment in transformation will be on the basis it delivers cost savings and is therefore self-funding over the medium to long term.

**Transformation: the argument for 4D**

The well thought out geographies proposed in the 4D model align with existing communities and follow Kent's natural transport and travel routes. They will provide significant scope to transform service delivery and increased opportunities for service efficiencies. For example, they will allow for a more coherent approach to housing strategy across the region.

# Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government

**Criteria 2e.** For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.

## The Kent financial context

None of the 14 councils in Kent are in Best Value intervention or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support.

However, Medway Council has been granted a capitalisation direction under the government's Exceptional Financial Support.

There is collective concern regarding the financial sustainability of the current system, particularly given rising demand in adult social care and children's services, rising costs and increasing levels of debt.

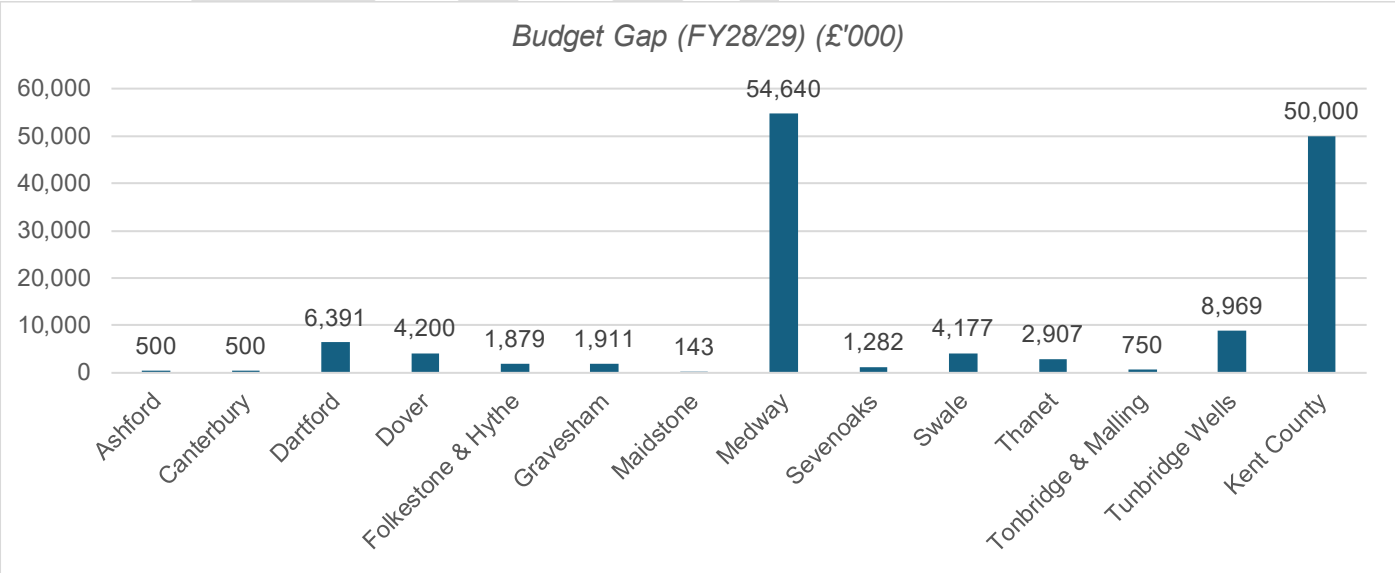
The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery across county and districts.

## Existing budget challenges

The forecast total gross budget gap, including assumed funding from reserves, for all councils by 2028/29 is £138.2m, which includes £54.6m within Medway and £50.0m within Kent County Council.

These figures exclude consideration of the impact of Fair Funding 2.0.

***Figure 16:*** *Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£'000)*




All existing councils will continue to focus on delivering savings and managing their ongoing budget gaps regardless of LGR.

However, the starting point for all new councils is expected to be stretched, with ongoing need for savings to be identified.

***Table 15:*** *Projected budget position for new councils under Option 4D*

| Local Authority | Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£m) |
|---|---|
| North Kent | 79.4 |
| West Kent | 23.3 |
| East Kent | 23.1 |
| Mid Kent | 12.5 |
| **Total** | 138.2 |

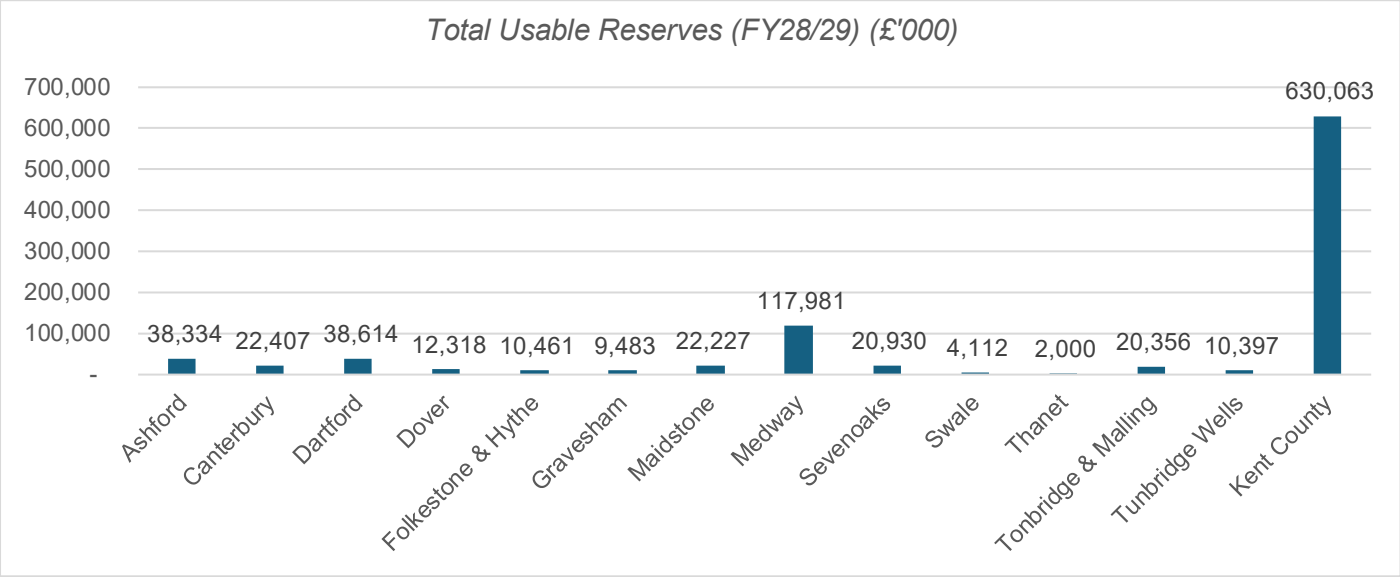
All councils report manageable budget gaps: Mid Kent demonstrates fiscal strength with a gap of £12.5m, while East and West Kent each have gaps of approximately £23m. North Kent faces a larger gap primarily due to Medway, which comprises 98% of the North unitary area. However, this is mitigated by Medway's substantial usable reserves—£118m, equating to 6.7 times the average reserve level among districts (£17.6m). Also, the formation of a new, larger North Kent council would enhance financial resilience and provide access to a broader revenue base, improving North Kent's capacity to absorb financial shocks at scale.

### Current reserves levels

Across Kent councils, Total Usable Reserves are forecast to be £959.7m.

This includes the full value of the Kent County Council's usable reserves of £630.1m.

***Figure 17:*** *Total Usable Reserves*




*Note – for all districts, this amount related to General Fund balance, Earmarked Reserves, Capital Receipts Reserve and Capital Grants Unapplied.*

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the new councils post reorganisation.

It will be the decision of each new council to determine how to use its resources to pay for the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

***Table 16:*** *Projected reserves levels under Option 4D*

| Local Authority | Total Usable Reserves (FY27/28) (£m) |
|---|---|
| North Kent | 359.1 |
| West Kent | 178.2 |
| East Kent | 215.0 |
| Mid Kent | 207.5 |
| **Total** | **959.7** |

All councils have healthy reserves levels above £178m and are all moderately balanced, in the range of £178m to £359m. The North Unitary holds a substantial reserve of £359 million, largely due to Medway's disproportionately high level of reserves.

### Existing council debt

The external debt position reported across all Kent councils is £1.7bn on a net revenue of £2.3bn with a total financing cost of £123.6m. 67% of the borrowing and 87% of net revenue and 87% of the financing cost is within Kent County Council and Medway.

The combined financing ratio across all Kent councils is 5.3%.

***Table 22:*** *Borrowing and financing costs across Kent councils*[31]

| Local Authority (£'000) (26/27) | General Fund Borrowing (External) | Financing cost | Net Revenue | Financing ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ashford | 95,375 | 402 | 9,009 | 4.5% |
| Canterbury | 120,358 | 5,417 | 31,800 | 17.0% |
| Dartford | - | 370 | 21,531 | 1.7% |
| Dover | 102,600 | 1,424 | 20,088 | 7.1% |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 53,000 | 2,628 | 35,504 | 7.4% |
| Gravesham | 101,955 | 2,777 | 25,693 | 10.8% |
| Maidstone | 65,000 | 4,183 | 27,945 | 15.0% |
| Medway | 442,468 | 21,731 | 481,631 | 4.5% |
| Sevenoaks | 13,934 | 1,040 | 21,868 | 4.8% |
| Swale | 13,000 | 2,802 | 31,400 | 8.9% |
| Thanet | 6,622 | 371 | 26,749 | 1.4% |
| Tonbridge & Malling | - | - | 27,346 | 0.0% |
| Tunbridge Wells | - | 529 | 21,535 | 2.5% |
| Kent County Council | 716,039 | 79,890 | 1,531,280 | 5.2% |
| **Total** | **1,730,351** | **123,573** | **2,313,379** | **5.3% (Average)** |

[31] Financial data return submitted by councils

**The projected debt position for new councils under Option 4D**

The councils' borrowing costs, net financing costs and net revenue have been combined and the County costs have been apportioned based on population data.

***Table 17:*** *Projected debt position for new councils*

| Local Authority | General Fund Borrowing (External) | Financing cost | Net Revenue (26/27) | Financing ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Kent | 761.3 | 51.8 | 1,024.7 | 5.1% |
| West Kent | 175.9 | 18.0 | 376.0 | 4.8% |
| East Kent | 460.0 | 31.0 | 521.9 | 5.9% |
| Mid Kent | 333.1 | 22.8 | 390.8 | 5.8% |
| **Total** | **1,730.4** | **123.6** | **2,313.4** | **5.3%** |

**Commentary on Balance**

North Kent holds both the highest borrowing requirement (£761.3 million) and highest net revenue (£1,024.7 million). Its relatively low financing ratio of 5.1% reflects an efficient debt servicing capacity. West Kent has the smallest borrowing (£175.9 million) and net revenue (£376.0 million), alongside the most favourable financing ratio at 4.8%, indicating a comparatively minimal debt burden. East Kent and Mid Kent present higher financing ratios of 5.9% and 5.8% respectively, suggesting relatively constrained revenue positions or less optimal financing terms. Although these ratios exceed those of North and West Kent, the range remains narrow, less than 1.1%, demonstrating consistent debt servicing capacity across all authorities.

**Four councils driving long term financial sustainability**

The establishment of four councils under Option 4D facilitates a more robust and efficient operational framework, enabling each council to address local priorities while achieving financial resilience. The sizes of the councils enable 4D to leverage economies of scale in shared services and procurement, while offering the flexibility for local service delivery.

Key financial indicators reflect a balanced distribution across the four councils:

- **Total GVA** spans from £12.4 billion to £16 billion, with West Kent recording the highest GVA per capita (£37,204), indicative of its strong economic base.
- **Council tax bases** are broadly similar, ranging between 151,000 and 197,000 Band D equivalents, with average Band D rates closely matched.
- **Retained business rates** and **general fund balances** vary. Notably, Mid Kent maintains the largest general fund balance (£73.9 million), providing a substantial safeguard against financial volatility.
- **Net revenue expenditure** ranges from £432 million to £748 million, with North Kent at the upper end, in keeping with its scale and economic activity.

Collectively, these metrics indicate that Option 4D delivers a well-balanced approach to financial sustainability, integrating local adaptability with adequate scale to optimise resource management.

***Table 18:*** *Key financial metrics for the 4D option*

| Metric | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total GVA (£ million) (2023)[32]** | 16,011 | 13,924 | 12,634 | 12,396 |
| **GVA per capita (£) (2023)[33]** | 25,995 | 37,204 | 24,127 | 29,666 |
| **Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (2025-26)[34]** | 197,265 | 150,602 | 180,623 | 151,161 |
| **Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes) (£) (2024-25)[35]** | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,907 |
| **Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[36]** | 123 | 81 | 82 | 78 |
| **General fund balance (£m)** | 35.92 | 26.40 | 35.00 | 73.90 |
| **Net revenue expenditure (£m)** | 748.03 | 432.12 | 609.80 | 483.81 |

[32] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[33] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[34] Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages
[35] Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages
[36] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK

# **Criteria 3:** Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Improving delivery of key services** | **Criteria 3a and 3c** |
| **Public service reform** | **Criteria 3b** |


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# Improving delivery of key services

**Criteria 3a.** Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.

**Criteria 3c.** Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

**Ensuring the delivery of high-quality, sustainable services – particularly in areas such as adult social care, children's services, SEND, homelessness, and wider public safety – stands at the heart of the future vision for local government in Kent.**

## Working together on the future of services

As part of the Kent LGR programme, the 14 councils have collectively agreed key service areas to explore in more detail through workshops, supplemented by additional discussions and data gathering.

Workshops were held in five key service areas, bringing together representation from across the councils of Kent and Medway to ensure multiple perspectives were shared.

These services were:

- Adult Social Care;
- Children's Services including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC);
- Housing and Homelessness;
- Highways Services; and
- Waste Services.

During these sessions, attendees considered the following:

- current service challenges;
- existing good practice and collaboration;
- future improvement opportunities shared across all LGR options; and
- opportunities and challenges specific to individual options where a proposal is being submitted to government.

In addition to the sessions held, colleagues from a wide range of services across Kent have had the opportunity to input to collective thinking on service-specific impacts through online forms with in excess of 125 responses.

There were a number of emerging themes and these were aligned with workshop discussions where the same themes were consistently identified.

We are continuing to engage with colleagues across the councils.

| Challenges of two tier working | How single tier working can improve performance and customer outcomes |
|---|---|

- **Service fragmentation:** Services split between county and district councils cause confusion over responsibilities, leading to resident frustration and delays.
- **Coordination and communication issues:** Lack of shared systems and contacts between tiers results in slow responses and missed opportunities.
- **Duplication of effort:** Overlapping services between councils waste resources and confuse residents with inconsistent messaging.
- **Strategic misalignment:** Differing priorities and leadership across tiers hinder cohesive planning and policy alignment.
- **Limited access to expertise and resources:** Smaller district teams often lack specialists and face challenges in recruitment and timely support.
- **Inconsistent service standards:** Variations in budgets and policies across districts lead to unequal service quality for residents.
- **Funding and commissioning challenges:** Fragmented funding and commissioning processes reduce flexibility and limit district influence over county decisions.

- **Consistent and integrated services**: Uniform standards and joined-up support for complex needs reduce disparities and improve outcomes for all residents.
- **Faster decision-making**: Simplified governance structures allow quicker, more coordinated responses and clearer responsibilities.
- **Efficiency gains**: Streamlined processes and reduced bureaucracy lead to cost savings and faster service delivery.
- **Strategic alignment**: Unified leadership and planning enable coherent strategies and better prioritisation across services.
- **Optimised resources**: Shared staffing and expertise increase flexibility, resilience, and effective demand management.
- **Enhanced data sharing**: Integrated systems improve planning, monitoring, and decision-making through better access to information.
- **Improved performance management**: Clear accountability and consistent use of key performance indicators (KPIs) enhance service monitoring and impact tracking.
- **Simplified customer access**: A single point of contact eliminates confusion, ensuring easier navigation and fewer misdirected queries.

Our shared view across Kent is that LGR must be the catalyst for fundamental reform in how we deliver our services, how we work with our partners and how we deliver for all communities.

From the engagement with services to date, it is clear there are opportunities to enhance service delivery by building on areas of good and innovative practice, alongside opportunities to operate differently post-LGR.

Initial discussions are the first steps in designing future service provision and we are committed to building on the momentum of our service specific workshops as we progress with reorganisation.

**Pan-Kent working**

There are functions and services which will be best delivered across Kent. This minimises the disruption from disaggregation but is driven by considering what the best geographic footprint and operating model for delivery of those services is.

A strategic authority across Kent and Medway provides a real opportunity to strengthen Kent as a whole and to focus the role of unitary authorities on their delivery role. The strategic authority will take a strategic role across Kent including:

- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

There are also services and organisations that operate across Kent that our approach to LGR would not disrupt including Adoption Partnership South East, Safeguarding Adults Board, elements of commissioning, Attendance Alliance for Kent and Medway, Kent Housing Group and Kent Resources partnership.

While not tying future councils into service delivery model decisions, we are supportive of partnership arrangements and other approaches that enables strategic functions, services and operations to be delivered across Kent where it is in the best interests of residents to do so.

### Adult Social Care and Children's Services spend data

During the Options Appraisal, analysis was carried out of the actual cost incurred by different councils for key county-wide services.

This was led by KCC and tested with finance officers across Kent.

It found:

- for all of the multi-council options being put forward there is significant misalignment between the costs of delivery and the funding provided for both adult social care and children's services, with some areas at more of a disadvantage than others.
- the impact of the Fair Funding Review has been considered and is expected to have some impact on funding allocation, but based on analysis to date, misalignment between costs and funding is expected to continue for any multi-council model.
- this disparity is important for all councils across Kent to be aware of and to take appropriate mitigating steps in LGR planning. The potential to share funding appropriately based on actual demand and costs is an opportunity for discussion.

### Funding and expenditure

***Table 19:*** *Total expenditure on Social Care*

| **Total Expenditure** *(based on 23/24 spending)*[37] | **North Kent** | **West Kent** | **East Kent** | **Mid Kent** |
|---|---|---|---|---|

[37] Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2023 to 2024 individual local authority data - outturn - GOV.UK

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Children's Social Care (£m)** | 140.27 | 31.21 | 82.28 | 44.33 |
| **Adult Social Care (£m)** | 185.64 | 109.14 | 214.76 | 124.46 |

## Adult Social Care (ASC)

Overview of current ASC delivery

Kent County Council and Medway Council deliver adult social care as part of their existing responsibilities with some place-based partnerships in place across the existing councils to bring integrated teams together to understand the needs of the population, agree plans to meet those needs and implement solutions.

Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board oversees strategic planning and resource allocation for health and care services.

Delivery is planned and co-ordinated on the footprint of four health and care partnerships which bring together health providers, social care, public health, district councils and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Partnership for Better Health.

Kent County Council and Medway Council have a history of working together to great effect, with examples including:

- The Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board: a multi-agency partnership consisting of statutory and voluntary partner organisations, working together to keep adults at risk of abuse or neglect safe.
- The Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit (VRU): a partnership between the police, councils, health service providers and other key agencies to deliver a reduction in violence the county.

Evidence of shared posts demonstrates how working together across councils can build resilience, provide flexibility, offer value for money and deliver good outcomes.

***Case study – Joint Commissioning Post – Learning Disability and Autism***

The Kent and Medway Learning Disability and Autism Delivery Partnership was formed in January 2022.

It was established after a review of previous commissioning and alliance arrangements highlighted the need for a new whole-system approach.

This approach aims to improve health outcomes and maximise choice, control, independence and human rights for citizens with learning disabilities, autism or both.

In September 2023, NHS Kent and Medway and Kent County Council formed a legal partnership to jointly plan and commission services for neurodivergent citizens.

This Partnership for Neurodiversity Agreement allows for delegated functions under section 75 of the NHS Act (2006) if deemed necessary.

This agreement is further supported by a memorandum of understanding between Kent County Council, representing the partnership, and Medway Council, which aims to explore a tripartite

agreement and facilitate discussions on resources for neurodivergent individuals in Kent and Medway.

The System Programme Lead is a pivotal role established in August 2022, focusing on senior system leadership and comprehensive programme management.

This position is instrumental in fostering collaborative improvement, working with various partners to design and implement projects aimed at enhancing the health, wellbeing and life chances of individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people across Kent and Medway.

Effective and sustainable delivery of Kent and Medway's Learning Disability and Autism programme is ensured through collaboration and whole-system leadership, underpinned by securing commitment from essential stakeholders across health, social care and the third sector.

**LGR provides the opportunity to consider strategically how shared services and posts across the future councils can enhance delivery.**

Key ASC delivery challenges

CQC inspections in 23/24 across Kent and Medway rated both as Requires Improvement.

The strengths and areas for improvement included:

- for Kent County Council strengths included co-production and lived experience, improved hospital discharge, high demand management and staff development. Areas of focus included communications and information, transitions, delays in support and staff morale.
- Medway Council strengths included positive staff interactions, person-centred support, effective transitions and partnership working. Areas of focus included accessibility of information waiting times, service gaps and staffing challenges.

Given the differences highlighted there is an opportunity for KCC and Medway ASC teams to share learning and areas of good practice in preparation for LGR.

Additional challenges include:

- **Demographic and geographical challenges:** more than one-fifth of Kent's residents are aged 65 and above (20.5%), a higher proportion than Medway's 17%, and this demographic is expected to grow considerably by 2040.
- Areas of deprivation exist across Kent, particularly in eastern Kent. Coastal regions face specific difficulties, including economic precarity, geographical remoteness, and the complexities of service provision.
- **Funding shortfalls and financial strain:** budgets are insufficient to meet the rising demand and complexity of care needs, leading to difficult decisions and financial pressure on the entire system.
- **Workforce crisis:** difficult to recruit and retain enough care staff with specific challenges in Kent due to geography (coastal) and competition from neighbouring councils, alongside shortages in specialist roles like Approved Mental Health Professionals.
- **Rising and complex demand:** an increasing number of older adults with multiple health conditions, plus more younger adults with complex disabilities, means services are stretched by growing and more intricate care needs.
- **Fragile care market:** the local market of care homes and home care providers is unstable and inconsistent.

- **Fragmented health and social care:** despite efforts, integrating NHS health services with council social care remains difficult, causing disjointed care pathways, delayed hospital discharges, and gaps in support.
- **Poor data and system integration:** information sharing across different services and partners is complex and fragmented, hindering effective coordination, strategic planning and the ability to gain insights from data.
- **Policies:** differing local policies, procedures and ways of working across the area can lead to different cultures across localities resulting in inconsistent experiences for people accessing services.

Future ASC delivery and opportunities through LGR

Regardless of the geographies of future councils, we are committed to transforming adult social care by:

- **Improved, innovative service delivery:** developing and implementing new models of delivery based on best practice.
- **Fostering collaborative partnerships:** strengthening meaningful collaborations across Kent to achieve improved outcomes for all residents.
- **Strategic housing integration**: adopting a unified, strategic approach to the planning and co-ordination with housing services across the wider footprint to achieve closer alignment of these services for the benefit of adults needing support, reduce inequalities and prevent escalating need.
- **Streamlining data and systems:** enhancing data sharing and analytics through integrated systems to drive insights and improve service delivery.
- **Building workforce resilience:** exploring shared service models and new approaches to strengthen the social care workforce and ensure its sustainability.
- **Optimising commissioning:** implementing a strategic, Kent-wide commissioning approach where appropriate to better shape and influence the market, delivering enhanced outcomes and improved value for money.
- **Localising care provision:** ensuring services are delivered closer to home, with a deeper understanding of communities and individual needs.

**Medway Intensive Support Team MIST**

The Medway Intensive Support Team (MIST) commenced operations on 2 June 2025. The team was established to provide proactive, specialist, and relationship-based support to individuals in Medway who are considered “hard to reach” or “seldom heard.” These individuals often experience multiple and complex needs that require a tailored, persistent, and multi-agency approach to achieve sustainable outcomes.

**Background and Rationale**

The creation of MIST was driven by a clear and pressing need to address the challenges faced by a cohort of adults in Medway who are not effectively supported by traditional service models. These individuals often live with:

- Long-term self-neglect

- Enduring mental health conditions
- Hoarding behaviours
- Learning disabilities and/or autism
- Experiences of coercion and control, including domestic abuse and financial exploitation

These challenges frequently result in poor life outcomes, including homelessness, deteriorating health, social isolation, and repeated safeguarding concerns. The impact on the wider health and social care system is significant, with high levels of emergency interventions, hospital admissions, and costly placements.

MIST was developed to provide a more effective response—one that is intensive, consistent, and rooted in building trust over time. The team works collaboratively with partners across health, housing, and community services to ensure individuals receive the right support at the right time.

Team members bring a diverse range of expertise, including mental health, learning disabilities, safeguarding, housing, substance misuse, and outreach. The team is led by the Principal Social Worker and operates an allocated model, receiving referrals from across Adult Social Care.

Two of the Social Care Officer roles are funded through Public Health via the Drugs and Alcohol Treatment Recovery and Improvement Grant, originally allocated to the Medway Multi Disadvantage Network (MMDN). This integration has enabled a more joined-up, multidisciplinary approach to supporting individuals with multiple disadvantages.

Discussions are ongoing with Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust (KMPT) to embed mental health expertise within the team, further enhancing its capacity to respond to complex needs.

**Impact and Early Outcomes**

Since its launch, MIST has begun working with individuals who were previously disengaged from services or at risk of serious harm. Early casework has demonstrated the value of the team's approach:

- Individuals experiencing severe self-neglect have been supported into safe environments and appropriate treatment
- Rough sleepers have been engaged and supported into temporary accommodation, avoiding long-term placements
- High-cost care packages have been reviewed and, in some cases, replaced with more sustainable, independent living arrangements

These outcomes not only improve the lives of individuals but also reduce pressure on the Adult Social Care budget and other public services.

**Strategic Alignment and System Benefits**

MIST contributes directly to several strategic priorities across the Council and its partners, including:

- Reducing homelessness (Housing)
- Improving health outcomes (Public Health)
- Supporting families and preventing breakdown (Children's Services)
- Delivering the Prevention Agenda (Adult Social Care)

The team also supports broader system goals by:

- Reducing safeguarding referrals and serious case reviews
- Increasing capacity within ASC by reducing repeat demand
- Avoiding high-cost emergency and long-term interventions
- Enhancing Medway Council's reputation as a responsive, innovative, and compassionate authority

Adult Social Care delivery under Option 4D

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the four proposed councils making up Option 4D.

***Table 20:*** *Adult Social Care Metrics*

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Population Size (mid 2024)** | 615,931 | 374,269 | 523,642 | 417,842 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25) | 16 | 14 | 47 | 28 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25) | 266 | 196 | 366 | 262 |
| People accessing short term support during the year, rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-25) | 19 | 6 | 61 | 38 |
| People accessing short term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 (2024-25) | 334 | 329 | 409 | 353 |
| People accessing long term support during the year (18-64), rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 57 | 41 | 73 | 55 |
| People accessing long term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 438 | 331 | 395 | 359 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 1,411 | 1,325 | 2,117 | 1,581 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 456 | 492 | 757 | 504 |

**Key points in relation to the data:**

The data seeks to identify at a high level the indicative demand on the system. This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

- People with learning disabilities for both short-term and long-term support is significantly higher in East Kent.
- Demand for all services is consistently higher in East Kent. This is a known area of higher deprivation. In addition, there are a greater number of residential homes in the coastal areas and therefore a greater proportion of provision. This impact for East Kent is mitigated by the boundary change of Folkstone and Hythe, splitting the district between East and Mid.
- Safeguarding concerns received were the second highest in Mid Kent in terms of received and commenced.
- North Kent received more safeguarding concerns than West Kent however more safeguarding concerns commenced in West Kent.

Opportunities for Adult Social Care delivery under Option 4D

The 4D model for Kent and Medway creates a stronger, more balanced platform for adult social care by aligning services with community needs, health boundaries, and local capacity. It combines strategic resilience with local accountability, allowing care to be delivered closer to residents while maintaining the specialist scale needed for quality and sustainability.

There are currently one in four residents in Kent that report a disability or long-term health condition. Kent has an aging population with significant increases in the elderly by 2036. According to the CQC there are projected to be over 30,000 people aged 85+ in Kent, nearly double the number in 2018, increasing the demand for care and support[38].

The 4D model allows for **Place-Based Care and Early Intervention.** Smaller councils are better able to design place-based care systems, tailoring services to the demographic and geographic characteristics of their populations, for example:

- East Kent could focus on coastal health inequalities and hospital discharge pressures.
- Mid Kent could build integrated rural and market-town models around community nursing and reablement.
- North Kent could strengthen urban and industrial workforce wellbeing services.
- West Kent could expand community prevention and ageing-well initiatives.

Furthermore, integration of public health (already in place in Medway), social care and housing functions within each authority will allow earlier identification of risk and intervention before crisis. This, along with an increased focus in place and neighbourhoods will further extend the use of community-based assets such as local organisations, carers, and volunteers, which will support independence and reduce long-term care costs. A study by *People Too* entitled Local Government Reform – An Adult and Children's Services Lens" (2025), identified that all average unit costs across ASC and Children's Services are lower in councils and metropolitans" and concluded "that there is no evidence that county councils are achieving lower unit costs because of greater buying power in the market".

[38] https://www.cqc.org.uk/press-release/cqc-rates-kent-county-council-adult-social-care-provision-requires-improvement

The four proposed councils are aligned with the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System (ICS) footprint, supporting full integration of health, care and prevention. Each authority will operate within a Health and Care Partnership (HCP) area—North & Medway, East, Mid and West – mirroring NHS and public health boundaries. The 4D model will allow **greater integration with health and community partners** thus enabling:

- Joint commissioning and shared outcomes frameworks with the NHS and voluntary sector.
- Streamlined discharge pathways, reducing delayed transfers of care.
- Co-located community hubs combining social care, primary care and wellbeing services.
- Strengthened local leadership within the ICS, ensuring that social care is an equal partner in system decisions.

The 4D model allows each council to build a stable, **locally focused care workforce, reducing reliance** on high-cost agency staffing. Shared workforce planning across four balanced councils will allow:

- Joint recruitment campaigns and local training pipelines with FE colleges and NHS partners.
- Common standards, pay frameworks and career development routes across the county.
- Targeted retention programmes in hard-to-recruit areas such as coastal Kent.
- Stronger provider markets will help stabilise home-care and residential-care availability.
- The proposal also creates specific (hyperlocal) opportunities such as carefully managing the coastal deprivation and impact on service demand by splitting Folkestone & Hythe, and enhancing the alignment of urban and coastal communities support more strategic decision making to meet population needs.
- Integrating county and district-level functions into one organisation per area eliminates duplication in commissioning, contracts, and back-office functions, creating **greater financial sustainability**. An enhanced focus on early intervention and prevention can be applied in those areas of greater and escalating need.

Each council will manage its own end-to-end care pathways, allowing local control of budgets and better alignment between prevention, care delivery and outcomes. Four councils which are small enough to understand all the local challenges and opportunities, harnessing a strengths based approach to develop service provision whilst also mitigating risk.

The proposed scale of 400,000–600,000 residents per council will ensure sufficient critical mass for efficiency while allowing responsive local oversight. Future **devolution powers** could also create greater integrated funding and workforce arrangements, funding and innovation opportunities.

### Children's Social Care

Overview of Children's Social Care current delivery

Kent County Council and Medway Council currently deliver children's social care services with positive Ofsted recognition.

The current delivery of services is an excellent foundation for LGR and provides the opportunity to learn from each other.

Kent County Council, covering a large and diverse region, achieved an Outstanding rating from Ofsted in November 2021.

This reflects consistently high-quality social work, strong leadership and significant positive impacts on children and families, particularly in early help, child protection and support for looked-after children.

Medway Council, serving a more concentrated urban area, was rated Good by Ofsted in July 2023.

This rating acknowledges effective leadership, sound social work practice and positive outcomes for children.

Medway's success is attributed to robust multi-agency partnerships and a commitment to early intervention, demonstrating a stable and responsive service model.

The rating demonstrates the transformation journey that Medway has been on.

Delivering effective and impactful children's services cannot be done in isolation and partnership working are critical.

Whatever tools, enablers or metrics you use, there is an undeniable and fundamental need for excellent leadership, clarity of vision and values, a culture of high support and high challenge, adequate resourcing and a resilient workforce to deliver day-in, day-out.

There are multiple examples which demonstrate how services are already being delivered innovatively across organisations.

- KCC has operated Out Of Hours (OOH) services for Medway since 2014, with the current contractual arrangements being in place since April 2023. The service covers between 5pm and 7am, Monday to Friday and weekend and bank holidays and results in effective delivery and value for money. This arrangement works well, with good levels of open communication between managers. Inspection feedback regarding OOH work for Medway has always identified effective service delivery and good to outstanding practice. There is no reason why this approach could not be replicated across the Kent and Medway footprint going forward.
- The Attendance Alliance for Kent and Medway is a regional initiative, working in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE), to share good practice and develop new strategies for improving school attendance.

***Case study - Adoption Agency South East***

Adoption Partnership South East (APSE) is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) delivering adoption services for three local authorities - the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council. It was launched on 1 November 2020. Kent County Council remains the host local authority.

RAA's 2023 Three-Year Plan focuses on building a supportive adoption community.

Its mission prioritises securing permanent homes for children and providing comprehensive support to all affected by adoption.

Since its inception, RAA has encouraged innovation and collaboration across several key areas.

These include innovative projects funded by the Department for Education, development of the adoption community, training and practice enhancement, and comprehensive adoption support services.

RAA has also focused on adopter recruitment to achieve permanency for children and has implemented mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement.

The RAA has allowed a localised service to operate across a regional footprint to the best advantage of providing permanence to children.

**The principles of this approach with a host authority can be explored further across the future unitary authorities.**

Key Children's Services delivery challenges

- **Workforce instability:** a national shortage of qualified social workers, leading to recruitment and retention difficulties, reliance on agency staff and higher caseloads that impact continuity and quality of care.
- **Rising and complex demand:** services are under pressure from a growing number of referrals, often involving highly complex issues.
- **Placement shortages:** securing enough suitable and stable placements for looked-after children is a critical challenge, particularly for older children, sibling groups and those with complex needs, often resulting in out-of-area placements and increased costs.
- **Limited specialist support:** access to timely and appropriate specialist services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), is difficult, leaving social care teams to manage complex emotional and behavioural needs.
- **Socio-economic impact:** areas of deprivation in both Kent and Medway contribute to child welfare concerns, with poverty, poor housing and family stressors increasing the demand for social care intervention.
- **Inconsistent thresholds:** differing thresholds for intervention across services and partner organisations can create confusion and make navigation difficult for families and professionals alike.
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities:** The SEND system including funding through the high needs block continues to face significant national and local challenges. This includes rising demand, increasing complexity, sufficiency of provision, capacity and capability gaps in relation to SEND specialists and educational psychologists and scale and complexity of the partnership landscape.
- **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) pressure**: the presence of UASC, particularly in Dover and the wider area, places significant strain on multiple services, including housing, with varying policies for their support.
- **Out-of-Area Placements (OOAP)**: both councils, especially Medway with its high per capita rate, face a major challenge from children placed by other local authorities, impacting housing, children's homes and foster care capacity.
- **Improving prevention:** while good social care practice exists, there is a shared need to enhance preventative services to intervene earlier and reduce the escalation of needs to statutory services.

***Case study - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children***

Kent faces a unique and profound challenge as a primary entry point for unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UAS) children, a direct consequence of its proximity to mainland Europe.

The county's UAS Children's Service holds comprehensive responsibility for the care and accommodation of these newly-arrived children, providing support until they are transferred to

another local authority under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) or integrated into Kent's mainstream Child in Care Services, where support continues until they reach eligibility limits or are advised to return to their country of birth.

Since January 2016, more than 10,000 UAS children have arrived in Kent, necessitating a substantial expansion of services.

This now includes 10 reception centres and increased social work teams dedicated to assessment and placement.

Crucially, the timely transfer of these children is vital for maintaining sufficient accommodation capacity within Kent.

**This ongoing demand on the system and associated services is significant and will continue beyond LGR, representing a unique and disproportionate pressure not experienced by other areas across the UK.**

Future Children's Social Care delivery and opportunities through LGR

We are committed to continuing to transform children's services through LGR. Taking learning from across the area and delivering across the new councils.

- **Evolving best practice:** developing and putting into practice new ways of delivering care rooted in the best approaches for children and families.
- **Streamlined service delivery:** reducing complexity in delivery, for example, by consolidating current community service partnerships from 14 to enhance efficiency.
- **Leveraging convening power:** utilising our unique position to foster stronger partnerships and collaborations across the system.
- **Holistic place-based prevention:** adopting a comprehensive approach to prevention through multi-agency teams and neighbourhood working.
- **Community-centric approach:** ensuring local needs and cultures are deeply understood to influence and tailor delivery approaches.
- **Child and young person-led system:** placing the voice of our children and young people at the heart of our whole system approach, with stronger ownership and engagement from families and schools.
- **Strategic financial redesign:** designing new service budgets to optimise resource allocation, rather than relying on existing financial structures.
- **Building workforce resilience:** exploring shared service models and innovative approaches to strengthen the social care workforce and ensure its sustainability.
- **Unified housing provision:** implementing a simplified and unified approach to housing and planning to build market capacity at a local level.
- **Integrated early help pathways:** reducing duplication and improving visibility of risk across agencies.

***Case study - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities SEND***

In recent years, Medway Council has transformed its delivery of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services, driven by a commitment to accountability and collaborative commissioning.

By engaging with partners across the system, fostering a culture of shared responsibility, and holding providers to account, Medway has moved from a £24 million deficit to a balanced budget.

This strategic financial management, coupled with a high-trust-high-challenge mantra for providers, has enabled the development of more local provision and a transparent funding model, ensuring resources are effectively directed to where they are most needed.

Core to this success lies in an embedded cultural change, uniting stakeholders and particularly bringing schools around the table to address issues and problem-solve together. This approach has fostered a powerful sense of collective responsibility, resulting in a system where schools actively challenge each other, develop new initiatives and have significantly increased the proportion of EHCPs managed within mainstream settings from 26.4% to 35%.

This cultural shift is further reinforced by robust quality assurance, ensuring all provision meets high standards and is responsive to children's needs.

The size of Medway has proven to be a distinct advantage, enabling rapid change and full oversight of the entire SEND system.

This agility allows for the co-production of teams, personalised responses for complex cases and a deep understanding of families and social workers within the community.

With strong parent/carer involvement, locality-focused initiatives and a commitment to embedding accessibility policies, Medway has not only achieved significant financial stability but has also cultivated a happier, more integrated team and a highly responsive, accountable and inclusive SEND service that truly knows and supports its children.

**The proposed options are in relation to smaller scale, multiple councils where this approach and learning could be applied.**

Children's Social Care delivery under Option 4D

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the four proposed councils making up Option 4D.

***Table 21:*** *Children's Social Care*

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Active Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) by School District, rate per 10,000) (Oct 2025) | 1,249 | 902 | 1,797 | 993 |
| Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Y12&13, rate per 10,000 (2024) | 385 | 237 | 404 | 335 |
| Child in Need (CiN) Plans, rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025) | 93 | 62 | 103 | 85 |
| Child Protection Plans (CPP) Rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025) | 37 | 22 | 42 | 31 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Looked After Children (LAC) by placement address, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 38 | 4 | 14 | 7 |
| Other Local Authority (OLA) Looked After Children placed in Kent & Medway, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 49 | 19 | 49 | 25 |
| Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Looked After, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 7 | 3 | 14 | 7 |

**Key points in relation to the data:**

The data seeks to identify at a high level the indicative demand on the system. This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

- **High needs (SEND):** Data highlights that East and North Kent is managing a larger proportion of the provision. This is likely a combination of factors including higher demand and more suitable provision available to meet need.
- **NEET:** The rate is highest in East Kent, which is likely influenced by the region's geographical location, its impact on job availability, and wider economic factors. North Kent has the second highest levels.
- **Children's services:** The data shows that while CiN and CPP numbers follow a similar trend – higher in East and lowest in the West. The rate of LAC is much higher in North Kent and this is driven by the available provision. Similarly the rate of OLA is high in North Kent, however this is balanced across East Kent. This is as a result of both sufficiency and the cost of provision with children often needing to be placed in East Kent.

<u>Opportunities for Children's Social Care delivery under Option 4D</u>

The 4D option offers a major opportunity to transform children's social care across Kent and Medway by creating four balanced, place-based councils aligned with community identity, health partnerships, and education systems. It combines the benefits of local knowledge and relationship-based practice with the scale and stability needed to sustain quality, workforce, and innovation.

Under the 4D model, each new Unitary Authority will take full responsibility for children's services bringing together education, early help, safeguarding, and family support under one democratically accountable organisation. This creates a single line of accountability for outcomes, resources and leadership within each geography,

Each of the four proposed councils reflect a coherent children's population profile and set of local challenges that is equitable and can be effectively resourced and managed aligned to local geographies and needs, for example:

- **North Kent**: High demand for safeguarding, child protection and adolescent services linked to deprivation and population density. Opportunities to strengthen edge-of-care support, reduce residential placements, and expand youth mentoring and family hubs in Chatham, Gillingham and Gravesend.

- **East Kent**: Significant coastal deprivation and high levels of need among families affected by poverty, housing instability, and poor mental health. The unitary can integrate school inclusion, family support and early years services to tackle entrenched disadvantage and improve educational attainment.

- **Mid Kent**: Rapid housing growth, family mobility and mixed rural-urban communities create opportunities to design locally responsive early help and youth services, integrating family hubs with schools and health visitors.

- **West Kent**: Lower deprivation but rising complex needs and children with disabilities populations; opportunities to strengthen inclusion and short-break provision through closer integration with health and SEN services.

This alignment ensures that children's social care delivery is designed around community identity and real patterns of need rather than administrative legacy boundaries. The 4D model will enable earlier intervention. With education and social care within each council, decisions about SEND provision, attendance and safeguarding can be made holistically. The integration of housing, youth services and public health in one organisation will also strengthen support for vulnerable adolescents and care leavers. While localised delivery enables responsiveness, the four new councils will collaborate through the Kent & Medway Children's Safeguarding Partnership, ensuring shared quality standards and joint innovation on matters such as:

- County-wide frameworks for safeguarding, corporate parenting and quality assurance maintain consistency and resilience.
- Joint commissioning for residential and specialist placements allows scale purchasing, reducing costs and reliance on out-of-county provision.
- Shared digital, legal and commissioning functions free local teams to focus on direct practice.
- Collective oversight supports cross-boundary issues such as child exploitation, missing children, and youth offending.
- Embracing the opportunity to do things differently e.g. family hubs, with closer alignment to health, education and housing.
- Nuanced planning to manage demand across the area with an enhanced early intervention and prevention model to reduce long term demand.
- A holistic, system wide approach delivering services which fits future children's service needs.
- Stronger sense of ownership and engagement from families and schools where boundaries match local identities, enabling a greater community-led approach.

In short, the 4D model creates the conditions for earlier help, stronger families, and better life outcomes, ensuring that every child and young person in Kent and Medway can be safe, thrive and achieve their potential.

## Housing and homelessness

### Overview of current housing and homelessness delivery

Operating within the structures of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and national housing targets, councils are pivotal in delivering housing and homelessness services.

The provision and key responsibilities vary across the type of local authority.

- **Medway Unitary Council:** full housing authority covering strategic spatial planning, homelessness services, social housing allocation, private sector housing regulation and affordable housing delivery.
- **Kent County Council:** indirect housing impact including securing supply for needs arising from social care, public health, education and strategic infrastructure planning influencing housing needs and support for vulnerable people.
- **12 district councils:** local housing authority covering homelessness prevention and relief, social housing allocation, private sector housing enforcement, local housing strategy and strategic spatial planning to enable supply of housing through land allocations including for small sites and garden communities and determination of planning applications. In addition, some districts are housing providers which includes building and managing housing stock and in some cases managing a Housing Revenue Account.

Delivering successful outcomes is a complex challenge, whether it's managing vast infrastructure projects or tackling homelessness in our communities.

While large-scale programmes demand intricate planning, addressing homelessness requires understanding a deeply personal and varied set of needs.

Homelessness itself stems from a difficult mix of financial struggles like poverty, unaffordable housing and low wages; societal problems such as domestic violence, discrimination and a lack of support; and individual battles with mental health, addiction, physical disabilities, or past trauma.

This intricate web of challenges extends beyond homelessness, frequently impacting other vital services like adult and children's social care.

Initiatives are already in place and there is the opportunity to build on these through LGR.

***Case study – Homelessness Employment Pathway - Gravesham Brough Council***

Gravesham Borough Council (GBC), using its role as the area's largest employer, has successfully tackled a critical barrier to employment for homeless individuals.

Recognising traditional employment services often fail vulnerable individuals, the council identified an opportunity to use its influence to support disadvantaged people back into the workforce and to stabilise its own frontline services, such as waste and refuse collection, which experienced high staff turnover and agency spend.

This led to the introduction of a dedicated Employment Pathway in September 2023, specifically targeting former rough sleepers residing in GBC's supported housing scheme.

The Employment Pathway is designed for holistic support, moving beyond just job placement.

Once clients are ready for employment, they receive help with CV creation and employment risk assessments.

The programme includes an induction day, two weeks of work experience and entry into casual contracts, providing a crucial first step back into the workforce.

The initiative integrates ongoing mentorship, mental health and wellbeing support through weekly sessions and flexibility during hardship, all aimed at helping individuals establish a routine, build confidence and develop essential skills for long-term stability and independence.

This innovative approach has proven highly successful, not only providing participants with vital employment history and a route to unsupported accommodation but also significantly reducing the council's in-year agency spend.

Due to its positive impact, GBC is now expanding this initiative, rolling it out to private companies to maximise job opportunities for more vulnerable individuals.

**Innovation on a local scale which can be applied across an area of multiple unitary authorities.**

The need for working together and sharing of information to deliver outcomes cannot be underestimated.

The Kent Housing Group (KHG) is a forum for housing organisations in Kent and Medway.

KHG has representation from all 12 district councils across Kent, Medway Council, 13 housing associations, four support providers, Kent County Council and Kent Public Health.

KHG also has affiliated membership with a number of organisations who have a vested interest in the housing sector across Kent and Medway.

This strong strategic approach will provide stability through LGR and beyond.

***Case study – Kent Forum Housing Strategy***

The Kent Forum Housing Strategy provides clarity on the major strategic housing challenges facing Kent and Medway, acknowledges that past ways of working may not be fit for the future and identifies where a Kent and Medway perspective can add value, stimulate innovation and contribute to the delivery of local aims.

The strategy is unique in that it looks across a whole county area and brings district, borough, unitary and county council ambitions together through a bottom-up approach.

This is not about centrally-imposed targets. This is about lower tier and unitary authorities identifying their own local housing needs and requirements, while recognising the added value that can be gained by adopting a common approach to meeting these where appropriate.

**An adaptable model which can be shaped for future delivery while minimising the risks associated with change to the current model.**

Key housing and homelessness delivery challenges

**Overarching challenges:**

- **Complex delivery landscape:** the involvement of 14 councils delivering diverse services and initiatives across the area results in significant complexity and different approaches to policy formulation through to actual delivery.
- **Data fragmentation:** Kent and Medway use the same software for homelessness and operation of housing registers. There are multiple systems for housing management activities

meaning that it is difficult to gather comprehensive data and insights impeding effective decision-making.

- **Staffing and capacity gaps:** a notable shortage of skills and capacity including challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced staff, impacts the effective delivery of both large infrastructure projects and critical public services.
- **Funding constraints:** investment in housing delivery varies across Kent. Notwithstanding this, the level of investment, grant and subsidy needed to address social housing need is not available. Limited and often short-term funding restricts long-term planning and investment in housing and homelessness services, making proactive solutions difficult.

### Housing supply and delivery challenges

- **Housing delivery shortfalls:** each district has its own challenges in delivering housing requirements both in terms of the overall amount of housing needed and housing that people can afford including social rented homes and supported accommodation. Housing cost to earning affordability ratios differ across Kent and Medway resulting in varying housing requirements. Market conditions which significantly impact the ability of housing developers to deliver housing also vary markedly. This produces a complex picture. Consequently, delivery performance varies markedly both spatially and over time in line with economic cycles. Reflecting the national picture, meeting housing delivery plans is challenging, leading to a scarcity of housing and in particular affordable housing options.
- **Rising demand:** rising demand for housing is further exacerbated by Kent's location. Our coastal position results in a situation where asylum seekers disproportionately put strain the housing system, leading to increased demand for temporary accommodation, pressure on the private rental market, significant unreimbursed financial burdens and operational challenges.
- **Proximity to London**: where housing costs and demand produce a more acute set of challenges also impacts on demand in Kent through out-of-area placements, gradients in costs for housing being generally higher in the west of the county results in out-of-area placement within Kent and the spatial pattern of this is complex. For example, currently Maidstone currently hosts 222 out-of-area placements by other Kent authorities while Thanet hosts five. Unitary authorities covering larger geographies and populations offer the opportunity for many of these pressures to be managed within their own boundaries.
- **Private rental sector issues:** concerns exist regarding the quality of homes in the private rental sector and frequent breakdowns in relationships between tenants and landlords, contributing to housing instability. The distribution of challenges and resources are not uniform.
- **Social housing stock:** the availability of local authority social housing stock, coupled with varying quality and high maintenance costs for existing properties. Not all current authorities are stock holding. This needs to be recognised in both the transition to new unitary authorities e.g. arising from the need to appropriately engage with tenants and the time needed for successor authorities to design a structured approach to future arrangements in the larger geographies where social housing will have a more diverse landscape in terms of providers.
- **Temporary accommodation (TA) shortage:** a lack of suitable and affordable temporary accommodation options further strains services and resources. There is a mixed picture across Kent with variation in investment in TA or capacity arising within HRAs in some places. Notwithstanding this all councils use expensive nightly-paid accommodation to bridge the gap between their own accommodation levels and need.

### Homelessness services

- **Homelessness visibility and policy fragmentation:** the propensity for rough sleeping and homelessness varies across Kent and Medway reflecting differences in the factors that cause

homelessness. This impacts on the consequent demands, the distribution of cost and the solutions that have been developed. Maintaining visibility of individuals experiencing homelessness is difficult as they often move across districts. This is compounded by differing strategies and policies between councils, hindering a unified approach.

- **Disconnected services and complex needs:** homelessness is often linked to a wider range of complex individual needs, yet services are not always joined up effectively for proactive prevention and holistic support.

Future housing and homelessness delivery and opportunities through LGR

We are committed to:

- **Building on successful initiatives**: identify, scale and celebrate proven best practices and successful initiatives across Kent, fostering shared learning and replicating positive outcomes.
- **Communities**: listen to and collaborate with our diverse communities, ensuring their voices shape housing and homelessness strategies and solutions.
- **Partner collaboration:** continue to foster robust and effective partnerships with all stakeholders including statutory bodies, third-sector organisations and private providers to deliver comprehensive and coordinated support.
- **Simplified Strategic Planning**: simplified strategic plan for housing and homelessness, maximising available opportunities and resources through coordinated effort across smaller unitary and place focus.
- **Holistic service integration and prevention:** adopt a truly holistic approach to service delivery, ensuring seamless integration across all relevant services and the wider system to proactively support, prevent and reduce homelessness through early intervention.
- **Data insights:** simplified and streamlined systems will enable data and insights to be more readily available to inform strategies, measure impact and drive continuous improvement in service design and delivery.
- **Policy alignment for impact:** drive greater alignment of policies and ways of working, where practical, to achieve more consistent and effective outcomes and address systemic drivers of housing instability.
- **Sustainable**: focus on developing and implementing sustainable, long-term solutions that address the root causes of homelessness and ensure lasting housing stability for individuals and families.

***Case study – innovative use of Housing Revenue Account***

Ashford Borough Council is making innovative use of its Housing Revenue Account to deliver an ambitious programme of more than 1,000 new council-owned homes within the next six to seven years.

The council has an identified pipeline of 33 sites which will deliver a mix of affordable and social rent homes, including independent living homes for older people and accessible homes for people with disabilities, as well as properties for shared ownership.

A diverse range of delivery models are being used to achieve the pipeline of new homes.

These include:

- building on council-owned land
- regeneration schemes
- largescale acquisitions from developers of already-built homes

- purchasing affordable homes that have been secured under a s106 agreement which Registered Providers are unable or unwilling to deliver and package deals where land is purchased and the properties paid for during the construction process.

The HRA is also used buy properties on the open market and taking them into council ownership and use.

A majority of these properties are former council homes that were sold via the Right to Buy.

The strategic focus is on larger homes that can be adapted for people with physical disabilities to help them live independently.

This ambitious programme aims to significantly address housing needs and improve the quality of life for residents across the borough.

**A scalable best practice approach which can replicate positive outcomes.**

***Case study: Canterbury City Council – resettlement support***

Canterbury City Council took the decision to deliver resettlement support in house rather than using the KCC provision, supporting those arriving on resettlement schemes since 2015.

The work expanded rapidly in 2021 when the council supported the opening of two hotels to accommodate Afghan nationals within the district.

The wraparound support work includes successful integration into communities, access to services, one-to-one and group support, money management, entering into employment/skills/training and longer-term housing solutions.

The experienced team consistently deliver excellent integration outcomes for families.

A key strength of the Canterbury approach is partnership working with voluntary and statutory sector partners to deliver joined up and innovative services such as the Welcome Hub – a jobs, English language and drop-in advice service.

**This initiative was praised by the Ministry of Defence as a model of good practice and work is already underway to replicate this approach in other areas of Kent.**

Housing and Homelessness under Option 4D

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the four proposed councils making up Option 4D.

***Table 22**: Housing and homelessness metrics for four unitary model option*

| Metric | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024)[39]** | 6 | 2 | 6 | 4 |
| **Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement (%)[40]** | 83% | 68% | 79% | 120% |

As shown West Kent has the lowest rate of homelessness and Mid Kent is delivering beyond targets for Housing Delivery.

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Opportunities for Housing and homelessness under Option 4D

Devolution will be a key enabler to help accelerate delivery of the future ambition through strategic joined up planning and delivery across the area.

This model will have four strong unitary voices that are able to represent the area and provide a 'local feel' while working collaboratively through Kent forums to deliver strategically across the area. The good alignment means that the councils are well placed to share learning and innovation while delivering for local people.

The 4D option creates four balanced, integrated councils with full responsibility for housing, planning, homelessness, and social care within a single tier of governance. This consolidation ends the current fragmentation between county and district functions, enabling joined-up housing delivery, targeted prevention, and more responsive support for vulnerable residents.

Under the current two-tier system, housing and homelessness are managed by districts while adult and children's social services sit at county level creating barriers in prevention, resettlement, and joint commissioning. Emulating the strong work of Medway Council in this area, the 4D model

[39] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[40] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK

would support **greater integration and joint working**, centring it around holistic well-being and independence through:

- Unified local housing strategy connecting planning, economic growth, and care needs.
- Integrated housing and social care teams enabling rapid response for rough sleepers, care leavers, and adults with complex needs.
- Coordinated discharge-to-settle programmes linking hospital discharge with suitable accommodation.
- Alignment of Local Plans, homelessness strategies, and health priorities across coherent housing market areas.

Each new council will have the scale and flexibility to deliver **stronger, proactive, prevention-led homelessness services**, reducing reliance on costly temporary accommodation, and creating a more coherent, person-centred system, reducing duplication and improving outcomes for vulnerable residents. Key opportunities include:

- Integrated early-help systems where social workers, housing officers and welfare teams share data and triage households before crisis.
- Coordinated financial inclusion and debt support, helping families at risk of eviction maintain tenancies.
- Housing pathways for care leavers, survivors of domestic abuse and hospital discharge patients, avoiding repeat homelessness.
- Joint commissioning of supported and transitional housing, with social care and health partners.
- Place-based multi-agency hubs, embedding homelessness prevention within family and community support centres.

The 4D option aligns perfectly with Kent's key housing and infrastructure corridors, ensuring new development is strategically planned and locally accountable. Each unitary authority will manage housing delivery along its major transport and economic corridors:

- **North Kent**: brownfield regeneration and waterfront growth along the Thames Gateway;
- **Mid Kent**: garden-community developments and rural expansion around Ashford, Maidstone and Tonbridge;
- **East Kent**: coastal renewal and affordable housing tied to regeneration in Dover, Thanet and Canterbury;
- **West Kent**: smaller, sustainable schemes reflecting rural and commuter housing needs.

Each authority will produce a single Local Plan combining planning, housing supply and infrastructure delivery, develop stronger partnerships with Homes England and private developers through larger, financially sustainable councils with the aim of securing long-term infrastructure

funding (e.g. Housing Infrastructure Fund, Levelling Up Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund) tied to housing delivery.

**Case Study: Medway Council and the Peel Group Ltd Chatham Waters Development**

The Chatham Waters scheme is a partnership between Medway Council and Peel Group. It provides a strong example of strategic brown-field waterfront regeneration, where public and private sectors align around a vision of mixed-use, jobs, homes and public realm. The council provided the enabling policy, infrastructure and planning framework; Peel group brought the necessary investment, development expertise and implementation. The significant benefits to date include jobs, homes, activated waterfront, and the scheme's phased, long-term nature points to sustained impact. Key success factors include clear shared objectives, local benefit orientation, integrated planning, and developer commitment.

The partnership exemplifies the kind of public–private collaboration the 4D model seeks to embed across Kent. It demonstrates how a single, locally accountable authority can align planning, infrastructure and regeneration policy with private investment to deliver lasting local benefits.

There are significant **place based opportunities for housing provision and tackling homelessness**. The 4D model creates four councils that align with Kent's functional housing markets, economic corridors, and social geographies. Each area faces distinct housing pressures ranging from urban regeneration and coastal deprivation to rural affordability and the model allows targeted local strategies within a coherent county-wide framework including:

**North Kent**

The housing market is dominated by brownfield regeneration, high demand, and pockets of acute deprivation. Homelessness rates and temporary accommodation use are among the highest in the county. Opportunities include:

- Integrated regeneration and housing strategy along the Thames Gateway, aligning Medway's waterfront developments with growth in Ebbsfleet, Gravesend and Sittingbourne.
- Expansion of affordable and mixed-tenure housing within major brownfield regeneration sites, embedding supported and extra-care housing within new communities.
- Coordinated homelessness prevention network linking housing, social care, and voluntary sector partners.
- Rapid rehousing pathways for rough sleepers and families in temporary accommodation, supported by joint commissioning with health and mental-health services.
- Active partnership with Homes England and private developers to accelerate delivery of sustainable homes linked to the Lower Thames Crossing and HS1 corridor.
- Innovation in modular and move-on housing, repurposing vacant commercial units for emergency or transitional accommodation.

**East Kent**

The area faces long-term housing quality issues and a high proportion of residents in private rented and temporary accommodation. Opportunities include:

- Coastal housing renewal and regeneration programme, improving poor-quality private rented housing and converting empty homes.
- Affordable coastal housing initiative, partnering with housing associations to deliver energy-efficient homes that reduce fuel poverty.
- Integrated homelessness and health model, linking outreach, GP services, and mental health support for rough sleepers and vulnerable families.
- Targeted prevention approach to address eviction and tenancy loss in coastal private rentals through early-warning systems.
- Specialist supported accommodation for care leavers, ex-offenders, and people with complex needs, located close to employment and transport links.
- Place-based partnerships with universities and FE colleges to support young people and reduce hidden homelessness.

**Mid Kent**

The area combines expanding market towns and rural villages with strong transport corridors (M20, HS1) and significant new housing growth areas. Opportunities include:

- Integrated planning and housing growth strategy linking Local Plans to major infrastructure and garden-community developments (e.g. Heathlands, Chilmington Green).
- Housing-with-care schemes to meet the needs of older and disabled residents, delivered through joint commissioning with adult social care.
- Early intervention and homelessness prevention services embedded in family and community hubs.
- Expansion of affordable housing supply through joint ventures with developers and community land trusts in rural areas.
- Creation of “Smart Growth” hubs – digital housing and energy efficiency programmes supporting net-zero goals and cost-of-living resilience.
- Temporary accommodation and resettlement partnerships across Mid and East Kent to manage demand and maintain quality standards.

**West Kent**

The area has some of the highest housing costs in the county and limited affordable provision. Hidden homelessness, sofa-surfing and rural isolation are common. Opportunities include:

- Affordable rural housing programme delivered through parish and community partnerships, enabling small-scale, sustainable developments.

- Shared-ownership and key-worker housing initiatives supporting the local workforce in education, health and emergency services.

- Rural homelessness prevention service, focusing on early advice, tenancy sustainment and community-based mediation.

- Supported housing for vulnerable young people and families, co-located with training and employment support.

- Use of public land and small brownfield sites to create locally-led affordable homes while protecting the rural environment.

- Low-carbon retrofit and housing decarbonisation programme, tackling fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency in older housing stock.

Each council will have **direct democratic accountability** for housing, planning and homelessness, replacing the fragmented responsibilities of the current system. This improves transparency and public engagement by enabling community involvement in Local Plan consultation, neighbourhood planning, and housing design, embedding neighbourhood representation through area committees and parish partnerships, empowering local councillors to influence planning, housing design and regeneration priorities, and supporting co-production with people who have lived experience of homelessness or care needs.

**Case Study: Rochester Riverside**

Rochester Riverside is Medway Council's flagship regeneration project, transforming a 32-hectare brownfield site between Rochester Station and the River Medway into a vibrant, mixed-use community. Developed in partnership with Homes England, Countryside Properties (now Vistry), and Hyde Housing, the scheme reconnects the historic town centre with the waterfront.

Partnership working between the Council, Network Rail and partners enabled the station to be moved to the centre of the town. This improved accessibility, facilitated longer trains supporting HS1 and allowed 36 minute journeys into St Pancras. The scheme aims to provide 1,400 homes, including 25% affordable housing, 2.5km of river walk, a new school, significant public realm improvements and the provision of an extra care housing scheme for older people, Bellerophon House (see below). Rochester Riverside delivers a genuinely mixed-use development that provides 108,000sq ft of commercial space including shops, hotels and cafés.

Bellerophon House is in Doust Way, Rochester and has 41 spacious apartments available for rent. The house is designed for residents to live in complete comfort and apartments are self-contained with a full wet room, fitted kitchen and large lounge. Residents also have access to a care team that are on site 24 hours a day to provide care (as part of a planned package of care) and respond to emergencies.

LGR and the proposed 4d model will provide a mechanism for more of these important partnership housing projects to be realised across Kent improving outcomes across communities and intrinsically linking health, social care, housing and regeneration.

## Transport and highways system function

Overview of current transport and highways delivery

The transport and highways system function encompasses a broad range of activities from strategic transport planning and policy development to the delivery of highways programmes, planned and reactive maintenance and network management including coordination with utility works.

Highways services in Kent and Medway are managed by three primary authorities: National Highways, Kent County Council, and Medway Council.

Each holds distinct responsibilities for different parts of the road network, ensuring comprehensive coverage across the region.

While these three are the designated highway authorities, district councils also play a vital supporting role, acting as key intermediaries and advisors in local highway-related matters and securing developer financial contributions.

- **Department for Transport:** defines national policy for transport planning and systems including public transport and highways. This includes its vision for the future of the English strategic road network and a Roads Investment Strategy.
- **National Highways:** manages and improves the strategic road network including motorways and major A-roads (trunk roads) within Kent and Medway.
- **Kent County Council (KCC):** is the transport planning authority for Kent and the highway authority for the majority of Kent, overseeing the production of transport and infrastructure strategy and the management, maintenance and improvement of local roads, pavements, cycleways and associated infrastructure.
- **Medway Council:** as a unitary authority, it is the transport planning and highway authority for all local roads and highways within its specific Medway unitary boundary.
- **District councils:** provide crucial local input and advice on planning applications impacting transport and highways. While Kent County Council (KCC) acts as a statutory consultee on planning applications, providing advice, identifying conditions, and managing Section 278 agreements, district councils also act as public liaisons for community concerns and manage local amenities.

Examples of collaboration include district council engagement with KCC and National Highways to bring forward local improvements on the strategic network.

***Case study - Ebbsfleet Garden City***

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation EDC was announced in 2015 to facilitate the delivery of up to 15,000 homes and create a 21st-century Garden City in Ebbsfleet, north Kent.

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation is the planning authority for development management.

However, Dartford Brough Council (Dartford BC) is the local planning authority.

Dartford has worked closely with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation and KCC highways in the successful preparation of the Dartford borough local plan and implementation of development schemes and the associated infrastructure requirements.

This is facilitated through regular meetings and collaboration on sustainable travel projects between the EDC, Dartford BC, Gravesham Borough Council and KCC.

This builds on a longstanding history of collaboration on the Ebbsfleet area, prior to the establishment of the EDC, in relation to junction and road improvements required to facilitate the significant growth in the area.

***Case study: Bringing back international rail services to Kent***

Strong and sustained collaboration has taken place between KCC and district and borough councils to bring back international rail services like Eurostar to Kent.

This involved a concerted effort to build a strong case for resuming operations, addressing technical challenges with operators and infrastructure managers and demonstrating the economic benefits of serving the Kent passenger market.

The aim was to convince key stakeholders both Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International stations should have services restored, similar to the pre-pandemic situation in 2020.

This objective was achieved through collaboration between Kent County Council (KCC) and the district/borough councils, particularly Ashford and Dartford.

While KCC led on the transport aspects and coordinated economic arguments between the boroughs, the individual councils were crucial in championing their respective stations and highlighting local economic growth opportunities.

This combined effort allowed for a comprehensive and unified argument to the government for the reopening of both stations.

Key transport and highways delivery challenges

- **Active Travel and pedestrian infrastructure:** both authorities face challenges in maintaining and improving pedestrian environments. Ageing footways, limited accessibility in some urban centres and gaps in safe walking routes, particularly around schools and town centres, hinder efforts to promote walking. Funding constraints have slowed progress on upgrading crossings, improving public realm quality and ensuring compliance with accessibility standards, especially for vulnerable users.
- **Sustainable and public transport connectivity:** bus services continue to face declining patronage and reliability issues due to congestion, rising operating costs and driver shortages. Limited funding for service subsidies restricts route coverage and frequency, particularly in rural areas. Opportunities to enhance integration between bus, rail and active travel modes are often constrained by infrastructure limitations and inconsistent investment across the region. The ambition to grow sustainable travel is also challenged by public perceptions of reliability and affordability.
- **Private vehicles and freight movement:** high volumes of commuter, tourist and freight traffic, driven by Kent's strategic location, cross-Channel gateways and proximity to London, place sustained pressure on the road network. This contributes to congestion, accelerated asset deterioration and difficulties in meeting air quality and carbon reduction targets. The

maintenance backlog, exacerbated by rising material costs and climate impacts, continues to challenge network resilience.

- **Operational, workforce and coordination challenges:** persistent workforce shortages and skills gaps across engineering, planning and operational roles affect both authorities. Coordination with utility companies and developers for roadworks and infrastructure upgrades remains complex and disruptive, often prolonging project delivery times and reducing public satisfaction.
- **Governance, geography and strategic balance:** Medway Council, as a unitary authority, has direct responsibility for all local transport functions within a dense urban area, requiring a fine balance between supporting growth and improving sustainable transport options. Kent County Council, overseeing a much larger and more rural network, faces distinct challenges in ensuring equitable access and consistent service standards across varied geographies.

Future transport and highways delivery and opportunities through LGR

Future delivery of transport and highways services relies on ongoing collaboration and a strategic approach to deliver for the people of Kent.

In the future we are committed to:

- **Integrated strategic planning:** significantly streamlining the current 12 Local Plans, this approach fosters a more cohesive and joined-up strategic planning framework across the area, particularly for transport and highways infrastructure, with improved integration of land planning and transport planning.
- **Equitable influence:** the creation of evenly-sized unitary authorities ensures each entity possesses a balanced voice, enabling effective influence over strategic decision-making for the entire transport network.
- **Service harmonisation:** standardising service provision and associated fees and charges across the entire area will simplify processes and enhance consistency for residents across all transport-related services.
- **Balanced local governance:** this model establishes unitary authorities that are sufficiently large for strategic decision-making yet remain agile enough to deeply understand and respond to local impacts and needs across the transport system.
- **Enabling devolution:** this option directly supports the ambition for establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority, facilitating greater local control and accountability over transport and highways.
- **Innovative service delivery:** exploring and implementing shared service models and pioneering approaches to enhance organisational resilience and service effectiveness which can support future devolution plans.
- **Optimised commissioning:** implementing a strategic, integrated commissioning approach where appropriate, to effectively shape and influence the market, driving better outcomes and value.
- **Resilience:** if there is poor delivery in one unitary authority, the delivery in the remaining unitary authorities is unaffected.

Opportunities for Highways delivery under Option 4D

As outlined, devolution will be a key enabler for accelerating our ambition in relation to strategic and joined up highways delivery.

The 4D model offers a clear opportunity to create a modern, integrated and locally responsive highways service, by unifying strategic transport, local highways maintenance and planning functions within four balanced councils. This removes the split between county and district responsibilities, improving efficiency, accountability, and connectivity across Kent and Medway's strategic corridors

Across the majority of Kent, Kent County Council manages highways and transport strategy while district councils handle parking, planning, and environmental management. Like in Medway, under the 4D model, these functions will be consolidated within each council, creating a single, end-to-end highways and transport service. This presents several opportunities including integrated planning and delivery such as aligning highway maintenance, street works, and transport planning with housing and economic development, and unified and improved planning and coordination of works.

Each new council will have the necessary scale to manage a modern highway network while remaining close to community needs. Local priorities such as rural access in West Kent or coastal resilience in East Kent can be embedded in annual maintenance and investment programmes.

The 4D model aligns directly with Kent's major transport corridors (M2/A2, M20/A20, A21, HS1 and coastal routes), supporting more joined-up infrastructure planning. Each authority can lead on corridor-based investment while coordinating through the future Combined County Authority (CCA), ensuring that investment decisions reflect both local priorities and regional economic impact for example:

- **North Kent**– can focus on Thames Gateway connectivity, the Lower Thames Crossing, and A2/M2 resilience.
- **Mid Kent** – lead on M20/HS1 corridor planning, freight management, and rural junction improvements.
- **East Kent** – prioritise A256/A299 upgrades and coastal route resilience for port access.
- **West Kent** – focus on A21 corridor safety, rural access, and integration with commuter rail services.

The 4D model strengthens engagement with National Highways, Network Rail, Transport for the South East (TfSE) and Homes England through a clear four-authority structure. Each council can secure direct devolved transport funding under a future CCA, reducing dependence on central bidding cycles this will also lead to greater opportunities to align infrastructure and housing delivery, making a stronger case for government and developer contributions, and provides scope to develop regional design standards and share specialist engineering expertise across Kent and Medway.

This partnership approach positions Kent for greater influence in regional transport and investment programmes.

The 4D model allows each council to manage its own highways and transport network within a coherent county-wide system, strengthening local responsiveness while ensuring strategic coordination across Kent's major economic and transport corridors, for example:

**North Kent** - contains key international gateways, including the Port of Sheerness, and is directly impacted by the Lower Thames Crossing and M2/A2 corridors with opportunities to coordinate and

lead on local access, traffic management, and mitigation schemes, active travel schemes and freight management.

**East Kent** - the coastal areas have high visitor traffic, strategic ports (Dover and Ramsgate), and constrained transport access. There are opportunities to have unified leadership for the East Kent coastal route, coordinated coastal resilience and flood-adaptation schemes as well as targeted visitor and tourism infrastructure.

**Mid Kent -** this area forms Kent's east–west transport spine, hosting the M20, A20 and HS1 corridors and key freight and logistics hubs. There are opportunities linked to improved rural road maintenance, the expansion of rural bus routes to support model shift, and leading the management of the M20 and HS1 transport corridor.

**West Kent - t**his area has significant cross-boundary travel to London and strong environmental constraints. There are opportunities around rural accessibility and demand responsive transport, sustainable commuting, and strategic management and investment in the A21 and A26 corridor.

### Waste services

Overview of current waste delivery

As a unitary authority, Medway Council is the Waste Collection Authority (WCA) and Waste Disposal Authority (WDA). Contracts are in place with Medway Norse, Countrystyle and Veolia with lengthy terms up to 2040.

Waste arises in Medway of 117kt per annum of which 38% is recycled, reused or composted

Kent County Council acts as the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), contracting with third parties like FCC and CSKL until 2030 to manage waste disposal infrastructure.

This includes Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), Waste Transfer Stations (WTS), Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) and Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities at Allington.

The 12 district councils serve as Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs), collecting household waste and delivering it to KCC-managed disposal outlets.

Waste arises in Kent of 650kt per annum of which 42.1% recycled, reused or composted

Kent and the districts work closely through partnerships including Mid Kent Partnership, South West Kent partnerships and the Kent Waste Partnership.

***Case study – Kent Waste Partnership***

The Kent Resource Partnership brings together staff from Kent County Council and the 12 district councils.

Together, they manage waste collection and disposal, street cleaning and enforcement services across the region.

A dedicated strategic lead guides all partnership activities including how they are run, how they communicate, and what projects they work on.

The lead also builds relationships with other groups and looks for new opportunities and funding.

The Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, developed through the partnership provides the framework for collaborative delivery with a strong focus on developing and delivering services to be efficient, effective and sustainable while navigating significant change in waste policy.

All partners contribute money each year to cover staff costs, for the lead and an analyst, and to pay for agreed projects.

A recent campaign to recycle food waste increased the average amount collected and recycled across seven areas by 20%.

**This collaborative approach and shared strategy have been crucial in driving alignment, maintaining a shared focus and ultimately achieving positive outcomes.**

Key waste delivery challenges

- **Aging infrastructure:** maintaining and upgrading existing waste management infrastructure to ensure continued operational efficiency and reliability.
- **Infrastructure capacity:** strategic planning and investment are required to meet future infrastructure demands, particularly in response to significant housing growth.
- **Divergent delivery approaches and policies:** inconsistencies in collection methodologies and varying resident expectations across different areas hinder the establishment of a unified and efficient waste management system.
- **Waste and collection strategy misalignment:** the two-tier delivery structure often leads to a disconnect between waste strategies and budgetary allocations, potentially resulting in isolated decision-making and collection approaches that do not adequately consider disposal costs.
- **Limited funding transparency:** a lack of clear information regarding the flow of funding from central government to local waste services.
- **Complex contractual landscape:** the presence of multiple long-term contracts across Kent, including one currently under dispute, complicates operational management and strategic planning.
- **Public engagement and behaviour change:** challenges in encouraging effective resident participation in recycling schemes, waste reduction and sustainable waste practices including addressing contamination issues.
- **Regulatory compliance and evolving legislation:** the ongoing demand to adapt to and comply with changes in national and international waste management regulations, environmental standards and targets.
- **Workforce recruitment and retention:** difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled personnel across all levels of waste management operations.
- **Technological adoption and innovation:** the complexities and costs associated with integrating new technologies for waste sorting, treatment, energy recovery and data management.
- **Illegal dumping and fly tipping:** addressing the persistent issue of illegal waste disposal and its associated costs and environmental consequences.

Future waste delivery and opportunities through LGR

In the future we are committed to:

- **Learning from success:** we will take what has worked well across Kent, like our Waste Liaison Officers, and build on those successes to make things even better.
- **Working together:** we will strengthen our relationships across Kent, adapting our partnerships as needed to deliver on our regional waste plans.

- **Smarter way to deliver:** we will look into creating a single, strategic waste body for the whole region, potentially linking it with how we plan for new developments.
- **Connecting the dots:** we will bring together collection and disposal budgets so we can make smarter decisions that consider the whole picture, not just parts of it.
- **Better use of information:** we will get our data and systems talking to each other so we can gain clearer insights and make better plans.
- **Planning ahead:** planning for the infrastructure we need, making sure it fits with local areas and future building projects.
- **Making decisions easier:** working together across future councils will enable us to reach consensus and move forward more quickly.

***Case study – Waste Liaison Officers***

Kent County Council (KCC) has established two Waste Liaison Officer roles to enhance the operational relationship between the Waste Disposal Authority (KCC) and the 12 district and borough councils, which act as Waste Collection Authorities.

These officers serve as a crucial link, fostering communication, promoting shared understanding, and supporting performance improvement across both tiers of local government.

Their responsibilities include facilitating quarterly liaison meetings, sharing monthly performance data for transparency and resolving operational issues arising between the collection and disposal authorities.

By acting as a bridge, they ensure service challenges are addressed collaboratively and efficiently, ultimately improving outcomes for residents.

The Waste Liaison Officers monitor performance data - tonnage, recycling and contamination - for statutory reporting and improvement, collaborating with district teams and KCC Waste Data and Insight to interpret trends.

They ensure two-way communication on policy and operational changes for consistency, translate complex data into actionable insights for districts and coordinate abandoned vehicle disposal.

In addition to strengthening relationships, the Waste Liaison Officers have significantly improved operational efficiency by resolving service issues faster and with fewer escalations.

They have also been crucial during disruptions like extreme weather or contractor problems, coordinating responses and maintaining service resilience through rapid communication and joint problem-solving.

**This has minimised impact on residents and upheld service standards.**

***Case study – creation of a waste Local Authority Trading Company***

Canterbury Council established a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) called Canterbury Environment Company (Canenco) to take over household waste collection services from a commercial contractor.

This decision was made after an options appraisal due to dissatisfaction with the previous service.

Canenco's board consists of three council officers and a managing director with extensive waste management experience was recruited.

Staff from the former contractor were transferred to Canenco and the council bought the necessary vehicles.

The council maintains oversight of the client function and waste collection strategy.

This change has resulted in a more responsive company for waste collection and street cleansing.

The council and Canenco teams work closely, leading to efforts to reduce contamination in dry recycling bins.

**Following the successful transfer of waste collection and street cleansing in February 2021, grounds maintenance services were transferred in December 2021 and public toilet cleansing and maintenance in June 2024.**

Opportunities for Waste delivery under Option 4D

The 4D proposal creates a single-tier structure in which each of the four new Unitary Authorities - North Kent, East Kent, Mid Kent and West Kent - will take full responsibility for waste collection, disposal, recycling, and environmental services within their boundaries. This integration ends the fragmentation between district waste collection and county waste disposal, allowing joined-up planning, consistent service standards, and better environmental outcomes across Kent and Medway.

- **Integrated working** - integrated budgeting enables single-stream decision-making on vehicle fleets, treatment contracts and recycling infrastructure, improving value for money. Based on the proven efficiency of Medway's existing single-tier service, this model is expected to generate savings on contract and operational costs through shared procurement, joint depot use, and harmonised service standards.
- **Environmental standards** - each council will be responsible for achieving local net-zero and waste-reduction targets aligned to Kent's county-wide climate strategy. Harmonised policies across the four councils will support consistent recycling collections, contamination controls, and food-waste treatment, making services simpler for residents and more cost-effective for contractors. Shared data systems across the four councils will enable transparent reporting of waste performance and carbon reduction.
- **Customer experience -** residents will have a single point of contact for all waste, street cleansing and recycling queries, improving customer satisfaction and responsiveness. There are also opportunities to run hyper local campaigns that can drive behaviour change and increase recycling participation. Local control allows each unitary to design services reflecting their nuanced geographies, for example:
    - North Kent: urban waste optimisation and riverside recycling logistics.

  - East Kent: coastal litter management and tourism-related waste strategies.
  - Mid Kent: rural route rationalisation and community composting.
  - West Kent: green-waste and recycling services tailored to rural and commuter communities.

- **Partnerships and investment -** the 4D proposal will enhance partnership working with Kent Resource Partnership (KRP), DEFRA, and private-sector waste operators through simplified governance. Each council will be able to lead or co-invest in regional waste infrastructure, such as materials recovery facilities, transfer stations and low-carbon fleet depots. Joint procurement across the four authorities will attract stronger bids, secure economies of scale, and stimulate innovation in waste technology. Collaboration with universities and FE colleges (e.g. Medway's Institute of Sustainable Futures, Canterbury Christ Church University) will support research into waste reduction, recycling behaviour and green skills.
- **Social value -** integrated contracts will include local employment, apprenticeships, and reuse initiatives, replicating Medway's successful social-value approach in highways and waste. Each authority can partner with local voluntary organisations and social enterprises to expand reuse, repair and community recycling centres. The 4D model creates opportunities to link waste policy with climate, housing and transport planning, enabling low-carbon logistics and circular-economy clusters along major corridors such as the Thames Gateway and M20.

DRAFT

# Public service reform

**Criteria 3b.** Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money

**At the core of any successful public service organisation is the desire to do the best for those who need those services most. Kent, as an area, starts from a high base but there is an obvious desire to push further and faster for the citizens of Kent. LGR provides the platform to meet the moment and drive for fundamental change. There is a clear desire to be ambitious and to change public services. There is an underpinning set of shared principles focused around shifting the system to a preventative model. Public services cannot just keep meeting demand. They must move from being responsive to being proactive. LGR can be a catalyst to this change. Kent will drive the reform of public services, ensuring they are rooted in their communities with outcomes at the centre of decision making.**

## What is public service reform (PSR) and why is it needed?

Public service reform will be the core to the transformation of any new configuration of local government in Kent.

LGR offers an opportunity to rethink how people and communities are supported, moving from a fragmented, reactive system to one that is proactive, integrated and designed around the needs and strengths of Kent's residents.

There will be the opportunity to root this in reform of public services in the community and people of Kent.

Public service reform will seek to change the way public service professionals work together and ensure residents feel the positive benefits of that work, fundamentally changing the way services are configured and delivered.

Too often services are organised around institutional and professional boundaries rather than people.

In the latest Spending Review, the government outlined three principles to its approach to PSR:

- to integrate services so they are organised around people's lives;
- to improve long-term outcomes for people through a focus on prevention, relying less on expensive crisis management; and
- to devolve power to local areas that understand the needs of their communities best, with services that are designed with and for people, in partnership with civil society and the impact economy.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring together services and improve outcomes.

A move from a demand-led model to a preventative model will allow for greater focus on outcomes and using precious resources in a more effective way.

## Demand and prevention

Nationally and across Kent, public services face growing pressures.

The system is struggling to meet the demand for key services that are vital to the health and wellbeing of the community.

Services, such as adult social care and children's social care, are being stretched to breaking point. The system is broken for those who need it most.

**Cuts to non-statutory services**

Failure to see the connection between prevention and demand, and to join the dots across the silos between service providers, means statutory services are protected from deep root-and-branch transformation.

This leads to cuts in non-statutory services which are often preventative services.

Cutting preventative services only increases demand in the more expensive acute part of the system, resulting in increased costs and increased pressure on statutory services.

**The 'front door' and thresholds**

At the 'front door' of these statutory services, more and more expensive specialist staff are being deployed to triage and assess.

This means that these specialist staff are using their time on assessment rather than treatment.

Furthermore, given the cuts to services, and their lower capacity to deal with demand, eligibility thresholds for support are rising further, leading to gatekeeping and meaning help is only available at the point of crisis.

As a result, the most pressing demand - those in crisis - continues to grow, creating a cycle where services intervene too late and at greater cost.

**Assessments and siloes**

Given this increase in pressure, services often refer cases on to one another in attempt to control in-service demand and residents are frequently required to repeat their stories to multiple agencies, undergoing assessment after assessment.

Services have slipped into an 'assessment mindset' where practitioners and leaders have been siloed into their respective organisations.

This not only causes frustration but also erodes public trust and confidence in local services.

**Outcomes**

These mounting pressures are leading to poorer outcomes for residents.

The danger is this provides a negative loop where demand keeps growing and preventative services cannot be prioritised as resources are used to address the immediate challenge.

**Fiscal control**

## Fiscal control

At the same time as outcomes are declining and there is less preventative focus, public service leaders, trying to counteract growing financial risks, are increasingly reliant on salami slicing - incremental cuts to service budgets.

These cuts are a way to demonstrate better financial control but ultimately mean that services fail to address underlying demand and associated costs.

## The urgency of now

The continued cutting of services will not resolve these challenges.

As crisis response consumes a larger share of resources, the underlying problems persist and intensify.

The system becomes reactive rather than proactive, focusing on managing emergencies rather than preventing them.

This approach is unsustainable, both financially and in terms of outcomes for residents.

A focus on prevention and early intervention needs to be prioritised before services hit breaking point. Now is the time to act.

Public services in Kent need to be fit for purpose and fit for the future.

Public service sustainability cannot be addressed without PSR.

Without reform, councils will be forced to make ever deeper cuts, further reducing the quality and accessibility of services and undermining the support available in communities.

LGR offers an opportunity to embrace change and deliver a different form of support that will serve communities in a way that works for them.

## PSR: a new approach

Kent leaders are fully aware of the need to act and are ambitious to embrace PSR.

On 17th September 2025, leaders and chief executives from county, unitary, and district councils came together to outline and agree the opportunities presented by the LGR process. PSR was a central theme of the day, with stakeholders discussing and agreeing a vision for the region.

To achieve these ambitions for Kent and to break this cycle of growing costs and poor resident outcomes, the focus must shift to public services being more community based and preventative. This means focussing on outcomes, managing demand more effectively, and supporting people before their needs escalate.

Through the discussions between Leaders and Chief Executive, five PSR principles have been defined.

1 Community first
2 Outcomes focussed

| | |
|---|---|
| **Community first** | • Service delivery must be led by the needs and aspirations of communities, with openness and transparency in the governance and the delivery of public services.<br>• By working closely with residents and local groups, services can better understand what matters most and tailor their offer accordingly.<br>• Residents should feel that their voice is being listened to, and the subsequent service design reflects their input.<br>• Services should be reshaped to reflect the needs of local people in flexible, community-focused provision.<br>• By designing support around the lived experience of residents, Kent can deliver more effective, efficient, and equitable outcomes.<br>• Leadership at all levels should mirror the diversity of Kent's communities, ensuring that a broad range of voices and experiences shape decision-making. |
| **Outcomes focussed** | • An outcomes focussed approach should drive the reform of public services.<br>• Leaders must focus on providing joined-up support that is accessible and tailored to the presenting need of a person and designed around meeting that need.<br>• A relational approach should be applied, where public servants focus a person, rather than just dispensing the services of their organisation. |
| **Prevention and early intervention** | • Prevention and early intervention are fundamental principles underpinning effective PSR that are essential to deliver better outcomes for residents, achieve financial sustainability, and build public services that are fit for the needs of the people of Kent.<br>• By intervening before issues escalate, services can help people maintain control over their lives, access support at the right time, and avoid the distress and disruption that comes with crisis intervention.<br>• Evidence demonstrates that pre-crisis intervention delivers financial benefits through a more effective and better targeted use of public services. Early help can reduce demand on high-cost crisis services and enable resources to be targeted where they have the greatest impact. For example, investment in family support, community health, and neighbourhood-based services has been shown to reduce the need for statutory intervention in both children's and adults' services. |
| **Collaborative partnership working** | • LGR presents a unique opportunity to reset and strengthen relationships across the public sector in Kent.<br>• The benefits have been seen from a number of successful partnerships across the geography, involving statutory and non-statutory services, the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, and a wide range of public bodies.<br>• While there are excellent examples of joint working, these are often isolated and not yet embedded as the norm across the system.<br>• Key partners that collaborate together include the police, health services, the Department for Work and Pensions, fire and rescue, housing providers, waste management, social services, education, and asylum support, among others. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Digital mindset** | • To set up services for success, Kent needs to embrace the benefits of adopting a digital first mindset, seeking to leverage opportunities in LGR to transform services with a digital approach.<br>• Integrated digital systems and improved data sharing between services will enable a single, holistic view of residents' needs, leading to a more joined up service. This will support more timely interventions, reduce duplication, and ensure that every professional involved has access to the right information at the right time. There is an opportunity to strengthen evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.<br>• AI can be used to better understand large data and identify resident need or risk earlier. This can be used by services to more quickly and better understand the residents they serve, so more time can be spent on treating need rather than identifying it. |

***Case study – development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams***

In eastern Kent, the health and care partnership is working with four Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) as Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) early adopter sites.

They are looking at tools to identify those most at risk of needing social care or who are likely to experience worsening health outcomes.

This is known as risk stratification and will help identify those people who will benefit from remote monitoring and early identification of deterioration to provide additional support.

This is a formal programme working alongside John Hopkins University and will be invaluable in informing how INTs develop across the county of Kent.

This integrated approach is emerging across western Kent too as they prepare for INTs. This includes examples such as, but is not limited to:
- the core frailty team with shared case management and shared system use working well in Tonbridge PCN area.
- a mental health multi-disciplinary team dealing with complex mental health needs working well in Weald.
- Maidstone PCNs have worked together on a joint service provided by the VCS for people with complex mental health-related needs across all their PCNs.
- the Sevenoaks area has established a health and wellbeing huddle approach to link in with the core primary care networks/Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.

The development in INTs with health, social care, the VCS and other key organisations working together are a foundation of good practice to build off when adopting the PSR principle of partnership working.

## Enablers of PSR

To realise the full potential of PSR, partners must work together to embrace its core tenets.

This means moving beyond organisational boundaries and focusing collectively on the needs of the person.

It requires a cultural shift. One where engagement is purposeful, open and rooted in a shared ambition for Kent as a whole.

Several enablers are critical to making this collaborative approach a reality:

1 **More permeable boundaries between partners and services:** services must become more open and flexible, allowing for the free flow of information, resources and expertise. When one partner's actions benefit another's budget or outcomes, this should be recognised and the benefit shared.
2 **Shared benefits and budgets:** a move towards shared benefits naturally lends itself to the possibility of shared budgets. By pooling resources, partners can take a joined-up approach to tackling key issues, ensuring investment is targeted where it will have the greatest impact.
3 **Co-location of services:** Bringing services and organisations together physically - whether in community hubs, shared offices, or integrated teams - can drive a more joined-up way of working, break down silos and make it easier for residents to access the support they need.
4 **Inclusive partnership:** No partner should be left out of this process. Every organisation, whether statutory, voluntary or community-based, must feel a sense of purpose and importance in helping the people of Kent. Organisations should embody a shared learning culture, recognising that they have something to learn from someone else round the table.

Achieving this vision will require organisations to work together differently.

It means moving away from transactional relationships and towards a model where partners are engaged as equals, united by a common purpose.

It means recognising the challenges facing communities cannot be solved by any one organisation alone.

**The next steps for PSR:**

There is broad agreement among Kent Leaders they want to:

- **Refresh working arrangements between organisations**: updating governance structures and shared forums between Chief Executives to enable more effective joint working. This will result in better alignment and a collective approach to PSR.
- **Establish shared learning culture**: councils and partners actively sharing key learning, where best practice is actively sought and embedded.
- **Purposeful and reassuring staff communication**: ambition for reform must be communicated clearly and confidently to staff, providing reassurance about their future and a sense of shared purpose.
- **Prepare for a seamless transition**: LGR should a seamless handover between services with support that feels joined up and easy to navigate. Residents should feel well informed about the changes from LGR, what to expect and the positive impacts that will be driven.
- **More voices are required and welcomed**. There is also an ambition to engage with voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to understand excellent practice that drives resident outcomes currently. To achieve more community-centred, outcome focused service delivery, collaborating with the VCSE, who are at the heart of communities and places, will be pivotal.

***Case Study – Dover SmART project***

Dover SmART Project is a charity founded in 2013 to support disadvantaged children, especially young carers, through creative activities to improve their wellbeing and boost their confidence.

It runs creative groups to boost children's aspirations and as a safe space away from other responsibilities.

The charity has evolved to support other age groups now, such as supporting older people who may be isolated in the community or have conditions like dementia.

Dover SmART project is funded by a variety of fundraising efforts including the private sector and the district council.

In 2025, the Dover SmART Project was named a winner at the Kent Mental Health Wellbeing Awards.

The SmART project demonstrates the impact the VCS can have on the community.

**There is an opportunity for voluntary and community sector projects to use their expertise and knowledge to support statutory services in supporting vulnerable people, acting as partners where there are opportunities for a holistic approach.**

**PSR under Option 4D**

Option 4D creates the optimum framework to deliver that ambition by unifying governance, integrating services, and embedding the five PSR principles agreed by Leaders on 17 September 2025. Under Option 4D, each council will be large enough to deliver efficiently yet close enough to communities to understand local priorities, through:

- Neighbourhood-based service design: local hubs combining housing, health, social care, employment and advice services.
- Stronger community engagement: residents directly shaping priorities through area committees and digital participation platforms.
- Cultural alignment: leadership structures reflecting the diversity and identity of local communities.

These three activities will help deliver value-for-money through early engagement and co-production reducing duplication, targeting resources more accurately, and improving overall resident satisfaction, for example, in health and social care evidence nationally shows that early-intervention programmes yield savings of £2–£4 for every £1 invested through reduced acute demand and better targeted support.[41]

[41] Investing in preventative support can save more than £3 for every pound spent

# **Criteria 4:** Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)

This section includes:

**Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design** — **Criteria 4a and 4c**

**Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance** — **Criteria 4b**

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# Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design

**Criteria 4a.** It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.

**Criteria 4c.** Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

**Overview of the approach taken to engage the community and stakeholders:**

Kent's approach to LGR has been firmly rooted in the principles of transparency, inclusion and shared ownership.

Kent's 14 councils have worked together to formulate a set of joint proposals and have a coordinated, county-wide programme of public and stakeholder engagement.

We ran a resident survey in September and October 2025, have met with key partners and have engaged with communities through our usual engagement routes to ensure the voices of local people and organisations are central to business case development.

Reflecting local identity and fostering a shared vision across the county requires meaningful engagement with residents, businesses and key stakeholder groups at every stage of the process.

This engagement activity aligns with the political commitment across Kent to meaningfully involve communities in shaping their future governance while exceeding what is required under MHCLG guidance.

While MHCLG has not prescribed the extent of engagement, Kent's Leaders chose to pursue a proactive and inclusive approach.

The process has been informed by best practice from previous LGR areas, advice from the cross-Kent communications group and feedback from council Chiefs Executives and Leaders.

We gathered the views of more than 2,000 stakeholders to understand reflections, including:

- Kent residents
- businesses
- community groups
- councillors and officers
- Members of Parliament
- strategic partners across housing, health, emergency services, social care and safeguarding, education and skills, economic development, government, public sector and volunteering

**Overview of engagement activities:**

A) Standardised resident survey
B) Stakeholder engagement programme

The feedback from the public survey and stakeholder engagement has been analysed by the Canterbury City Council Policy and Communications team, which led the communications and engagement workstream. The findings are reflected below and throughout this proposal.

A) Standardised resident survey

A standardised resident survey, agreed across all Kent councils, was launched during the engagement period.

This consistency ensures data comparability across districts and enables the creation of both Kent-wide and locally-specific insights.

The survey aimed to capture residents' views on their local identity, service expectations and priorities for the future shape of local government.

These insights have informed the business cases and local decision-making processes within each council.

The survey received 2,107 responses, which includes written responses and survey responses.

B) Stakeholder engagement programme

In addition, a joint stakeholder engagement programme has been developed, via a coordinated letter sent on behalf of all Kent councils to a wide-ranging list of county-level stakeholders.

Each council has also engaged with its own networks including parish and town councils, voluntary and community organisations, businesses and sector-specific partnerships.

Councils were encouraged to host meetings and discussions to ensure stakeholders could explore the implications of different governance models and offer their perspectives on how local identity and service delivery can be best preserved and enhanced.

Across all Kent councils, priority strategic partners* have been engaged in dedicated workshops to understand key reflections, including:

- challenges that can be addressed through reorganisation
- opportunities to be realised through reorganisation
- issues that may arise through reorganisation that need to be mitigated

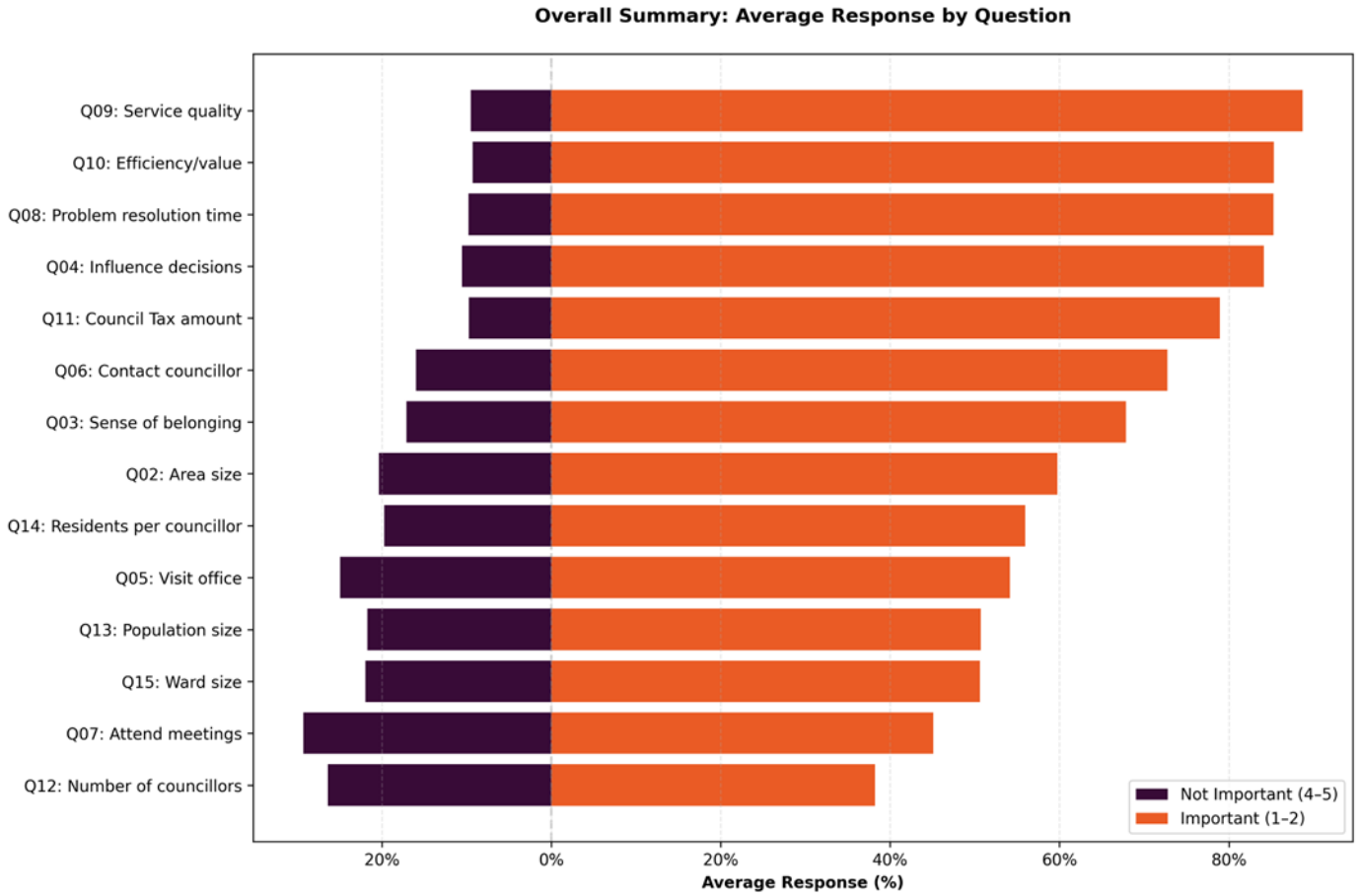
***Table 29: *Priority key strategic partners:***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Health** | • NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB)<br>• Kent Integrated Care Alliance<br>• NHS Provider Trusts<br>  ○ East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust<br>  ○ Medway NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust |
| **Emergency services** | • Kent Police<br>• Kent Police and Crime Commissioner<br>• South East Coast Ambulance Service |
| **Social care and safeguarding** | • Chairs of Safeguarding Boards – Adults and Children's<br>• Chairs of any Partnership Board<br>• Chair of Kent and Medway Resilience Forum |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Education and skills** | • University of Kent<br>• Canterbury Christ Church University<br>• University of Greenwich<br>• University for the Creative Arts<br>• FE colleges |
| **Economic development** | • Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce<br>• Federation of Small Businesses |
| **Government and Public Sector Partners** | • Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)<br>• National Highways<br>• Port health authorities<br>• Housing associations |
| **Volunteering** | • VCSE sector representation |

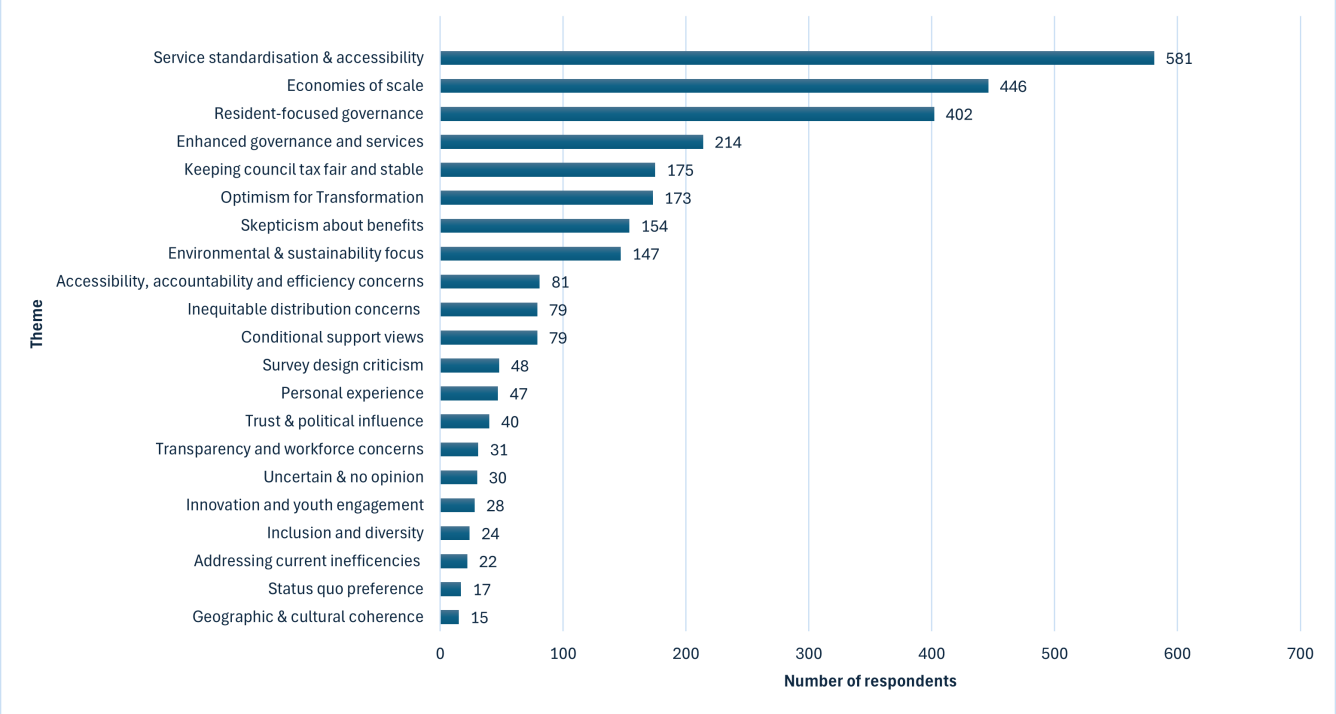
## The perspective of Kent residents

**Figure 18: What Kent residents value most about their local council:**




Overall, the highest-rated aspects were service quality, efficiency and value, problem resolution time, decision-making influence and council tax amount.

**Figure 19: Opportunities identified by Kent residents from local government reorganisation:**

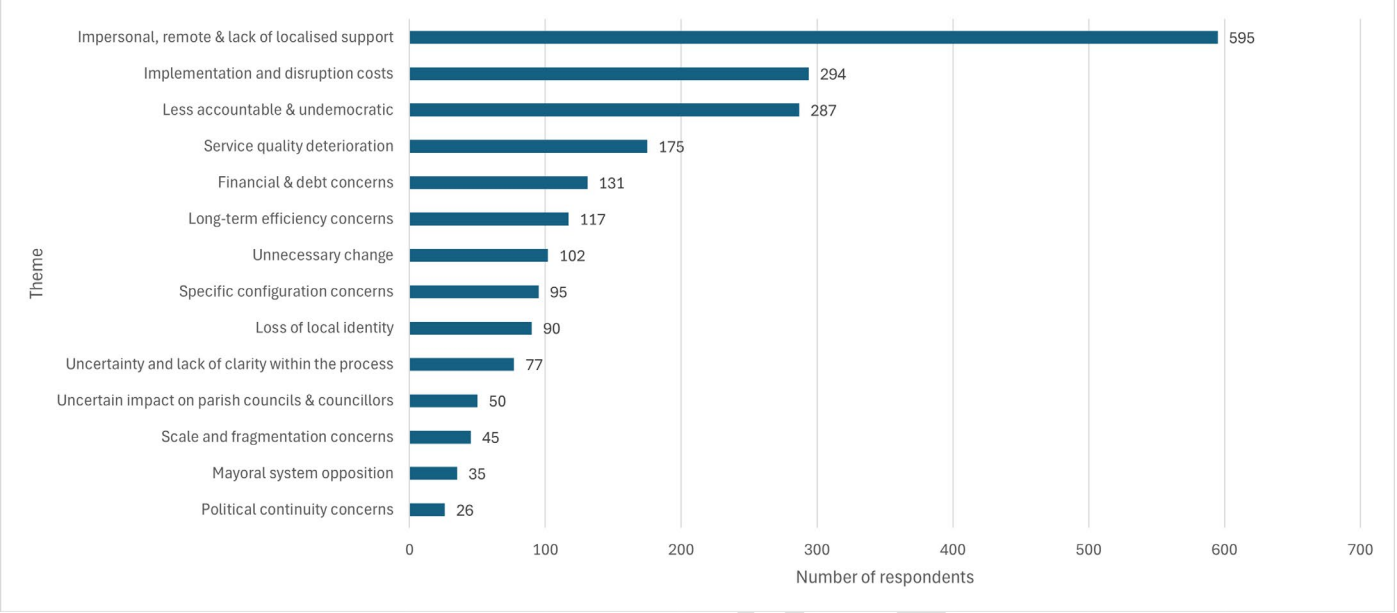



Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Participants identified economies of scale as another key opportunity of reorganisation, seeing it as a means to streamline operations, reduce bureaucracy and deliver better value and a fairer balance of power across areas.

> *"This is a generational opportunity, use it wisely or it will slip away like the last one… this is a chance to make a council work in new and innovative ways delivering services fit for 2025 not 1980." – Kent resident*

**Figure 20: Kent residents' concerns about local government reorganisation:**




Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote with fears that larger councils could become disconnected from communities, particularly in rural and coastal areas.

Participants questioned whether the promised efficiencies would outweigh the significant costs of restructuring and expressed concern about potential service disruption.

There was some concern that reorganisation will undermine local democracy and some fears that larger councils could weaken local accountability, reduce democratic representation and limit residents' ability to influence decisions that affect their communities.

*"[I am concerned by] loss of local connection, information and knowledge… Impersonal services due to number of residents, vulnerable residents suffering and likely to be left behind. Reduced opportunities for employment locally with risk of redundancies and increasing levels of unemployment. Potential increase in levels of vulnerabilities and failings of individuals, households and families mental health, safeguarding and domestic abuse." – Kent resident*

**Overview of key themes that emerged from the resident research:**

1. Service quality is a top priority for residents, yet many are concerned that services will deteriorate throughout the reorganisation process

Service quality ranked as residents' top priority with 81.4% rating it very important and a further 7.5% as important, underlining the need to maintain reliable everyday services through LGR.

Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Overall, there is an expectation for high quality, reliable and effective council services.

Residents want services to be responsible to community needs and to support local economies.

There was a strong desire to see improvements in coordination of local services, particularly those that impact daily life such as waste collection, highways, social care and community safety.

*"My main priority is to have big enough bins that are emptied on a weekly basis. This is very important to me and my family due to the amount of medical waste we have as a result of chronic illness." – Kent resident*

Some residents expressed concern LGR will result in a decline in service quality across the board, driven primarily by cost cutting measures rather than genuine efficiency improvements.

There is some anxiety essential services including social care, special educational, needs, waste collection and community facilities will suffer as budgets are spread thinner across large populations and competing priorities.

Many respondents noted any short-term financial savings from reorganisation will be offset by transition costs and the loss of established relationships and local expertise, ultimately leaving residents paying more through increased council tax while receiving demonstrated demonstrably worse services.

*"I work in education in Medway, we also have pupils who reside in Kent. From my experience, current services for education (especially SEND) and social care provision are poor and do not meet need" - Kent resident*

2. Service quality and input into decision-making is of particular importance for residents with disabilities

Residents with disabilities and those with long-term health conditions prioritised both service quality and having meaningful influence over decisions, reflecting a desire for responsive, inclusive services and concerns about accessibility, loss of voice and potential disruption to existing support.

While service quality remains priority for people who consider themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition, they also put a strong emphasis on influencing decisions.

This may suggest disabled residents value both swift service resolution and meaningful say in decisions affecting them, possibly reflecting experiences of services sometimes being designed without adequate input from people with disabilities.

When asked to outline their concerns about local government reorganisation, one of the respondents who considered themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition said:

*"Ability to be heard and to influence decision making in a much larger council area; The loss of a local Council making decisions for local people; The possibility of the Council offices being located somewhere that I can't get to (I don't drive); The possibility of losing services currently provided." - Kent resident*

Residents with disabilities want to ensure their voices are included in the redesign process to ensure their perspectives can shape services and meaningfully influence decision-making.

*"As a disabled resident who is passionate about shaping policy, I believe local government reorganisation presents a vital opportunity to build a more inclusive and accessible system… I hope any new council structure prioritises digital accessibility, transparent decision-making, and proactive outreach to underrepresented voices. It's essential that disabled people can contact councillors easily, attend meetings remotely, and have their concerns heard without barriers. Efficiency and value for money are important, but so is ensuring that no one is left behind. I urge decision-makers to design councils that reflect the diversity of their residents—not just in services,*

*but in how they engage and empower us. This reorganisation is also a chance to improve accountability."- Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 3 for further detail on the option-specific support high quality and sustainable service delivery.

3. Residents want to protect local identity, connection to community and democratic representation

Kent residents feel connected to their respective towns, villages and districts and want this to be reflected in new council arrangements.

67% of residents said a sense of belonging to their council area was important.

However, participants had concerns LGR will erode the distinct identities and characters of individual areas, towns and communities across Kent.

Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote.

Residents were worried councillors representing significantly larger populations will lack local knowledge and understanding of area-specific issues, making it harder for residents to reach their representatives and have their voices heard.

Some comments highlight fears that some areas, particularly rural and coastal communities, will be forgotten and abandoned in favour of larger urban areas.

*"Living in a rural area I consider that at larger authority including larger populated areas will mean our needs and wants are ignored." - Kent resident*

There is a desire for strong local representation.

Residents want to feel connected to their councillors and have confidence their voices will be heard and can shape their neighbourhoods.

68% of residents rated the ability to influence local decisions as very important.

Clear access to decision-makers and accountability in council actions was also highly valued by residents.

Residents emphasised the importance of maintaining a clear local voice in decision making and expressed concerns that larger councils may become distant and disconnected from the communities they serve.

*"If authorities are too large then councillors will have insufficient knowledge about the people they are representing and not be seen as part of their local community." - Kent resident*

Many expressed anxiety about the ability of a remote council to address everyday local concerns, with some noting that they already struggle to contact their current MPs due to large electorates and fear this problem will worsen.

There was concern amongst some residents that council offices may become physically inaccessible and that service quality may decline as decision-making becomes centralised among people unfamiliar with local needs and contexts.

*"Residents will have less representation and therefore local concerns or issues will not be sufficiently represented or addressed." - Kent Resident*

Notably, the ability to visit a council office, population size, ward size, attendance at council meetings and number of councillors were considered least important to residents when compared to other factors like service quality.

See Section 4: Criteria 1 for further detail on the model defines functional and coherent geographies and Section 4: Criteria 4 for further detail on how the model maintains local identity.

4. Residents view local government reorganisation as an opportunity to deliver better economies of scale value for money, but many are concerned with the cost to transition

Efficiency and value for money was the second highest priority among residents, with 74.3% rating it very important and 12.3% as important and residents expressing anxiety about costs and desire that promised savings materialise in practice.

*"The chance to simplify structures, reduce duplication, and make better use of resources across Kent and Medway. Clearer accountability for residents, with one council responsible for all services rather than multiple tiers… [as well as] efficiency and savings." - Kent resident*

Many participants viewed the reorganisation process as an opportunity to deliver more efficient, streamlined local government services that ultimately deliver better value for money for residents.

There was an expectation that reorganisation should bring economies of scale, reduce bureaucracy and ensure fairer balance of power across areas.

*"A single, unified authority could make it easier for people to understand who to turn to, and ensure that concerns are addressed without being passed between layers of bureaucracy." - Kent resident*

While many residents are hopeful about the potential benefits of reorganisation, some are concerned about the financial and operational cost of reorganisation, with many questioning whether the promised savings will ever materialise.

Participants were sceptical about transition costs, redundancies and systemic integration outweighing any efficiency gains, ultimately resulting in higher council tax for residents without any service improvements.

Comments highlight substantial anticipated expenses including restructuring, retaining and redundancy packages, IT system migrations, rebranding, new office infrastructure and external consultant fees.

*"My concerns relate to time and cost and how and the cost to Council Tax payers. With any reorganisation the short-term risk is always upheaval, delays in each council dealing with Business as unusual." - Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 2 for further detail on how the model supports resilient and efficient finances.

**The perspective of Kent partners and organisations**

There were shared perspectives across partner organisations and businesses:

1. There is genuine recognition among many stakeholders that reorganisation could unlock efficiencies.

Pooling resources, efficiency savings, reduced duplication, improved integration, stronger local voice, improved collaboration, joined-up policy making and clearer accountability were all highly referenced by stakeholders as potential benefits of reorganisation.

In particular, participants saw potential for improved mechanisms for communities to be heard, through co-production, forums or strengthened parish/town councils.

Economies of scale were also highly referenced. Participants acknowledged larger councils could enable efficiencies in back-office services, contracts and procurement, as well as recruitment and retention of specialist staff.

*"What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why? Duplication of services and confusion about which tier of local government is responsible for certain functions could be reduced. Larger councils may be able to pool resources to tackle county-wide issues such as major infrastructure or environmental challenges." - Kent partner*

2. Many stakeholders were concerned that reorganisation could exacerbate inequalities

Many stakeholders warned of risks relating to reduced local representation, loss of community identity, widening inequality, unresolved financial pressures and disruption to housing and estate management during transition.

Canterbury Foodbank raised concerns that reorganisation could worsen east/west inequality by separating poorer coastal areas from wealthier western districts.

They highlight new unitary authorities need strong, well-funded regional support to address inequalities.

*"There is a strong risk that unitary reorganisation will divide richer and poorer areas, so that the potential to cross-subsidise between areas of high social need (located mainly in the existing Thanet, Dovel, Folkestone and Hythe and Swale districts) and richer areas (Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells) is lost. At the same time opportunities to create high value-added employment in the poorer areas, whose economies currently rest on low-paid services (tourism, hospitality, social care) and primary sector agriculture will not exist." - Kent partner*

A concern of equality was also raised by a councillor who questions financial sustainability for the East Kent council, which concentrates the poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income.

There are concerns about resource allocation precision avoiding overlooked small, deprived areas and emphasis that local access points are essential for digitally-excluded residents.

***Table 30:*** *Nuanced feedback from stakeholders*

| Grouping | Key reflections from LGR | Verbatims |
|---|---|---|
| **Health** | • Stakeholders from the health sector emphasised opportunities for better integration if local government boundaries align with health and care partnership areas. The NHS trusts see potential for more seamless join working in social care, public health and prevention. | *"...we would value geographical alignment with NHS boundaries wherever possible and reasonable. Given that poor health is so strongly influenced by social factors, alignment facilitates coordination of approach."* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Parish Councils** | • Parish councils highlighted community identity and local knowledge are essential to resident wellbeing, concerns that extend to fears about lost heritage expertise, potential sale of community assets and diluted local oversight over planning and service decisions.<br>• Some stakeholders from parish councils emphasised parishes provide valued highly local, responsive community services and argue community identity is vital to resident wellbeing.<br>• Some acknowledged reorganisation could bring efficiency and clarity benefits, but stress local democracy or community identity should not be sacrificed in pursuit of these.<br>• They also emphasised parishes need proper recognition, empowerment and funding. | *"Parish Councils occupy a unique and invaluable position within their communities. As elected representatives who live and work within the areas they serve, Parish Councillors have a direct connection with local residents and a deep understanding of their needs and concerns."* |
| **Councillors** | • Councillors were concerned that reduced councillor numbers and increased responsibilities may deter candidates and reduce local representation and loss of local knowledge among councillors.<br>Residents<br>• Some respondents opposed abolishing district councils and list risks such as service disruption, higher costs and weaker democracy.<br>• A concern around equality was raised by a councillor who questioned the financial sustainability for an East Kent council concentrating poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income. | *"I am very concerned about using strategic planning and transport links on a wider scale to connect people to more places of value, build sustainable homes and vital infrastructure and bolster local growth. It is also important to me that we maintain local representation and community cohesion."* |
| **Housing** | • Stakeholders from the housing sector were concerned about service disruption during transition, delays to housebuilding, confusion over social housing priorities and potential disaggregation of county-wide social care services.<br>• An estate manager argued property management requires local knowledge and RICS regulations require surveyors to practice in known area and questions whether someone unfamiliar with an | *"Potential problems which could be created… Delays to housebuilding if newly-created unitary authorities opt to abandon adopted or emerging local plans in favour of developing their own; Confusion amongst residents on the housing waiting list over how local government reorganisation might affect* |

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| | area can manage valuations accurately, maintain estates or prevent loss of land through statutory rights. | *their priority for social housing…"* |
| **Education and skills** | • Further education leaders highlighted possibilities for coherent county-wide skills strategies and apprenticeship coordination that could better serve small-sized medium enterprises across Kent.<br>• However, among other things, they also highlighted that the reorganisation may have implications for learners with high needs. | *"Ensuring consistency, equity, and adequate provision will require any new local authorities to have the capacity and expertise to properly co-ordinate and oversee High Needs responsibilities."* |

**Support from residents and partner organisations for a 4-unitary model**

### Residents

There were several common themes that emerged through the resident research, such as service standardisation and accessibility (581 mentions), economies of scale (446 mentions), and resident-focused governance (402 mentions), which are all core themes that both reflect and support the proposed 4D model:

- **Service Quality**
  Residents wanted consistent, reliable frontline services such as waste, highways, and social care delivered in a joined-up way. The 4d model addresses this by removing the current split between county and district responsibilities, and integrating responsibility for key services (e.g. waste, highways, housing and social care) within sensible boundaries and geographies, enabling services to be designed and delivered aligned to local demand and needs.
- **Efficiency and Value for Money**
  There is public expectation for simplification and tangible savings. Respondents supported reducing duplication and delivering "one council per place," aligning strongly a four unitary single-tier model. As a small unitary, Medway has consistently demonstrated value for money for its residents charging the lowest council tax rates in Kent, receiving a "Good rating" for its Children's Services, being the only council in Kent providing weekly full waste collections and receiving a C2 rating for our Housing Landlord Service.
- **Local Identity and Belonging**
  Residents emphasised that new structures must preserve local identity. The 4D model creates four balanced unitaries built around real communities (North, East, Mid, and West Kent) preserving local identity while creating viable population sizes of 375k–625k, directly reflecting the feedback. Likewise, just under 60% feel that the size of the area covered by their council was important or very important.
- **Influence and Accountability**
  Residents told us they valued clear lines of accountability and wanted to know "who to contact." The 4d model provides one locally focused council for each geography, with

strengthened ward representation and community engagement mechanisms, and simplified governance structures.

As part of the engagement process, residents also provided feedback on specific council services:

- **Waste and Recycling**
  Featured prominently in both quantitative rankings and open-text responses as one of the top three services most valued by residents. Over 78% of respondents described waste and recycling as “essential to local quality of life,” and 64% identified it as a service they interact with most frequently. Comments reflected frustration at “inconsistent collection standards between districts” and confusion about “who is responsible for waste disposal versus collection.” Many respondents supported having “one council responsible for the whole service” to simplify accountability and ensure consistency. Option 4d meets this expectation by tailoring local waste management plans to local need alongside an integrated waste management function. I ı**Council Tax and Financial Efficiency**

  Council tax levels and perceived fairness were repeatedly cited as a key concern. 72% of respondents stated that “keeping council tax low and delivering value for money” was a very important priority with comments frequently referenced duplication of management and administration across tiers as a driver of inefficiency and higher council tax bills. Respondents expressed support for “streamlined councils that reduce duplication and pass on savings through council tax stability.” The 4d option consolidates

  anagement and back-office costs, creating scope to stabilise or slow growth in council tax without reducing frontline services.

- **Highways and Street Maintenance**

  In questions about improvement priorities, road maintenance, pothole repair and street cleanliness were among the most frequently mentioned issues. Many residents expressed confusion about responsibility for highways (“I never know whether it’s the county or the district I need to contact”) — a consistent theme supporting the simplification goal of LGR more widely. Respondents favoured local control of highways and street scene services, stating these are “the most visible test of council performance.” The

  4d model gives each Unitary Authority full control of highways, transport and public realm services, reducing confusion and enabling quicker, more accountable responses to local maintenance issues.

- **Housing, Planning and Social Care**

  Around 62% of respondents prioritised “better joined-up planning between housing and infrastructure” and 58% highlighted “improving adult social care and support for older people.” Qualitative feedback linked housing, social care and health integration as areas where the current two-tier split “creates gaps and delays.” Residents see a clear need for more integrated delivery across housing, planning, and care — functions currently divided between county and district councils. The 4d model unifies these wittin each new authority, addressing those service-level concerns directly and at more cohesive, neighbourhood level.

**Partners**

Stakeholder workshops and written submissions from over 40 organisations - including the NHS Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue, universities, chambers of commerce, and VCSE networks – has similar reflections:

- **Health and Social Care**
  They emphasised the importance of coterminous boundaries with the four Health and Care Partnerships, and a focus more on prevention and population health. The 4d geographies mirror the 4 HCP's, enabling joint commissioning, shared data systems, and prevention-focused services.
- **Emergency Services**
  They called for clearer accountability, simpler coordination and better real-time data-sharing during incidents. Option 4D provides four coterminous councils aligned with police and resilience-forum geographies, strengthening emergency planning and resilience.
- **Education and Skills Providers**
  They favoured devolved, place-based partnerships aligned with labour-market areas - precisely how the 4d model distributes functions across North, East, Mid and West Kent.
- **Education and Skills partners**
  They desired closer collaboration between councils, schools, FE and HE providers. They favoured devolved, place-based partnerships aligned with labour market areas – precisely how the proposed 4d option would distribute functions across North, East, Mid and West Kent.
- **Business and Economic Stakeholders**
  They sought a single, predictable planning and licensing regime. The 4d model provides that consistency within each area while retaining a Kent-wide strategic framework through the proposed Combined County Authority, giving investors and employers a single local point of contact/access.
- **Voluntary and Community Sector (VCSE) organisations**
  They favoured locally led commissioning, engagement and co-production. The 4d model maintains place-based partnerships while simplifying funding routes and opening opportunities for co-design.

Both residents and partners clearly showed a desire for 'one council per place', and not a remote authority for the whole county. This reflects a report by the District Council's Network – Bigger is not better (2020) which stated that residents value accessibility, identity and local responsiveness, with large units risking losing these and weakening trust in local government.

# Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance

**Criteria 4b.** Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance

## Maintaining local identity across Kent

Kent is a large and diverse region with a rich history, strong civic traditions and distinct local identities.

From coastal towns and rural villages to historic market centres and modern urban hubs, the geography and culture of Kent have shaped how communities live, work and relate to their local institutions.

We know from engagement with our residents they associate their identify with their local town and not their local council.

They do not live their lives according to administrative boundaries.

Their daily experience is shaped by functional geographies – commuting patterns, access to hospitals, schools, and community services – that often extend beyond council borders.

The lived reality is that every road, bus route, and service network crosses boundaries.

New councils must recognise this and work together to create coherent, strategic plans that reflect how people move and access services.

This includes transport, health and preventative care, which are most effective when delivered through local, community-based interventions.

New councils must support both strategic coordination and planning across council boundaries and local responsiveness.

*Placeholder for collage showing geographical identity of Kent*

## Four councils with clear identities

***Table 31:*** *Identity and culture for each council area*

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| **North Kent:**<br>• Medway (98%),<br>• Gravesham (87%) | **A place shaped by rivers, industry and resilience: North Kent's identity has always been forged by its geography and its people. Stretching from Dartford and Gravesham through Medway and into the northern reaches of Swale, it sits where the Thames meets the Medway — a landscape of estuary light, dockyard cranes and centuries of trade, craftsmanship and civic pride. It is both gateway and frontier: the place** |

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| • Swale (81%)<br>• Dartford (78%)<br>• Small parts of Tonbridge and Malling (3%)<br>• Maidstone (2%) | **where England looks out to Europe and where London's energy begins to meet Kent's coast and countryside.**<br><br>The shipwrights, engineers, dockworkers and artisans of Chatham and Sheerness built vessels that carried Britain's navy and its trade. The same rivers and railways that once moved timber, coal and munitions now move ideas, data and people. The great industrial waterfronts are being reimagined as creative campuses, university quarters and centres of innovation, but they still carry the imprint of the areas working heritage.<br><br>Local pride in towns like Rochester, Strood and Gillingham reflects a distinct urban identity that is separate from, yet complementary to, Kent's rural heartlands.<br><br>**Historic foundations:** The towns and villages of North Kent have deep historical roots. Rochester's castle and cathedral still dominate the skyline, reminders of its role as one of England's oldest bishoprics and a seat of power since Norman times. Gravesend and Dartford grew as market towns and maritime gateways. Sheerness and the Medway Towns became synonymous with naval power and shipbuilding excellence. Dickens drew literary inspiration from these streets and marshes, capturing a landscape of endurance and change that still resonates.<br><br>**A culture of creativity and craftsmanship:** Today, North Kent's culture is expressed through reinvention. The University Quarter in Chatham and the Historic Dockyard are vibrant anchors for the creative economy, home to artists, film-makers, designers and digital start-ups who have found inspiration in its industrial heritage. The Dockyard itself, a UNESCO World Heritage contender, has become one of Britain's best-preserved maritime sites and a symbol of how heritage can drive regeneration.<br><br>The areas cultural calendar is equally diverse: Rochester Sweeps Festival and Dickens Festival celebrate folklore and literature; the Fuse Festival and Paint the Town bring contemporary performance and digital art to public spaces; and Sheerness, Gravesend and Sittingbourne sustain a long-standing music and community arts scene rooted in local stories and traditions. From jazz on the riverfront to poetry in Medway cafés, this is a culture that values participation and reinvention over spectacle.<br><br>**Communities and place:** North Kent's population is one of the youngest and most diverse in the county. Its communities include long-established families with dockyard and military heritage, new international residents drawn by proximity to London, and creative professionals relocating for affordable living and studio space. This mix of tradition and change gives the area its edge: confident, straight-talking, entrepreneurial and outward-looking. It is also a place of contrasts maritime towns and rural hinterlands, new housing and medieval high streets, industrial estates and protected marshland. Yet these differences coexist within a strong sense of shared belonging. Whether through local football clubs, community festivals, volunteer networks or parish councils, civic pride runs deep.<br><br>**Modern identity and emerging story:** The area's identity is being reshaped around innovation, creativity and inclusion. The universities, new business parks and cultural institutions are redefining the economy, while the waterfront developments at Chatham, Rochester Riverside and Strood symbolise a wider renewal. This is a place that embraces its working-class heritage while |

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| | imagining new futures; a community that has adapted to change for centuries and continues to do so with resilience and ambition. From the estuary mudflats to the high-speed rail links, North Kent's culture is one of transformation and innovation with a strong sense of place. |
| **West Kent:**<br>• Sevenoaks<br>• Tunbridge Wells<br>• Tonbridge and Malling (61%)<br>• Dartford (22%)<br>• Gravesham (13%)<br>• Medway (2%)<br>• | **West Kent's identity is rooted in its position as both a rural heartland and a prosperous commuter region bridging London and the wider South East. The landscape – marked by the wooded ridges of the High Weald and the chalk escarpments of the North Downs has long shaped settlement, trade and character. Historic market towns and villages grew from medieval manors and coaching routes, many still defined by Georgian and Victorian architecture and their proximity to country estates.**<br><br>**History:** West Kent's history has been one of continuity and adaptation. Its fertile soils and ancient woodland supported early agriculture and iron production, while its rivers – notably the Medway and Darent – powered mills and trade from medieval times onwards. The area's turnpike roads and coaching inns made it a key route between London and the coast, a legacy still visible in settlements such as Tonbridge and Sevenoaks. The 19th century brought prosperity through railways and commuter expansion, creating new suburbs and villas for London professionals. Tunbridge Wells, designated a Royal spa town in 1909, became a byword for genteel refinement and civic pride. These influences fostered a distinctive blend of affluence, civic engagement and cultural life that continues to define the area today.<br><br>**Cultural Life and Community Identity:** West Kent's cultural identity reflects a balance between tradition and creativity. The area is home to a strong arts and heritage scene – from The Amelia Scott in Tunbridge Wells and the Sevenoaks Kaleidoscope Gallery to annual festivals such as the Tonbridge Music Weekend and Wealden Literary Festival. Historic houses and gardens like Knole, Penshurst Place, Ightham Mote and Hever Castle anchor a sense of continuity and attract international visitors, while smaller villages sustain rich networks of local societies, choirs, and theatre groups. The area's communities value civic participation, education and environmental stewardship. Green space, conservation, and quality of life remain central to local pride and identity.<br><br>**Sense of Place:** Landscape remains central to West Kent's sense of place. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and North Downs frame the region's identity, shaping its architecture, leisure and economy. Villages like Chiddingstone, Groombridge, and Plaxtol typify the Kent as well as the timber-framed houses, oast roofs and greens surrounded by orchards and hop gardens. Today, West Kent has some of the highest educational attainment and wellbeing indicators in Kent, underpinned by a strong voluntary and cultural sector. The region identifies as both outward-looking connected to global London and protective of its rural and historic character. |
| **East Kent:**<br>• Canterbury<br>• Dover<br>• Thanet | **East Kent has one of the richest and most distinctive identities in England – a place shaped by its coastline, its proximity to Europe, and centuries of exchange, migration, and resilience. The area's character is a product of both its geography and its people: an enduring maritime** |

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| • Folkestone and Hythe (64%)<br>• Swale (Faversham area 17%) | **landscape that has long served as the nation's frontier, and a network of communities that blend historic pride with creative reinvention.**<br><br>**A Historic Gateway and Cultural Crossroads:** For over a thousand years, East Kent has been England's meeting point with continental Europe. The ports of Dover and Sandwich, and later Folkestone and Ramsgate, have connected Britain to the world – as trading posts, embarkation points, and front lines of defence. From the arrival of the Romans and St Augustine's mission at Canterbury in 597 AD, to the modern Channel Tunnel at Folkestone, this eastern corner has been a literal and symbolic gateway between nations.<br><br>This international orientation continues to shape East Kent's identity. The cultural confidence of Canterbury England's spiritual capital and UNESCO World Heritage Site coexists with the cosmopolitan energy of coastal towns such as Margate and Folkestone, whose fortunes have risen on creativity, tourism and reinvention. The coast has always been porous to ideas, influences and enterprise, giving East Kent a personality that is outward-looking yet deeply rooted.<br><br>**Sense of Place:** East Kent's geography defines its sense of belonging. The chalk cliffs of Dover, and the fertile Stour valley all form part of a landscape that has inspired artists, writers and campaigners for centuries. From Turner's seascapes to the writings of Dickens and Conrad, the light and openness of the coastline have long shaped the area's artistic imagination.<br><br>Each community has its own distinct story. Canterbury is defined by learning, pilgrimage and continuity; Dover by courage, resilience and service; Folkestone by reinvention and creative endeavour; Thanet by independence and seaside vitality; Faversham by industry, craftsmanship and civic pride. Together these identities form a connected whole – diverse, self-confident and bound by a shared coastal narrative.<br><br>**Culture, Creativity and Enterprise:** Cultural regeneration has been central to East Kent's modern identity. Turner Contemporary in Margate, the Creative Quarter in Folkestone, and the Marlowe Theatre and Cathedral Precincts in Canterbury are cornerstones of a flourishing creative economy. Festivals such as Folkestone Book Festival, Canterbury Festival, and Ramsgate Festival of Sound celebrate the region's artistic spirit, while community heritage projects keep local histories alive – from maritime museums to Roman and medieval archaeology.<br><br>These assets are not only economic drivers but expressions of East Kent's social fabric: open, inventive, and collaborative. They provide the foundation for inclusive place-making and for an identity that values heritage while embracing change.<br><br>**Continuity, Resilience and Renewal:** Across centuries of invasion, industrial decline and renewal, East Kent has demonstrated an extraordinary capacity to adapt. Naval history, agriculture, fishing, and tourism have each risen and transformed with the times. The decommissioning of the Dover and Richborough power stations, the redevelopment of the port estates, and the rise of renewable energy and creative industries all mark a region able to reinvent itself without losing its sense of purpose. |

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| **Mid Kent:**<br>• Ashford<br>• Maidstone (98%)<br>• Folkestone and Hythe (36%)<br>• Tonbridge and Malling (36%)<br>• Swale (3%) | Mid Kent occupies the historic heart of the county, defined by its market towns, rural landscapes and long-standing role as the crossroads of Kent. It is an area where the county's agricultural heritage, medieval trade routes and civic traditions meet the modern dynamism of transport, enterprise, and innovation but where the "Garden of England" remains a lived reality.<br><br>**Historic Development:** The area's settlements trace their roots to early Saxon and medieval origins, when Maidstone, Ashford and Tonbridge grew as market towns and river crossings on the Medway and Stour. Medieval Maidstone, with its Archbishop's Palace and All Saints Church, served as a key ecclesiastical and trading centre. Ashford's prominence rose through agriculture and later through the arrival of the railways, becoming a major railway works town and now a strategic rail gateway to Europe. Tonbridge and Malling's history is anchored in Norman fortifications and market life, while the surrounding Weald communities developed through hop growing, orchards and milling industries that defined Kent's rural economy for centuries.<br><br>Hythe's western parishes, forming part of Mid Kent's geography, add a coastal dimension shaped by military and maritime history from the Royal Military Canal to the defences of the Napoleonic wars. Hythe and the areas to the west retain a distinctive rural coastal identity linked to the Romney Marsh hinterland and the Kent Downs. Together these layers of history give Mid Kent a strong sense of continuity, with historic landscapes and architecture woven into its modern settlements.<br><br>**Sense of Place:** Mid Kent's identity is both rooted and connected. The rolling Weald, hop gardens and Oast houses remain symbols of the county's pastoral heritage, while the M20 and High Speed 1 have turned Ashford and Maidstone into commuter and commercial hubs linking Kent with London and Europe. The result is a hybrid identity — a region that retains a strong rural sense of place while serving as a vital economic bridge between Kent's coastal regeneration areas and its metropolitan north and west. Distinctive local identities endure within this shared geography:<br>• Maidstone is the county town and civic heart of Kent, known for its river setting, heritage architecture, and administrative and cultural role.<br>• Ashford represents modern Kent — ambitious, connected, and forward-looking, blending heritage with contemporary urban development.<br>• The western (Folkestone) and Hythe parishes retain a distinctive rural coastal identity linked to the Romney Marsh hinterland and the Kent Downs.<br><br>**Cultural Assets**: Cultural assets in Mid Kent are diverse and accessible. The Maidstone Museum and Bentlif Art Gallery, Hazlitt Theatre, and Ashford's Revelation St Mary's provide established centres for art, performance and heritage, while new creative venues such as Ashford's Elwick Place reflect growing investment in leisure and culture. The area's festivals from the Maidstone River Festival to Ashford's Create Festival celebrate community, music and local craftsmanship.<br><br>The Kent Downs National Landscape, Len Valley, and Wealden countryside inspire strong place-based identity and tourism, while traditional crafts such |

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| | as brewing, fruit growing and viticulture have been revitalised through new rural enterprises and local produce markets. The area's creative and artisan industries increasingly align with sustainability and place-branding initiatives that link culture to economic growth.<br><br>**Modern Identity and Future Outlook:** Today Mid Kent's culture and history inform a confident, connected, and adaptable identity. It is a region proud of its agricultural past yet defined by its modern role as Kent's central engine of growth. The coexistence of medieval market towns, garden communities, and international transport hubs captures the essence of Mid Kent's story a place where heritage and innovation co-exist, and where the idea of "Kentishness" continues to evolve. |

**Why Option 4D will retain and grow cultural identity**

The 4D option provides the best balance between local identity, scale, and service sustainability across Kent and Medway. It creates four coherent Unitary Authorities North, East, Mid, and West Kent each aligned with natural communities, transport corridors, and health and economic partnerships.

The 4D proposal is explicitly designed to strengthen, not dilute, Kent's unique local identities. Option 4D aligns administrative boundaries with the county's historic communities, economic geographies and cultural heritage, ensuring that decision-making remains close to the people and places it serves.

As a founding design principle, boundaries have been drawn around recognisable communities and place, following natural, cultural and economic geographies such as the Thames Gateway, Weald, and East Kent coast. Each new council combines towns and rural areas that already share historic ties, travel-to-work patterns and civic institutions, preserving community cohesion.

The model maintains and empowers existing town and parish councils, encouraging greater devolution of local decision-making and protecting the distinct character of villages and market towns. Local heritage identities such as "City of Canterbury," "Royal Tunbridge Wells," "Historic Rochester," and "Garden of England" will be retained and celebrated within each new council's civic identity.

Kent's culture and heritage are integral to its sense of place. Option 4D embeds cultural and heritage leadership within each authority, ensuring continuity and local stewardship:

- **North Kent** – Safeguards the rich naval and industrial heritage of Chatham Dockyard, Rochester Cathedral, and Gravesend's riverfront, integrating them into regeneration and tourism strategies.
- **East Kent** – Unites Canterbury's UNESCO World Heritage Site with Dover Castle and Thanet's coastal heritage, enabling a coherent cultural tourism plan across the coastal belt.
- **Mid Kent** – Protects the rural and market-town heritage of Maidstone, Ashford and the Weald, supporting agricultural, craft and festival traditions central to Kent's identity.

- **West Kent** – Sustains the historic and cultural character of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Royal Tunbridge Wells, maintaining their strong civic and architectural heritage.

Preserving heritage is also about ensuring it contributes to the future prosperity and wellbeing of communities. Heritage-led regeneration (e.g. Chatham Dockyard, Canterbury Cathedral Quarter, Dover Waterfront) will be central to local growth strategies. Cultural investment plans will link creative industries with historic sites, sustaining tourism and local employment. Education partnerships with universities and cultural institutions (e.g. University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church, University for the Creative Arts) will embed arts and heritage in civic development. Community volunteering and stewardship will be supported through local heritage trusts and civic societies, ensuring residents remain guardians of place.

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# **Criteria 5:** Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

This section includes:


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| **Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent** | **Criteria 5a** |
| **Equal representation from all four corners of Kent** | **Criteria 5c** |


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# Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent

**Criteria 5a.** Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.

**Criteria 5b.** Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.

**All of Kent's councils recognise the critical need to devolve powers to a strategic authority to unlock public sector reform and empower decisions about Kent to be made in Kent. The vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport, and the benefits it would bring across Kent in terms of accelerating public service reform, cannot be underestimated. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve life chances for the residents and businesses of Kent and Medway.**

## A devolution deal for Kent

We were disappointed to not be accepted onto the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and have been pressing the case with ministers and MHCLG to understand the path towards devolution in Kent.

This is particularly important in light of the critical role Kent plays in national infrastructure and border management, and the opportunities that arise from a strategic county-wide approach being taken on economic growth, education and skills.

## Partner support

Key local public sector partners - the Chief Executives and Chairs of the ICB, health and care partnerships and acute trusts, the Chancellors/Vice Chancellors of the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and Greenwich University which has a campus within Kent, the Chairs of the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, Business Advisory Board and Kent Invicta Chamber, the Chief Executives of Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover and the Chairs of the Kent Housing Group and Kent Developers Group - all share our concerns that reorganisation in Kent without devolution would result in a piecemeal approach and sub-optimal transformation.

## Timelines that work for both priorities

Aligning the timeline for the creation of a strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services through localised arrangements only to reaggregate services into a strategic authority shortly after.

This two-stage piecemeal approach would generate additional cost, complexity and create further disruption to staff and services as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government in delivering national objectives and policies.

Kent's district and borough councils and Medway strongly support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority at the first available opportunity in April 2028 to operate alongside the new unitary authorities.

Government support and agreement for devolution to be aligned with local government reorganisation in Kent will enable effective transition planning of key services resulting in a seamless transition, enabling synergies in programme management and leadership capacity while providing clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government and devolution opportunities will be embraced in Kent.

Clarity for partners is critical given our deep ambitions regarding public service reform at the earliest opportunity.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving outcomes.

Kent is a natural fit for devolution as critical partners already work coterminously with the footprint of the strategic authority including Kent Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the integrated care board and many voluntary and community service organisations.

A failure to bring forward devolution simultaneously alongside reorganisation in Kent represents a significant additional cost pressure through missed opportunities, delay, disruption and duplication of effort.

The proposals for LGR in Kent and Medway directly address the rationale given by MHCLG for excluding Kent and Medway from the DPP, namely addressing population disparity imbalance between the area of Kent and the unitary authority of Medway.

We urge ministers to accelerate devolution in Kent to meet the timescale we have proposed as this will deliver the greatest opportunity for successful public sector reform.

**All of Kent's councils recognise the critical need to devolve powers to a strategic authority to unlock public sector reform and empower decisions about Kent to be made in Kent. The vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport, and the benefits it would bring across Kent in terms of accelerating public service reform, cannot be underestimated. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve life chances for the residents and businesses of Kent and Medway. All of Kent's councils recognise the critical need to devolve powers to a strategic authority to unlock public sector reform and empower decisions about Kent to be made in Kent. The vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport, and the benefits it would bring across Kent in terms of accelerating public service reform, cannot be underestimated. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve life chances for the residents and businesses of Kent and Medway. Timelines that work for both priorities Enabling strategic leadership through a regional governance model**

A strategic authority across Kent and Medway provides a real opportunity to strengthen Kent as a whole and to focus the role of unitary authorities on their delivery role.

The strategic authority will take a strategic role across Kent including:

- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

A Mayor for Kent will provide a clear single voice for the region, support inward investment and ensure the county punches its weight on the national and international stages.

Kent requires a voice on the Council of the Nations and Regions, not only for its size but also for the critical role it plays in national infrastructure, travel and borders.

This high-profile leadership role with government will support growth in Kent and, through the national role, address a gap that would otherwise be apparent in addressing national priorities.

The future councils will be balanced and powerful constituent authorities on the strategic authority, alongside the mayor, and will provide the voice for their distinct economic areas.

We know from existing combined authorities that a single strategic approach does not mean that one size fits all.

A Kent strategic authority will also enable the councils to focus on effective local delivery and deep public service reform on an appropriate footprint.

The councils will have different strengths and needs, local partnerships and communities they represent.

A strategic authority will provide clear overall direction and coherence, enabling councils to focus delivery in their local area which will mean they can become more agile through a place-based approach within a larger strategic framework.

**Progress towards devolution**

Despite not being on the DPP, we have continued to develop our approach to devolution in Kent to enable us to rapidly take advantage of the opportunity when provided.

We have started work to agree our vision and strategic intent regarding devolution and the role and purpose of the strategic authority in delivering it, and the most effective relationship required with the constituent councils.

We are refreshing our shared priorities by identifying critical strategic challenges and opportunities requiring a strategic and Kent-wide approach.

Following MHCLG support for our devolution approach, we will finalise the preferred structure and identify the processes and resources required to integrate into the combined LGR and devolution implementation programme.

This will enable us to prepare the ground for the Mayoral Strategic Authority, develop the early investment programme and begin development of the statutory policy framework.

This will set robust foundations for the mayoral election and strategic authority to vest in April 2028.

Option 4D presents a compelling governance model for Kent, structured around four councils designed to advance strategic devolution and regional priorities. This configuration ensures balanced representation by aligning population sizes across the councils and fostering equitable participation in county-wide decision-making. This is essential for cultivating strong, collaborative relationships within any future strategic authority. The 4D configuration ensures all four councils are balanced in population and fiscal strength (approx. 375,000–625,000 residents), giving parity of influence and shared governance within a CCA model.

The Government's English Devolution Framework (2022) sets out that strong, stable, and strategically coherent local governance is a prerequisite for devolved powers. Option 4D directly meets this test by:

- Creating four resilient councils with clear accountability for place-based delivery;
- Enabling a Kent & Medway Combined County Authority (CCA) or Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) to act at regional scale;
- Providing strategic coherence across transport, skills, housing and net-zero while maintaining local flexibility;
- Embedding community identity and democratic legitimacy through direct representation and local accountability.

Importantly, this structure mirrors successful devolved regions such as Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, combining local responsiveness with regional capability.

The four unitary model will have streamlined governance which will enhance leadership clarity and simplify administrative processes, positioning Kent to engage more effectively with central government and regional stakeholders. Thus, Kent will be able to strengthen its strategic voice and influence over the region, through presenting a unified stance on critical issues such as infrastructure, housing, and economic growth.

The proposal aligns unitary boundaries with natural geographic landmarks, functional economic areas and transport corridors, thereby improving coordination and reducing inefficiencies. This alignment supports the effective delivery of devolved functions and ensures that governance structures reflect the county's operational realities.

These councils are designed to be sufficiently large to deliver services efficiently, yet remain closely connected to their communities. This balance enables responsive, locally tailored services whilst also balancing with the delivery of broader strategic ambitions.

Option 4D offers a governance framework capable of delivering strategic devolution through fair representation, simplified leadership, collaborative engagement, and locally attuned decision-making. It aligns Kent's geography with its economic and environmental realities, equipping the county to manage planning, infrastructure, and sustainability priorities with confidence and cohesion.

# Population sizes that support devolution

**Criteria 5c**. Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

**The four-unitary model for Kent meets government criteria by creating balanced and sufficiently large authorities. Each council is large enough to manage complex, devolved responsibilities yet each remains small enough to sustain strong local identity and meaningful democratic representation. It supports effective devolution by enabling strong collaboration with a Mayoral Strategic Authority and promotes equitable, efficient local governance**

**Devolution governance: the argument for Option 4D**

The 4D model proposes the creation of four balanced Unitary Authorities, each with a population between approximately 375,000 and 625,000 residents. These population ranges fall squarely within the optimal scale for councils recommended by MCHLG typically 300,000 to 700,000 residents which balances strategic capacity, financial resilience and local accountability.

Each council is large enough to manage complex, devolved responsibilities such as housing growth, transport infrastructure, skills planning and public health. Yet each remains small enough to sustain strong local identity and meaningful democratic representation. This creates a structure that mirrors successful devolved regions such as Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, and the West Midlands, where individual constituent authorities typically range between 350,000 and 700,000 residents. Balanced population sizes ensure parity between partners, preventing dominance by a single large authority and allowing equal voice within a future Kent & Medway Combined County Authority (CCA).

# **Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent** | **Criteria 6a, 6b** |
| **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)** | **Criteria 6a, 6b** |


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# Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent

**Criteria 6a:** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

**Criteria 6b:** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment are central to achieving our LGR objectives in Kent. Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) represent a powerful opportunity to transform how communities take part in local decision-making.**

**Through LGR in Kent, communities will have a stronger voice within their new councils and with partners. We will ensure local insights shape discussions between unitary authorities and service providers, while building on and strengthening existing approaches that are already working well.**

Effective local government is a function of the relationships between elected members, service provision, residents and communities.

Empowered, engaged communities know who they are and what they need.

They know what services are available in their area and they expect to co-design and shape those services.

They see and know their councillors and local service providers.

And they are not afraid to share their perspectives and they are confident they will be heard.

Councils at all levels across Kent and Medway have longstanding commitments to community engagement via county-wide initiatives such as Crowdfund Kent, district and borough forums like the Thanet Youth Council and direct grants for local organisations from parish and town councils like Faversham.

At the heart of this commitment lies a requirement to use LGR as an opportunity to work differently by tempering the tension between the economies and resilience that come with delivering at scale and the granular responsiveness and relevance that thrives on close working with each community.

Having fewer, single-tier councils offers greater opportunities for scaled models, consistent investment of resources and potentially smoother co-operation with statutory partners.

Conversely, a larger number of smaller councils provides a stronger basis to co-design locally-specific services that adapt to communities' distinct needs and priorities.

Regardless of the model selected by government, councils will deliver stronger community engagement and enable genuine neighbourhood empowerment, bringing decisions closer to communities and ensuring services are relevant, joined-up and efficient.

To do this, Kent recognises it requires a new vehicle for community engagement that is at once locally rooted and strategically impactful.

This is the Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC), a neighbourhood hub for partnership working and co-production that unites communities, elected unitary and town and parish councillors and service partners. NACs, working alongside service providers as well as unitary and town and parish councillors, will enable LGR to realise the generational opportunity to improve community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

Alongside the major changes to our council structures, this vehicle will support communities to be closer, more informed and more empowered in the decisions affecting them.

The participation of services will ensure NACs convert local perspectives into meaningful influence, while representation from town and parish councillors will allow close coordination and alignment with local governance and priorities.

Therefore, we have assessed our plans to enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment using three key criteria:

- will the reforms enable communities to make their voice heard by their unitary authority and by partners delivering services?
- will they enable unitary authorities to work effectively with service providers in response to insights from community engagement?
- will they allow unitary authorities to build effectively on community engagement approaches that are already working?

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# Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)

**Criteria 6a:** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

**Criteria 6b:** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are Kent's preferred model for strengthening local engagement through LGR. Led by ward councillors, NACs connect communities with services and decision-making, adapting to local needs and ambitions. They integrate town and parish councils, statutory services, and community groups. Their success will depend on inclusive engagement, strong local partnerships and responsiveness to community priorities.**

## Role of NACs

Central government has made clear that Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are the preferred way for Local Authorities to 'hardwire community engagement into their own structures'[42] through LGR.

Led by ward councillors, NACs are seen as maximising the structural efficiencies brought about by LGR and strengthening localism and community participation across all areas.

Our approach takes advantage of this opportunity to realise these benefits in ways that meet our distinctive Kent context.

This approach has been the prevailing view amongst Kent Leaders and officers during recent engagement with stakeholders

Kent's NACs will be a central hub for local partnership working, connecting residents and communities with services and their council.

Each NAC will identify its initial priorities, which may be specific local issues with significant opportunity to flex new powers and responsibilities around new solutions.

Over time, we anticipate NACs will gravitate towards more strategic arrangements between partners across their areas of responsibility.

NACs will be able to take on different levels of responsibility and decision-making in response to the size and ambition of their area.

Some may begin as largely advisory and consultative, acting as an effective platform to communicate local perspectives to strategic forums in the new unitary authority and other statutory partners.

Others may request and receive devolved responsibility and budget from their unitary authority.

[42] MHCLG, 'Local government reorganisation: summary of feedback on interim plans', available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-summary-of-feedback-on-interim-plans/local-government-reorganisation-summary-of-feedback-on-interim-plans

We want to see NACs tending towards taking on more devolved responsibilities as they develop more mature local ways of working.

### Membership of NACs

Elected unitary authority councillors will be the anchors of their NAC, ensuring that democratic accountability is central to local collaboration and delivery, and while making listening, understanding, and advocacy integral to their role.

As well as unitary councillors, NACs will include representation from town and parish councils where applicable and statutory services such as police, health, children's and family services.

Residents' associations and business groups will be encouraged to attend, as will Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, to ensure local perspectives and needs are well represented.

Precise membership of each NAC will vary depending on the needs and context of that community but all should enable participation by individual members of the public.

### Scale and local adaptations

Kent's NACs need to be effective neighbourhood structures.

As such, they need to cover a small enough population for a clear local identity to apply.

NACs in cities are likely to cover a larger population than those in villages, for example.

We will work with stakeholders to identify NAC boundaries and these will be informed by other neighbourhood-level footprints such as primary care networks which cover 30,000 to 50,000 residents.

These areas will cover substantially smaller geographies than those of statutory services and the unitary authorities and NACs will need to work with statutory partners to develop and iterate effective models of engagement.

On the other hand, NACs will cover a substantially larger population than most town and parish councils.

It is recommended these work in clusters to engage with this model.

Across Kent, different community engagement models are in use.

These need to shape NAC formation so that the new NACs work 'with the grain' of local energy and trust.

### Integrating NACs and town and parish councils

Town and parish councillors will be core members of well-functioning NACs.

The pivotal and established role that Kent's 317 town and parish councils play in community engagement in Kent will remain critical for any new council model.

These hyper-local councils, covering an average population of just over 5,000, are the closest tier of government to residents.

They provide an irreplaceable platform for direct interaction and feedback, and they will allow this representation to be sustained through the disruption and change of LGR.

Town and parish councils in Kent convene and facilitate face-to-face and online discussions and allow residents to ask questions, make suggestions and raise concerns in a setting that ensures their local context is respected and understood.

These forums empower communities and clearly position their unique needs and priorities within broader governmental decisions.

No other level of civic engagement can match their capacity to help smaller towns and villages retain their distinct identity.

Kent's local councils have widely varying numbers of town and parish councils (see below), due to population size and historical context.

Approximately six to 10 town or parish councils might expect to cluster into each NAC, though this will vary in accordance with local need and context.

| Council area | Town and parish councils[43] |
|---|---|
| Ashford | 42 |
| Canterbury | 26 |
| Dartford | 8 |
| Dover | 35 |
| Folkestone and Hythe | 29 |
| Gravesham | 5 |
| Maidstone | 40 |
| Medway | 11 |
| Sevenoaks | 31 |
| Swale | 37 |
| Thanet | 10 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 27 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 16 |
| **Total** | **317** |

**Creating the conditions for community empowerment**

NACs can be a powerful structure to drive community and neighbourhood empowerment in Kent, but success depends on three key conditions for success:

1) inclusive community engagement
2) being rooted in communities and existing structures
3) the ability to drive strategic impact

[43] Borough, District, and Unitary Authority websites

| Conditions for success | How this can be achieved in Kent |
|---|---|
| **1. Inclusive community engagement** | • **Embed openness, inclusion, and co-production** as foundational operational principles. Where communities feel 'done to' they vote with their feet, causing meaningful initiatives to wither on the vine. NACs' membership structures and role provide a context for genuine inclusion and co-production. NAC chairs and councillors must visibly and consistently model these values or participation from day one or participation risks quickly reverting to previous levels. This includes allowing NACs to form on different timelines depending on local appetite and capacity.<br>• **Resource communities to shape their NAC's scope and priorities**: Having the authority and resources to make a difference is at the heart of localism. Clear, permissive frameworks will support NACs to use their knowledge to define and tackle the subjects that matter to them.. NACs will be encouraged and supported, with the potential for seed funding and officer support where appropriate, to explore co-production and participatory models in the design and commissioning of services.<br>• **Poor transport links and digital isolation may hamper participation in rural or deprived communities**. And some places will have less past experience of collective action and deliberation. NACs will need support to work through these questions.<br>• **Confusion or cynicism borne of past restructures may demotivate communities** and prevent engagement. NACs and councils must be transparent about the rationale and roadmap for change and demonstrate with actions that NACs represent a real opportunity to make a difference. |
| **2. Drive strategic impact** | • Unitary authorities will need a **sustained commitment to gather and listen to NAC feedback** when developing strategies. The new councils will need structures and practices that embed listening and learning from NACs which should become advisory partners in policy formation.<br>• NACs will need to be supported and empowered in ways that acknowledge historic inequalities.<br>  ○ Given Kent's diversity, some NACs will need participation and resourcing mechanisms that take account of differences in civic capacity and social infrastructure, including additional capacity-building support.<br>  ○ Unitary authorities will need to be willing to listen closely to quieter voices from less well-resourced communities. |
| **3. Rooted in communities and existing groups** | • Accessible, skilled, and informed unitary and town/parish councillors<br>  ○ NACs will need **councillors who are skilled at local convening, mediating, and building coalitions for action**, sometimes in new ways. To support this, future councils will invest in updated councillor development programmes that include community leadership and co-production methods.<br>  ○ **Councillors will need access to local intelligence and data**, ensuring they can respond with insight and evidence to residents' concerns. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | ○ **Councillor remuneration and practical support** will need to be reviewed where new expectations on councillors' time exceed current commitments.<br>• A sustainable ecosystem of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations<br>○ **Strong and resilient VCSE partners are essential** for translating local priorities into tangible outcomes. Kent's small and medium size VCSEs, which will be vital delivery partners, sources of local insight and anchors of community trust within thriving NACs, are collectively experiencing significant financial strain with more closing than opening in recent years[44].<br>○ Unitary authorities will **build on existing work to strengthen local VCSEs**, and NACs will have an important role to play in amplifying VCSE insights and supporting the commissioning of smaller organisations.<br>• Boundaries that promote local engagement and strategic influence<br>• Unitary authorities will need to **develop boundaries that balance competing requirements** in order to unite meaningful communities with shared concerns, and to be coterminous with statutory and other partner geographies (for example, GPs and primary care networks) to support partner participation and dialogue. Community Governance Reviews going on across the region should also be considered in this process. |

[44] KCC, Headline analysis of the voluntary and community sector in Kent, available online at: https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/61718/Kent-voluntary-sector.pdf

# Section 6: Implementation plan

This section includes:

## Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)

## Programme governance and workstreams

## Summary risks and mitigations

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# Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)

## Joint implementation planning across Kent

We are operating a shared programme across all Kent authorities including a Steering Group, Programme Board and have a mature programme team with shared funding operating across all councils.

We have a long history of working across councils which is a very strong foundation to start our LGR journey from.

We bring significant momentum, shared understanding and common purpose that we will maintain into the future phases of the work.

We have worked extensively with colleagues from previous LGR programmes to discuss their approach and lessons that we can take into our implementation approach for Kent.

Our approach is guided by prudence regarding the scale and complexity of Kent but also ambition regarding public service reform and the role that an effective and efficient reorganisation can play in it.

Our approach is designed to implement reorganisation alongside devolution and the establishment of a Strategic Authority across Kent (see Criteria 5 for more detail).

There are significant synergies from operating a combined devolution and LGR programme where they can be done in parallel.

## Implementation principles for LGR in Kent

We have established principles to guide our approach to implementation and to ensure it is aligned with our wider public service reform ambitions. We will:

1) maintain and enhance our collaborative approach
2) ensure LGR decisions enable the bigger picture of devolution and public service reform
3) plan ahead and communicate
4) engage and co-create with partners and residents
5) support staff and partners on the journey
6) minimise disruption to staff and residents
7) establish governance to ensure delivery
8) transparent decision-making
9) be ambitious in what we can achieve beyond safe and legal
10) Keep provision of services to residents at the forefront of decision-making

## The phases of LGR

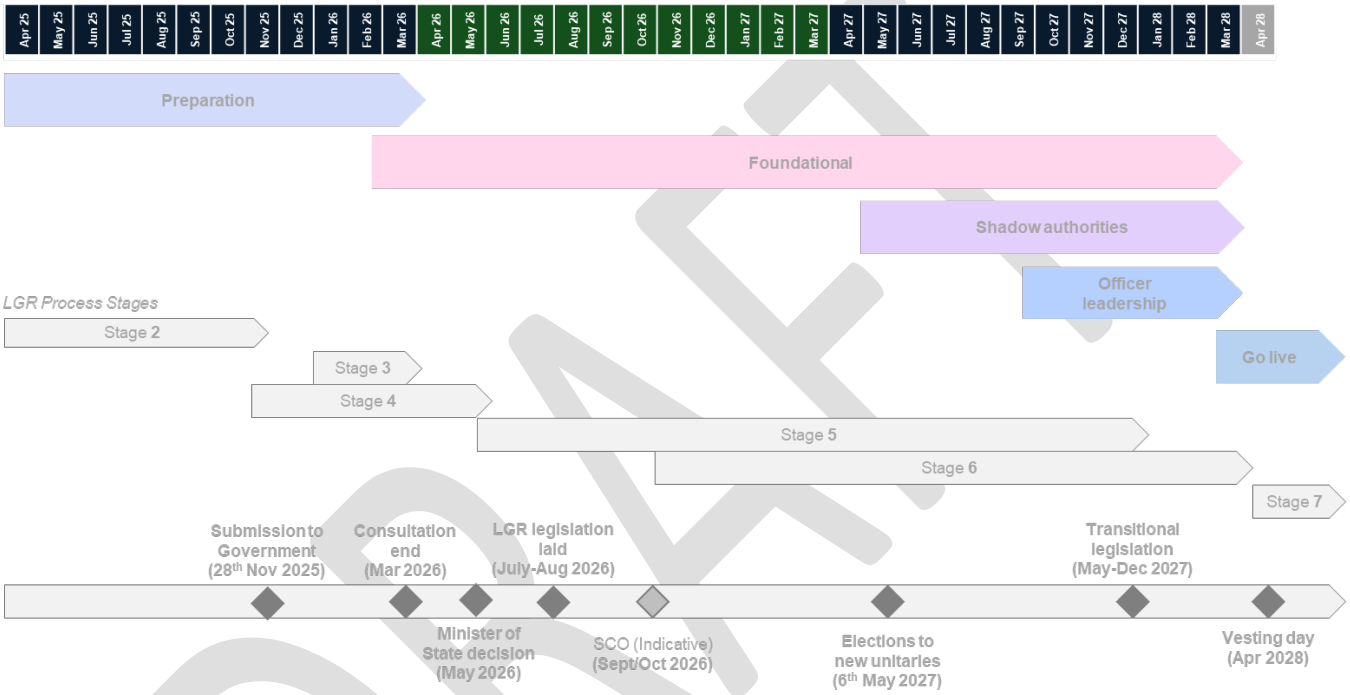
We understand the distinct phases that an LGR programme requires, the relative governance, priorities and resourcing required to make them a success.

Through working with colleagues who have delivered LGR and MHCLG officials we have developed a timeline for reorganisation which maps our phases onto the stages outlined by MHCLG.

We have transitioned our programme approach from development of this proposal into establishing the programme management that we will require through the preparation phase.

The plan and our advance preparation will enable us to deliver efficiently and continue engagement and consistent communication with partners and staff.

This will maintain the resilience of local government and maximise the benefits of reorganisation in Kent throughout the process.




1. **Preparation** Before a decision on the shape of the new councils. We have started work on implementation early to set it up for success. We have a plan for Day One and are ambitious to deliver strong, cohesive councils to deliver transformation and public service reform beyond safe and legal transition. We will appreciate a timely ministerial decision to enable us to move beyond this phase.

2. **Foundational** When a decision on the shape of the new councils has been made, initially before the election of shadow members or appointment of officer leadership.

3. **Shadow authorities** With members elected but only with programme or unofficial groupings of officers for capacity.

4. **Officer leadership** When statutory and senior officers have been appointed and can prepare the new councils working with the appointed councillors.

5. **Go-live** After vesting day when the councils deliver services.

There are fundamentals that will remain in place throughout the reorganisation process:

- staff support and communication
- communication with partners and residents
- access to the right skills and capacity
- clarity on Day 1 requirements and target state
- management of programme creep and over-optimism
- change management
- collaboration and ownership

In addition, these are the summary priorities by phase:

| Phase | Summary priorities |
|---|---|
| **Preparation** | • Collaborative service working – identifying opportunities, risks and shared understanding<br>• Set up the programme (governance, workstreams and finance)<br>• Recruit Strategic Partner(s)<br>• Agree target position for Day One and scenario planning<br>• Set up the plan, timeline and critical path including provisional Day One requirements and milestones<br>• Set up a data hub - gather and maintain consistent programme data<br>• Define and agree scope of LGR-related decisions with sovereign councils |
| **Foundational** | • Adapting programme to specific milestones<br>• Commencing Day One programme plan (what is in appropriate scope of the programme e.g. ICT infrastructure, treatment of systems and contracts)<br>• Service alignment and transformation including reconfiguring existing area based working arrangements to match boundaries of new councils<br>• Options appraisals and preparing for key decisions<br>• Elections<br>• Compliance with Structural Changes Order and legal checks and assurance<br>• Project plan for safely winding down sovereign authorities |
| **Shadow authorities** | • Continuing delivery of Day One programme plan<br>• Appointing Chief Executives and statutory and leadership roles<br>• Member inductions and service briefings<br>• Key decision timetable<br>• TUPE transfer arrangements |
| **Officer leadership** | • Tier 2 and Tier 3 Leadership Recruitment<br>• Service planning<br>• Development of council plan, budget MTFP<br>• Key policies and strategies (strategic priorities and corporate plans, unitary strategic risk register, constitution)<br>• Operating model and staffing allocations |

- Preparing for Day One and alignment with Day One vision and change (particularly for vulnerable people and those reliant on services for health and wellbeing).

**Go-live**

- Stability and seamless experience
- Improvement and post-LGR transformation planning

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# Programme governance and workstreams

We will operate an LGR Programme Board across Kent and Medway which will report to the existing Leaders group, though acknowledging it does not have decision-making powers, and in due course into Joint Committees.

This Board will include the Chief Executives and Programme Director and will oversee the programme and address strategic issues and risks.

We will establish a Day One Board to focus on managing delivery of the programme plan following the ministerial decision.

This will include tracking progress against milestones and completion of Day One requirements.

We have set up workstreams with Chief Executive sponsors and agreed engagement principles regarding representation from authorities as service leads and on workstreams.

We will set up unitary delivery groups to focus on issues specific to each new council including elections, council plan, member induction, policies and culture.

These groups will increase in importance when working to shadow authorities and when interim heads of paid service are appointed but by starting early, we are setting the councils up for success.

## Our workstreams

We know the importance of operating a single programme across Kent to drive consistency, efficiency and to address challenges where possible.

Our workstreams will cover services and the following key themes:




We will establish Unitary Delivery Groups to focus on preparations for the new councils.

These are collaborative by definition and will be agile to take advantage of opportunities that may arise but relate to one of the new councils individually.

These workstreams will evolve and governance structures will develop to support the Shadow Authorities and establish the new authorities when permanent officers are appointed.

## Stakeholder engagement

We know we need to work closely with partners, staff and residents to avoid LGR having negative impacts on the quality or resilience of services in Kent.

We know we need to communicate early, clearly and transparently with partners and provide opportunities for co-creation and innovation to improve how we work and set the right foundations for public service reform.

We are liaising with stakeholders and are developing an engagement plan to ensure proactive, timely and constructive conversation with stakeholders.

**Our ambition for Day One**

To deliver a seamless transition from the perspective of our residents where those who rely on public services for their health or wellbeing continue to be protected.

We will lay the foundations for improved collaboration across the public sector and harnessing the benefits of transformation.

**Our progress on implementation**

From our experience of reorganisation, we know the value of starting early.

We have a head start as we already work closely together and have a number of shared services, roles and contracts aligned with the new unitary structures.

To build upon this we are working collaboratively to:

- map our ICT infrastructure and enterprise architecture
- set up unitary delivery groups to identify and take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities such as shared roles or where contracts or licenses are expiring
- map our contracts to inform integration opportunities
- bring our service leads together to compare policies and processes and to identify opportunities
- clean up and standardise data across Kent
- establish a Project Management Office
- identify skills and capacity requirements to deliver the programme
- consider further shared roles and skills sharing across councils
- develop a datahub to drive forward the LGR process
- agree how sovereign councils in Kent will operate prior to vesting day
- maintain and transition our LGR programme Board and tools to power the programme
- stakeholder and resident engagement and a significant communications programme

# Summary risks and mitigations

We understand the risks LGR presents and are already working to mitigate them through our programme structure and approach:

- **Disaggregation** – we understand the challenge and risk of disaggregating key services and that this will take up significant programme capacity. We are planning early regarding Day One requirements and supporting services with significant capacity from workstreams to enable them to focus on their specific requirements.
- **Aggregation** – aggregating services requires alignment of policies, processes and systems in addition to fundamentals like organisational culture and ICT infrastructure. These can take time but are critical to achieving the benefits of local government reorganisation.
- **ICT capacity** – ICT is a key service, workstream and enabler of all services and elements of the programme and is a risk to the safe and legal function of the new councils.
- **Collaboration** – LGR requires collaboration across councils, tiers of local government, across political parties and with partners. We are mitigating this through:
    - Building on existing close working arrangements;
    - Developing 'no regrets activities' – a set of actions and decisions that we can deliver across Kent that will benefit the programme regardless of future decision;
    - Discussing protocols for how we will approach LGR.

We know the value of 'good endings and safe beginnings' and will setup the programme efficiently to maintain focus on service delivery in sovereign councils while setting up the future councils for success.

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# Appendix 1: Options appraisal

This section includes:

## 1a. Options appraisal approach

## 1b. Options appraisal results

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# Options appraisal process

**This appendix outlines the approach taken to appraise potential unitary options for Kent by the 14 local authorities. The appraisal was designed to ensure a robust, consistent and evidence-based assessment to support local decision-making on which options should progress to full business case development.**

**The options appraisal approach was rooted in government guidance, with alignment to the six local government reorganisation (LGR) criteria set out in the Secretary of State's letter dated 6th February 2025 and further clarified in June 2025.**

**The appraisal did not produce a ranked list of options or identify a preferred option.**

**Councils drew on the shared evidence base, alongside resident and stakeholder views, to inform their conclusions.**

## Overview of the approach

The appraisal process followed five key stages:

### Step 1: Selection of options for appraisal

The process began with the development of a longlist of 10 potential unitary options.

This longlist was informed by previous work carried out by local authorities, submissions to central government and extensive input from stakeholders, including council officers and Leaders.

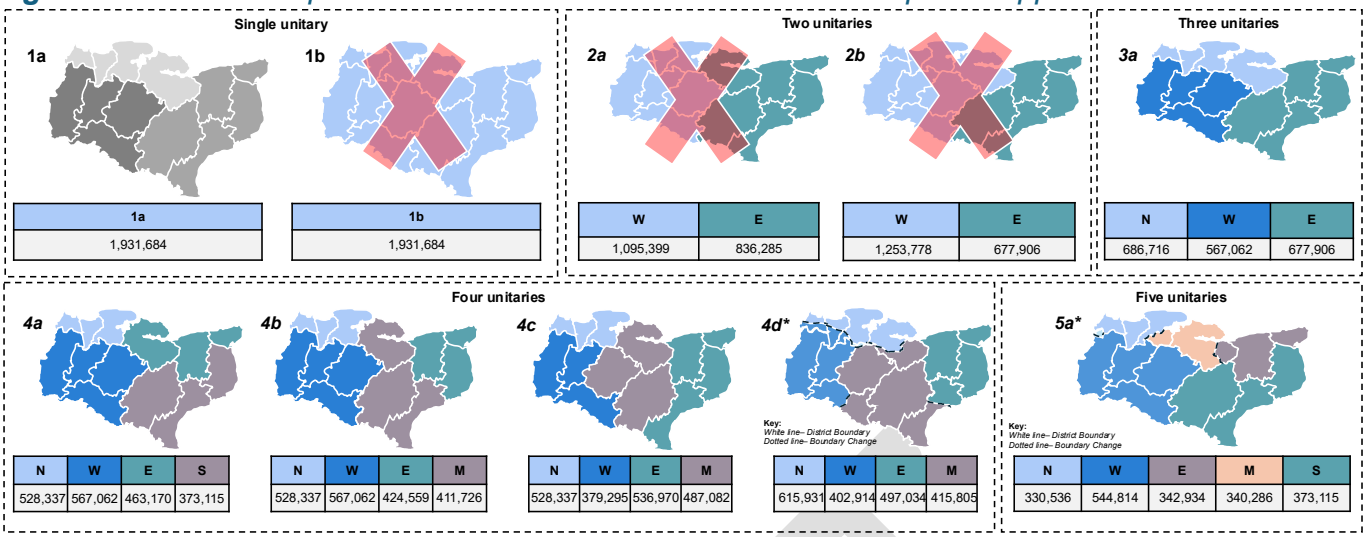
These options encompassed all permutations raised in prior discussions, including suggestions made during initial interviews and strategic workshops.

Following this initial development, a series of engagement sessions were held with Leaders from all 14 authorities.

Through these discussions, three options were jointly agreed to be out of scope for full appraisal, resulting in a refined shortlist of seven options to be taken forward for comprehensive evaluation.

This agreement marked a critical stage in the process, reinforcing the joint ownership of the appraisal exercise.

***Figure 21:*** *Potential options that were raised at the start of the options appraisal*




| 1a |
|---|
| 1,931,684 |

| 1b |
|---|
| 1,931,684 |

| W | E |
|---|---|
| 1,095,399 | 836,285 |

| W | E |
|---|---|
| 1,253,778 | 677,906 |

| N | W | E |
|---|---|---|
| 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 |

| N | W | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 528,337 | 567,062 | 463,170 | 373,115 |

| N | W | E | M |
|---|---|---|---|
| 528,337 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 |

| N | W | E | M |
|---|---|---|---|
| 528,337 | 379,295 | 536,970 | 487,082 |

| N | W | E | M |
|---|---|---|---|
| 615,931 | 402,914 | 497,034 | 415,805 |

| N | W | E | M | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |

**To match the current total population of 1,931,684, we applied a proportional multiplier to the original figures for options with boundary changes. This preserves the relative population distribution across the four areas while ensuring the total aligns with up -to-date data.*

## Step 2: Data collection and modelling

To assess each option, a comprehensive dataset was compiled using both publicly-available data sources and specific submissions from individual councils.

This ensured that the appraisal drew from a consistent and authoritative evidence base. Data was initially collected for each existing local authority and then aggregated or modelled to create a coherent picture of each potential new unitary configuration.

For options that involved redrawing boundaries, most notably options 4D and 5A, additional modelling was required.

This included the use of Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)-level population estimates to produce reliable approximations of how existing data would translate to proposed future geographies.

Where appropriate, other datasets not available at LSOA level, were looked at on a pro-rata basis and were based on population estimates to align with the proposed unitary boundaries.

The methodology applied population-weighted approaches and, where possible, consistent assumptions across datasets.

This modelling ensured the integrity and comparability of data across all options.

## *Figure 22: Example metrics*

*Example metrics gathered across all current authorities*

| Metric | Medway (unitary) | District councils | | | | | | | | | | | Kent County Council | Total / Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Ashford | Canterbury | Dartford | Dover | Folkestone and Hythe | Gravesham | Maidstone | Sevenoaks | Swale | Thanet | Tonbridge and Malling | Tunbridge Wells | |
| Population (mid-2024) | 292,655 | 140,936 | 162,100 | 125,011 | 119,768 | 112,411 | 110,671 | 187,767 | 122,748 | 158,379 | 142,691 | 136,853 | 119,694 | 1,639,029 | 1,931,684 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 194 | 581 | 309 | 73 | 315 | 357 | 99 | 393 | 370 | 373 | 104 | 240 | 331 | 3,545 | 3,739 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 1,509 | 243 | 525 | 1,712 | 380 | 315 | 1,118 | 478 | 332 | 425 | 1,372 | 570 | 362 | 462 | 517 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023) | 7,657 | 3,939 | 4,352 | 4,343 | 3,277 | 2,802 | 2,206 | 5,550 | 5,098 | 3,633 | 2,588 | 5,406 | 4,114 | 47,308 | 54,965 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 26,164 | 27,949 | 26,848 | 34,741 | 27,361 | 24,926 | 19,933 | 29,558 | 41,532 | 22,939 | 18,137 | 39,502 | 34,371 | 28,863 | 28,454 |

*Metrics consolidated by potential future unitary authority for options in scope*

| Metric | Option 1A | Option 3A (example) | | | Option 4A (example) | | | | Option 5A (example) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | N | W | E | N | W | E | S | N | W | E | M | S |
| Population (mid-2024) | 1,931,684 | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 | 528,337 | 567,062 | 463,170 | 373,115 | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 3,739 | 739 | 1,334 | 1,666 | 366 | 1,334 | 786 | 1,253 | 287 | 1,267 | 503 | 429 | 1,253 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 517 | 929 | 425 | 407 | 1,444 | 425 | 589 | 298 | 1,151 | 430 | 682 | 793 | 298 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023) | 54,965 | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 | 14,206 | 20,168 | 10,573 | 10,018 | 9,373 | 19,244 | 7,815 | 8,515 | 10,018 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 28,454 | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 | 26,888 | 35,566 | 22,827 | 26,850 | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |

## Step 3: Development of evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'

The appraisal was structured around fourteen evaluation criteria, developed directly in reference to the government's six tests for LGR, as outlined in its correspondence dated 6 February 2025 and subsequent guidance issued in June 2025.

These criteria reflect key considerations such as efficiency, local identity, capacity to deliver sustainable services and readiness for devolution.

For each of the 14 evaluation criteria, a set of specific metrics was identified to enable detailed assessment.

Alongside each metric, a definition of 'what good looks like' was agreed to provide a consistent standard against which all options were evaluated.

While some elements of government guidance were treated as threshold requirements, e.g. minimum standards for all options, others were differentiating factors and thus formed part of the comparative framework.

## *Figure 23: Evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'*

***Evaluation criteria defined to structure options analysis***

| Headline Government Criteria | Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance |
|---|---|
| 1. Establishing a single tier of local government | 1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base |
| | 1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs |
| | 1.3 Single tier governance structures |
| 2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks | 2.1 Appropriate population size |
| | 2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money |
| | 2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities |
| | 2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing |
| 3. High quality and sustainable public services | 3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation |
| | 3.2 Public service reform and better value for money |
| | 3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness |
| 4. Working together to understand and meet local needs | 4.1 Local identity, culture and historical importance |
| | 4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns |
| 5. Supporting devolution arrangements | 5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority |
| 6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment | 6.1 Enabling strong community engagement |

***Example of metrics to be assessed***

| 1.1: Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base | |
|---|---|
| **Metrics/factors** | **What does good look like?** |
| **Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita (2023) (£)** | Balanced GVA per capita between unitaries, suggesting balanced levels of productivity and positive implications for the distribution of economic prosperity among residents |
| **Total Gross Value Added (GVA) (2023) (£m)** | Each unitary has a sufficient GVA to generate tax and there is balance between unitaries, meaning good long-term prospects for all future authorities |
| **Council tax base (number of properties at Band D equivalent)** | All authorities with a sufficient number and profile of properties to provide a council tax base which can sustainably support services, with a reasonable balance between authorities |
| **Council Tax harmonisation / difference in Band D rates** | District areas within a unitary have low to no difference between council tax rates. The least difference between councils within a unitary would provide minimal administrative and resident disruption in harmonising rates |
| **Alignment to major Kent industries** | Unitaries demonstrate alignment to one or more of the key industries |

## Step 4: Assessment parameters and scoring methodology

Each metric was assessed using a standard three-point scale: high, medium or low.

For most metrics, this scoring was determined through statistical balance analysis i.e. evaluating the degree of variation in outcomes across the proposed unitary authorities under each option.

The underlying principle was that a more balanced distribution of characteristics-, e.g. population size, financial resilience, service demand- across new authorities would indicate greater equity and resilience.

The scoring process followed a clear sequence:

1. Identify the range of values between councils under each option for each metric.
2. Determine percentile thresholds for categorising those ranges:
    - High = below 33rd percentile (most balanced)
    - Medium = 33rd to 66th percentile
    - Low = above 66th percentile (least balanced)
3. Assign scores for each option accordingly.

In cases where balance was not a relevant concept, i.e. for county-wide service considerations or unique single-unitary configurations such as Option 1A, bespoke scoring definitions were applied.

Additionally, to allow for further nuance in interpretation, intermediate scores such as Medium/High or Medium/Low were used where appropriate.

No weighting was applied to either the criteria or the metrics. Each was treated as equally important for the purposes of the appraisal.

The model is explicitly comparative: the scores for each option reflect how they perform relative to others in the shortlist, rather than against an absolute benchmark.

## Step 5: Assessment and presentation of results

Each option was scored against every metric, producing an average score for each of the 14 evaluation criteria.

The results were presented via a visual dashboards, supplemented with detailed narrative and commentary to contextualise the findings and highlight key trade-offs or assumptions.

In some cases, particularly for Option 1A, which envisages a single county-wide unitary authority, additional analysis was undertaken to ensure comparability, given that balance metrics were not applicable in the same way as for multi-unitary options.

# Options appraisal results

**All 14 councils worked together to complete an options appraisal prior to business case development. Following joint analysis, review and discussion, the options being put forward are those that Leaders believe are both workable and offer the best value for Kent.**

Following the completion of the appraisal, Council Leaders convened to review the evidence presented.

During this meeting, they collectively identified preferred options to proceed to business case development.

This decision was informed both by the technical appraisal and by the views of their individual councils and local residents.

While the options appraisal itself did not rank or recommend a preferred outcome, it provided the objective foundation upon which political judgements and democratic input could be made.

**Figure 24**: Summary assessment by evaluation criteria

| Headline Government Criteria | Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance | Summary assessment by option | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1A* | 3A | 4A | 4B | 4C | 4D | 5A |
| 1. Establishing a single tier of local government | 1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base | M | H | M/L | M | M/H | M | M/L |
| | 1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs | M | H | M | M | L | M | M |
| | 1.3 Single tier local government structures | L | L | M | M | M | H | M |
| 2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks | 2.1 Appropriate population size | M | H | M | H | M | L | L |
| | 2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money | H | H | M/L | M/L | M/L | M/L | L |
| | 2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities | H | H | M | M | M | M/L | L |
| | 2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing | H | M | M/L | M/H | M/H | M/L | M |
| 3. High quality and sustainable public services | 3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation | M | H | M | M/H | M/L | M/L | M/L |
| | 3.2 Public service reform and better value for money | M | M | M | M | M/L | M/L | M |
| | 3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness | M | M | M/H | M | L | L | M |
| 4. Working together to understand and meet local needs | 4.1 Issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance | M/L | M | M | M | M | M | M |
| | 4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 5. Supporting devolution arrangements | 5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority | L | H | H | H | H | M | M |
| 6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment | 6.1 Enabling strong community engagement | L | M | L | H | M | H | L |

**Option 1a appraised separately due to it proposing a single unitary and an innovative model of local government which is not suited to the appraisal methodology.*

Notes:

- Each evaluation criterion was scored as High, Medium, or Low, based on an average score derived from multiple metrics.
- For most metrics assessed, the process evaluated how well each option achieves balance across all proposed unitary authorities.
- The model is comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed, rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad.
- Minor differences between options still resulted in at least one option scoring High and one Low, due to the comparative nature of the model.

# Appendix 2: Financial modelling

This section includes:


## Financial context

## Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling

## Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model

## Financial modelling summary outputs

## Implementation costs

## Reorganisation savings

## Disaggregation costs

## Phasing and payback period


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# Financial context

**Councils across Kent are under pressure from rising costs and demand. LGR can help to address these challenges, but in itself will not address the scale of the financial challenge.**

### National financial context

The local government sector faces a major financial challenge with an estimated £4 billion funding gap over the next two years.

Demand for critical services is increasing because of population growth and ageing populations.

Councils are also facing rising costs, with adult social care costs estimated to have increased by 9% and children's social care costs by 18% in real terms over the past five years.

There continues to be uncertainty over long term funding arrangements, which have placed many councils in increasingly fragile financial positions. The growing number of Section 114 notices in recent years highlights the systemic strain across the sector, with pressures in Social Care, Housing and Temporary Accommodation, and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits now common drivers of instability.

At the same time, the absence of clarity on the Fair Funding Review, ongoing uncertainty over business rates reform and reset, and the limited scope of multi-year settlements have constrained council's ability to plan sustainably. Against this backdrop, LGR offers an opportunity to strengthen financial resilience through streamlined structures, integrated service delivery, and more sustainable use of resources over the long term.

### The Kent financial context

Combined net revenue expenditure across the 14 Kent councils is £2,337m, with 73% in Kent County Council and 15% within Medway - the authorities delivering statutory adult social care and children's services.

Across Kent, councils are facing sustained financial pressures.

Rising demand in adult social care, children's services and SEND, alongside inflationary cost pressures and debt, are placing significant strain on budgets.

The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery.

### Reserves and funding the reorganisation

Across all Kent councils combined there are forecast Total Usable Reserves of **£959m by 2028/29.**

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the future councils post reorganisation.

It will be the decision of each new council to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

### Debt across Kent councils

Total external debt across Kent stands at £1,730m. Due to the provision of upper tier services, 26% of borrowing stands in Medway and 41% in the County Council. Three districts, (Dartford, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells) report no general fund borrowing.

### Gross budget gap of existing councils

The forecast total gross budget gap for all 14 councils by 2028/29 of **£138.3m**, has therefore not been included within the breakeven analysis.

However, there is recognition that if there were any budget gaps post vesting day, the recurring savings projected from our proposal could contribute to closing any future gross budget gaps across the new authorities.

The financial modelling does not take direct account of existing council budget gaps, which will need to be managed regardless of LGR.

### Impact of Fair Funding 2.0 on Gross Budget Gap

The Fair Funding Review is ongoing nationally. While considered by all councils across Kent, the complexity and uncertainty of the review mean it has not been modelled in detail.

There is recognition that Fair Funding 2.0 is likely to have an impact on councils' financial positions.

There are distinct additional needs in the county related to deprivation which are expected to benefit with the Fair Funding formula but no assumptions have been made within the gross budget gap assumptions above as it is not possible to quantify at this stage.

### Dedicated Schools Grants

The financial analysis assumes that all existing councils will manage their Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG) positions regardless of LGR, therefore DSG surplus or deficits (if any) have not been included within the breakeven analysis.

It will be the decision of each new authority to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation against any funding pressures observed from DSG.

The combined DSG deficit position as at 31 March 2025 was £150.1m (Medway Council had a £16.4m deficit and Kent County Council had a deficit balance of £133.7m).

Kent County Council entered the Department for Education's "Safety Valve" process in Summer 2022, which involves the local authority reforming its high needs systems and associated spending in return for additional funding to contribute to the historic deficit.

Deficits on the DSG is a national problem affecting county and unitary authorities.

At the present time these are being managed through a statutory override which enables a technical adjustment in the statutory statement of accounts to hold these deficits without recognising the impact against General Fund resources.

A consultation is expected by the government in 2026/27 on reforms to SEND, the root causes of deficits and to invite proposals for a resolution.

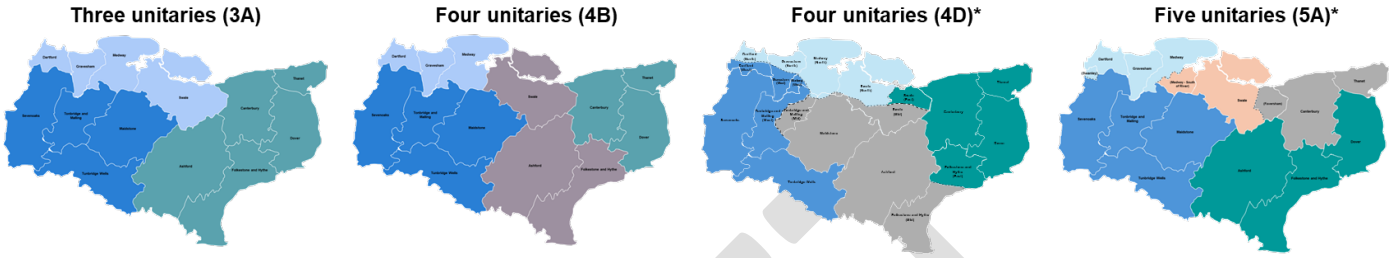
Members of the Shadow Authorities for the proposed unitary authorities will need to carefully consider proposed reforms in light of their local circumstances.

# Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling

**Financial modelling is a key component of the LGR proposal. Its purpose is to evaluate the financial implications of local government reorganisation across Kent in a consistent way across all LGR options.**

## The LGR options in scope for financial modelling

A single approach to estimating financial impact of LGR was taken across four options for LGR:




## Purpose of financial model

The financial modelling aims to:

- estimate the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options
- compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings costs, and payback

## Limitations of scope to date

Whilst being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all Kent finance officers agree that LGR does not in itself provide the solution to the scale of the financial challenge faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG) have collectively agreed on the following position on the analysis carried out:

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.
- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be funded.

- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new authorities may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new authorities.

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# Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model

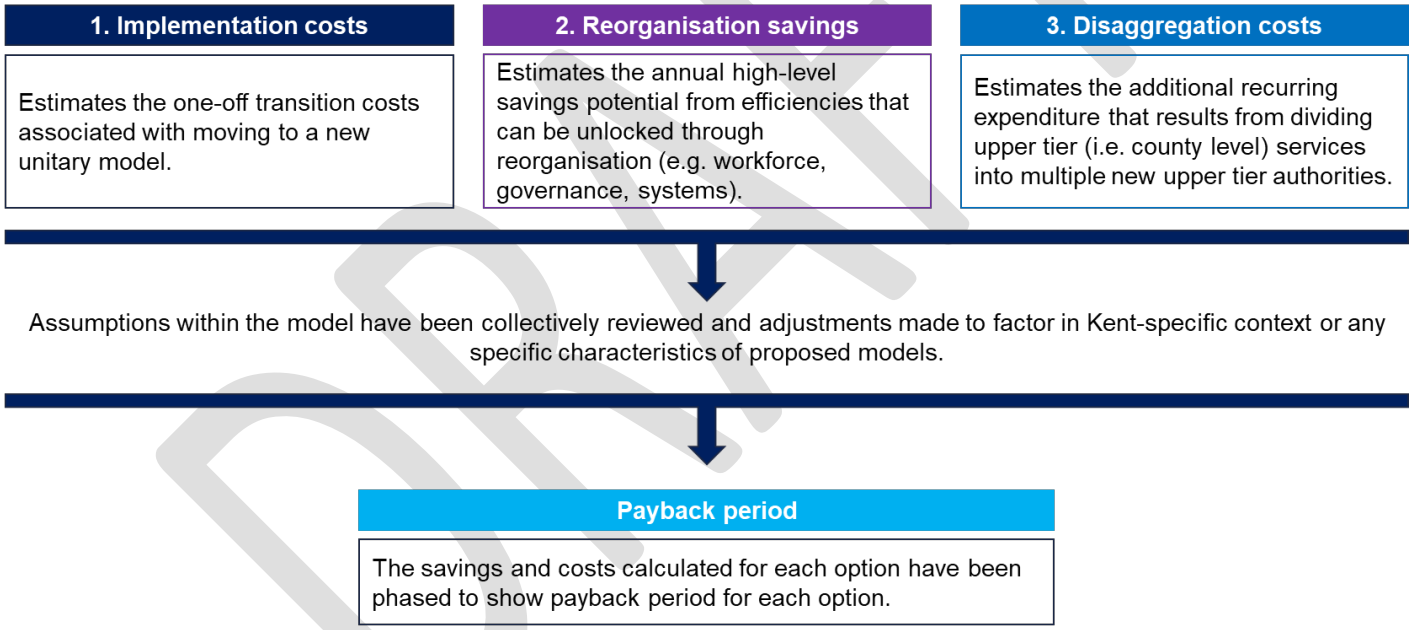
**All finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have reviewed and adjusted financial modelling in order to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to Government.**

## Baselining

1. **Standardised data requests** were completed by all 14 councils, covering revenue budgets, reserves, capital plans, balance sheets and key service metrics. Alongside numerical data, contextual narrative was gathered to support understanding of pressures, risks, and transformation plans.
2. **A consolidated financial baseline** was created, using data returns to combine district, unitary and county budgets into unified figures based on agreed assumptions.
3. Baseline information was then used to create a **financial view of all proposed councils** under each of the five options being submitted to government.

## Three elements of the financial modelling

The financial model is made up of three calculators, which have been applied to all options:




Financial calculations are underpinned by benchmarking of previous LGR proposals and the estimated costs and benefits modelled in those reports, adjusted for the budgets, populations and current local government structures within Kent.

Adjustments have been made to reflect experience of local government reorganisation implementation and through discussion with all Section 151 Officers across Kent.

## Further detail of methodology

The calculation of each element of the model applied is explained separately within this section of the report.

# Financial modelling summary outputs

**The key driver of difference between options are the number of councils being proposed. Due to the assumptions applied within the modelling, implementation costs and recurring costs of disaggregation increase as the number of councils proposed increases.**

Our financial modelling shows:

- **Option 4D, a four-unitary model with boundary changes**, has been built on the same assumptions at Option 4B, but with additional one-off implementation costs due to boundary changes, resulting in an estimated payback period of 7.9 – 14.5 years.

***Table 32:*** *Summary of financial modelling*

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4d** | (135.9) | 67.5 | (32.9) - (48.6) | 34.6 – 18.9 | 7.9 – 14.5 years |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

**Further analysis**
The calculation of each element of the financial model is explained in the following pages.

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# Implementation costs

**Implementation costs definition:** The estimated one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model.

**Method of calculation**:

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of implementation costs per capita.
- Multiplied the benchmarked costs per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total implementation cost per unitary model.
- Applied an uplift of costs per additional unitary authority being created, due to additional costs through establishing governance structures, IT systems, administrative frameworks, etc.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. A specific uplift of £5m was added to reflect the additional complexity and implementation effort to deliver boundary changes.

### Implementation costs

***Table 33:*** *Implementation cost summary*

| Option | Implementation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **4D** | (135.9) | Additional £5m added to implementation costs compared to Option 4B due to additional complexity associated with boundary changes. |

### Categories of implementation cost

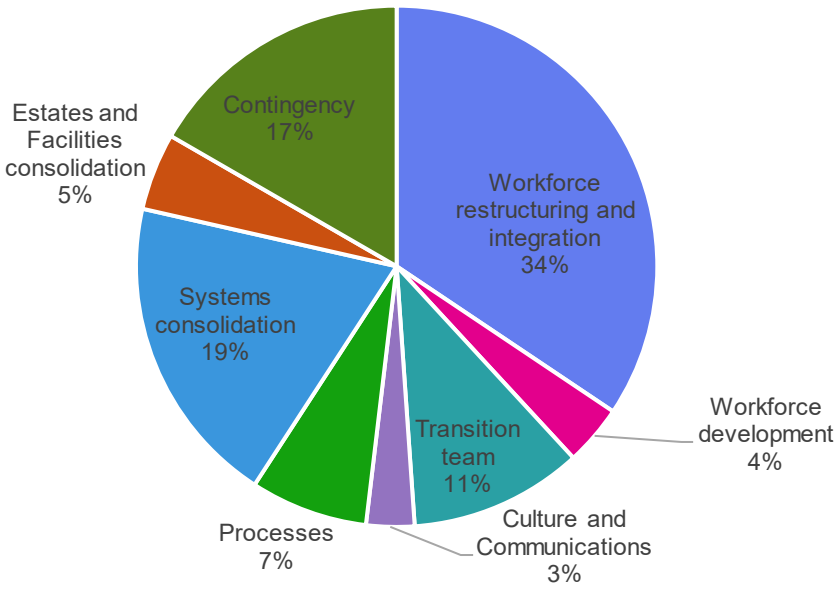
As part of implementation cost benchmarking, categories of implementation costs have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of costs, for any of the LGR options.

***Table 34:*** *Implementation cost categories*

| Implementation cost category | Description |
|---|---|
| **Workforce restructuring and integration** | Costs associated with delivering TUPE and salary harmonisation processes. Compensation paid to employees as a result of any redundancies and pension strain. ***Note: no decisions have been made regarding the size of the future workforce and the potential need for redundancies. A significant proportion of staff reductions could be delivered through staff naturally leaving the organisations.*** |
| **Workforce development** | Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities. |
| **Transition team** | Transition and implementation programme teams including programme management, legal, finance, contract management, finance and other specialist support. |
| **Culture and Communications** | Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Processes** | Harmonising processes and facilitating effective service transition, including specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition and new policies and procedures. |
| **Systems consolidation** | Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration and cyber security. |
| **Estates and Facilities consolidation** | Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases. |
| **Contingency** | Additional 20% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates. |

*Figure 25: Implementation cost distribution*




## Phasing of implementation costs

One-off implementation costs have been assumed to start ramping-up from the shadow year and build up by Year 4. The majority of costs are incurred in year 2 and year 3, where the most staff exit costs are expected to be incurred. The phasing of the contingency reflected the overall phasing of costs.

***Table 35:** Implementation cost summary*

| Implementation cost category | Shadow Year (FY27/28) | Year 1 (FY28/29) | Year 2 (FY29/30) | Year 3 (FY30/31) | Year 4 (FY31/32) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Workforce restructuring and integration** | 5% | 15% | 20% | 60% | - |
| **Workforce development** | 10% | 50% | 40% | - | - |
| **Transition team** | 25% | 30% | 30% | 15% | - |
| **Culture and Communications** | 20% | 50% | 30% | - | - |
| **Processes** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 30% | 20% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Systems consolidation** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 30% | 20% |
| **Estates and Facilities consolidation** | - | 5% | 25% | 30% | 40% |
| **Contingency** | 10% | 25% | 30% | 25% | 10% |

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# Reorganisation savings

**Reorganisation savings (gross) definition:** The estimated annual savings from efficiencies achieved through reorganisation, moving from two tiers to one tier of local government, by removing duplication, consolidating services and operating at greater scale.

**Method of calculation:**

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of savings per capita achievable through LGR.
- Multiplied the benchmarked savings per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total saving for per unitary model.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. This included a reduction in the total savings achievable and contingency being added to the model.
- Applied a dilution of savings for the number of unitary authorities being created, due to reduced ability to operate at scale.

## Reorganisation savings

***Table 36:*** *Reorganisation savings summary*

| Option | Gross reorganisation savings (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **4D** | 67.5 | Gross savings marginally lower than 3A and higher than 5A due to economies of scale. |

## Categories of reorganisation saving

As part of benchmarking LGR revenue savings, categories of savings have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of savings.

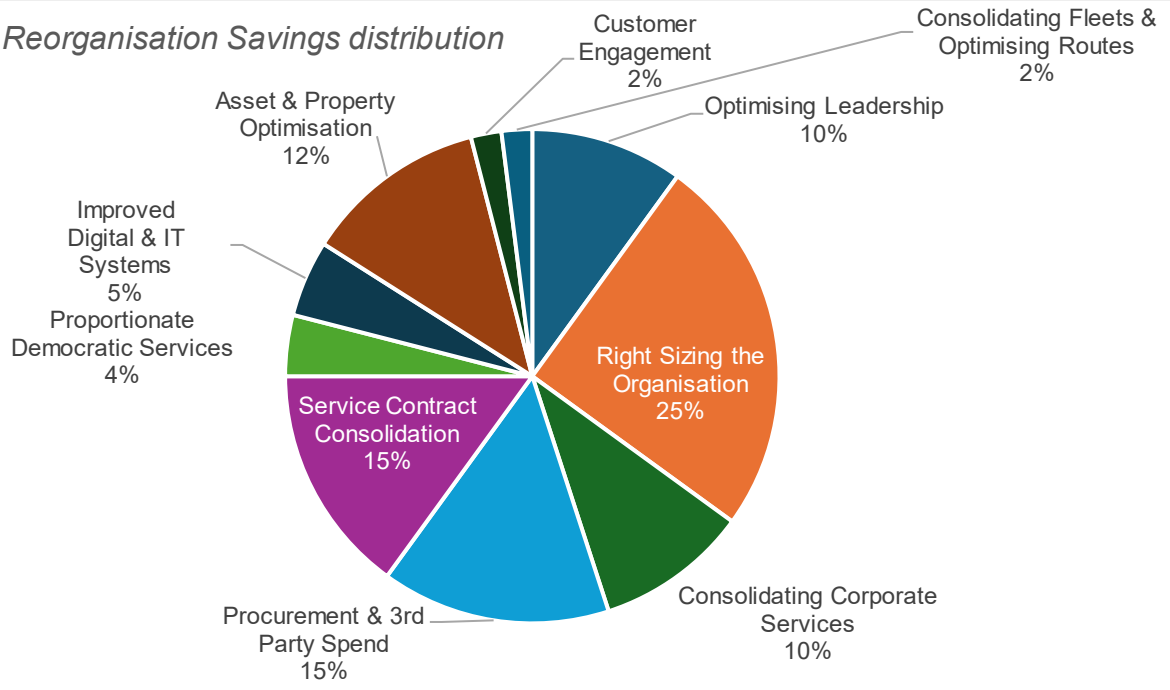
***Table 37:*** *Savings categories*

| Savings category | Description |
|---|---|
| **Optimising Leadership** | Reducing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication by merging similar responsibilities into fewer positions. |
| **Right Sizing the Organisation** | Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation. |
| **Consolidating Corporate Services** | Consolidating back-office functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT). |
| **Service Contract Consolidation** | Implementing new sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced, potentially leading to financial and operational efficiency. |
| **Procurement & 3rd Party Spend** | Centralising procurement, leading to an increase in relative purchasing power and renegotiating terms with suppliers. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Democratic Services** | Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (eg committees, elections). |
| **Improved Digital & IT Systems** | Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes. |
| **Asset & Property Optimisation** | Reducing asset and property portfolio to align with council needs. |
| **Customer Engagement** | Enhancing customer contact facilities and developing a combined approach to managing customer contact centre, where appropriate including digital self-service. |
| **Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes** | Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs. |
| **Contingency** | 10% contingency applied to reflect risks to savings being achieved. |

The exact proportion of savings may vary by option, and will be considered in greater detail in the next phase of LGR.

*Figure 26: Reorganisation Savings distribution*




*Note: a 10% contingency is also applied but has not been reflected in the graph above*

### Phasing of reorganisation savings

Savings are realised to their entirety by Year 6 and are then ongoing. Most savings are achieved in year 3. A 10% negative contingency has been applied to reflect risk and has been phased in line with when other savings are achieved.

***Table 38:*** *Savings summary*

| Reorganisation savings category | Year 1 (FY28/29) | Year 2 (FY29/30) | Year 3 (FY30/31) | Year 4 (FY31/32) | Year 5 (FY32/33) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Optimising Leadership** | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| **Right Sizing the Organisation** | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Consolidating Corporate Services** | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| **Procurement & 3rd Party Spend** | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |
| **Service Contract Consolidation** | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |
| **Democratic Services** | 80% | 20% | - | - | - |
| **Improved Digital & IT Systems** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 25% | 25% |
| **Asset & Property Optimisation** | 10% | 15% | 25% | 25% | 25% |
| **Customer Engagement** | 20% | 40% | 40% | - | - |
| **Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes** | - | 20% | 45% | 35% | - |
| **Contingency** | 15% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 15% |

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# Disaggregation costs

**Disaggregation costs definition:** The estimated additional recurring expenditure that results from dividing upper tier (i.e. county level) services into multiple new unitary authorities.

### Method of calculation:

- Identified core service categories where disaggregation will drive cost increases as: adult social care, children's services, housing, place services, and corporate and support services.
- Allocated Kent County Council net revenue spend against cost categories defined.
- Applied percentages of additional spend to each cost category to uplift total costs in line with benchmarking from previous LGR cases, to estimate the future level of spend of each cost category.
- Applied an additional uplift to the level of disaggregation costs for each additional unitary being proposed.

### Disaggregation costs

Disaggregation costs are the most significant differentiator between financial model outputs for each option. For each additional council proposed there are assumed to be additional costs, including those associated with management, commissioning and corporate services.

Whilst the costs are significant, it is important to view these within the context of the overall cost of delivering these services. The Kent County Council net revenue expenditure is budgeted to be£1,699m, including £722m for adult social care and £280m for children's services[45].

***Table 39:*** *Disaggregation costs*

| Option | Disaggregation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **4D** | (32.9) - (48.6) | Two additional sets of 'upper tier' services means higher disaggregation costs than a three-unitary model. |

### Categories of disaggregation costs

As part of calculating disaggregation costs, costs increase by category of spend have been calculated, as summarised below.

A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.

[45] 2025/26 RA return and Financial returns submitted by Kent County Council

***Table 40:*** *Disaggregation cost categories and uplift percentages*

| Disaggregation cost category | Description | Disaggregation cost uplift (one additional upper tier authority) % |
|---|---|---|
| Adult social care | Duplication of some current adult social care management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend. | 0.7% - 1.8% |
| Children's services | Duplication of some current children's services management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend. | 2.5% - 3% |
| Place services | Duplication of some current place services including management and staffing costs, and additional costs of commissioned spend. | 3.5% |
| Corporate and support services | Duplication of corporate & support services management, staffing and systems. | 3.8% |

### Phasing of disaggregation costs

All disaggregation costs are assumed to be incurred annually from Day 1 of the new authorities.

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# Payback period

**Payback period definition:** the period taken to reach a net positive financial impact of LGR, once all one-off and recurring savings have been considered.

## Cumulative financial benefit and payback period

Set out below is the year-by-year breakdown of the financial impact of LGR, considering both one-off costs and recurring benefits / costs.

The payback period is driven by the outputs of the three calculators (reorganisation savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs), and the phasing assumptions explained earlier in this Appendix.

***Table 41:** Payback period summary*

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m) | Estimated payback period | Commentary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4D** | (135.9) | 34.6 – 18.9 | 7.9 – 14.5 years | Implementation complexity, costs increase and additional cost due to boundary revisions. |

## Payback period

Set out in the figure below is the estimated cumulative financial impact of LGR for the four modelled options.

***Figure 27: Payback period***

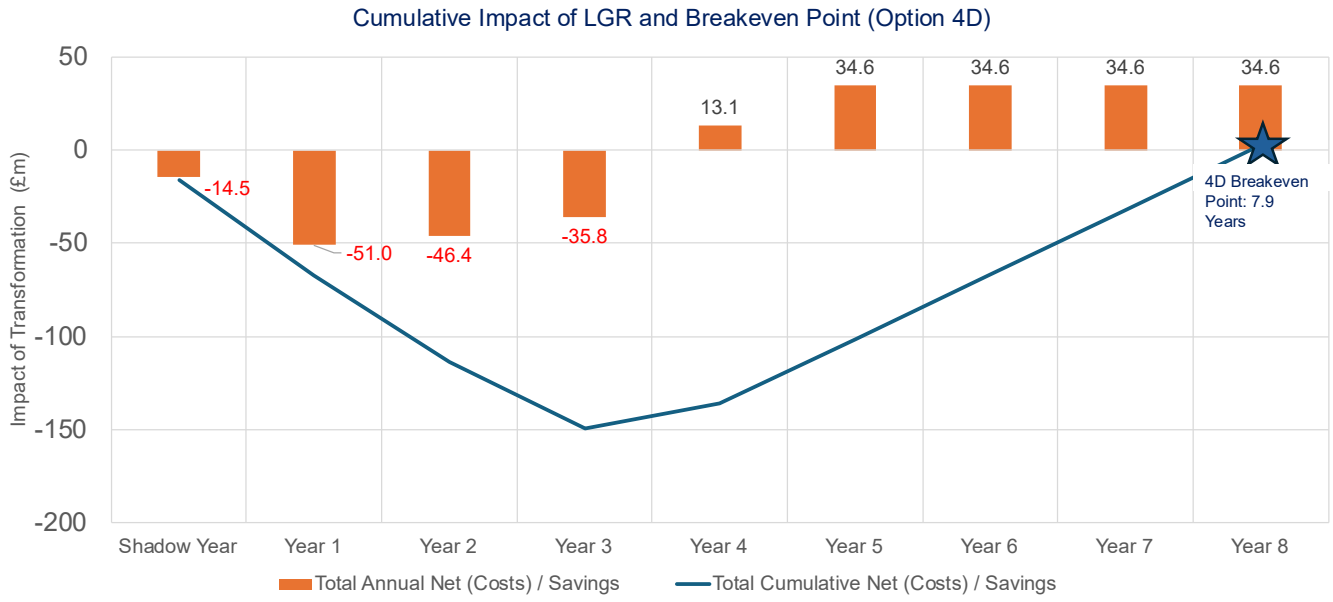



*Chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest end of the range

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# Appendix 3: Key data sources

Figure 8.1 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Economy and Demographics

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Population Size (mid-2024)[46] | 1,931,684 | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 | 528,337 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 | 615,931 | 374,269 | 523,642 | 417,842 | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024)[47] | 3,739.2 | 738.9 | 1,335.1 | 1,665.3 | 365.4 | 1,335.1 | 727.7 | 1,311.0 | 648.6 | 881.7 | 1,020.6 | 1,188.4 | 286.9 | 1,268.0 | 502.3 | 429.2 | 1,252.9 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 516.6 | 929.4 | 424.7 | 407.1 | 1445.8 | 424.7 | 583.4 | 314.1 | 949.7 | 424.5 | 513.1 | 351.6 | 1152.1 | 429.7 | 682.7 | 792.9 | 297.8 |
| 65+ Population (mid-2024)[46] | 384,033 | 113,951 | 113,406 | 156,676 | 83,544 | 113,406 | 99,972 | 87,111 | 102,437 | 74,636 | 123,715 | 83,245 | 52,329 | 108,477 | 77,559 | 59,227 | 86,440 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023)[48] | 54,965 | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 | 14,206 | 20,168 | 10,217 | 10,374 | 16,011 | 13,924 | 12,634 | 12,396 | 9,373 | 19,244 | 7,815 | 8,515 | 10,018 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023)[48] | 28,454 | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 | 26,888 | 35,566 | 24,065 | 25,196 | 25,995 | 37,204 | 24,127 | 29,666 | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |
| Unemployment Rate (%) Apr 24-March 25[49] | 3.7% | 4.0% | 3.0% | 4.0% | 3.8% | 3.0% | 4.3% | 4.0% | 3.5% | 2.5% | 4.2% | 3.5% | 3.9% | 3.1% | 4.7% | 4.0% | 3.5% |

Figure 8.2 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Financials

[46] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales
[47] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
[48] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities
[49] LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics

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| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (FY28/29)[50] | 703,525 | 225,749 | 231,972 | 245,804 | 173,700 | 231,972 | 151,628 | 146,225 | 202,762 | 156,102 | 187,882 | 156,779 | 111,995 | 222,260 | 120,136 | 110,931 | 138,203 |
| Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes)[50] | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,812 | 1,907 |
| General Fund Borrowing (FY26/27) (£m)[50] | 1,730.4 | 812.0 | 289.1 | 629.2 | 740.3 | 289.1 | 387.0 | 314.0 | 761.3 | 175.9 | 460.0 | 333.1 | 336.8 | 278.4 | 257.2 | 468.7 | 389.3 |
| Financing Costs (Q2 FY26/27) (£m)[50] | 123.6 | 56.1 | 29.2 | 38.3 | 46.7 | 29.2 | 24.8 | 22.9 | 51.8 | 18.0 | 31.0 | 22.8 | 22.4 | 28.1 | 20.6 | 32.5 | 19.9 |
| Net Revenue (Q2 FY26/27) (£m)[50] | 2,313.4 | 1,104.6 | 548.2 | 660.5 | 947.7 | 548.2 | 415.2 | 402.3 | 1,024.7 | 376.0 | 521.9 | 390.8 | 432.7 | 526.6 | 338.0 | 655.7 | 360.4 |
| Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream %[50] | 5.3% | 5.1% | 5.3% | 5.8% | 4.9% | 5.3% | 6.0% | 5.7% | 5.1% | 4.8% | 5.9% | 5.8% | 5.2% | 5.3% | 6.1% | 5.0% | 5.5% |
| Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£m)[50] | 138.2 | 84.9 | 25.8 | 27.5 | 76.6 | 25.8 | 18.6 | 17.2 | 79.4 | 23.3 | 23.1 | 12.5 | 30.6 | 25.0 | 13.3 | 53.1 | 16.2 |
| Total Usable Reserves (FY28/29) (£m)[50] | 959.7 | 394.2 | 258.9 | 306.6 | 338.4 | 258.9 | 175.2 | 187.2 | 359.1 | 178.2 | 215.0 | 207.5 | 189.0 | 247.8 | 137.3 | 202.8 | 182.8 |
| General fund balance | 186.4 | 68.7 | 59.8 | 58.0 | 58.3 | 59.8 | 33.5 | 34.8 | 63.1 | 31.7 | 43.0 | 48.6 | 30.6 | 58.0 | 26.6 | 37.4 | 33.8 |

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[50] Financial data return submitted by councils

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (FY28/29) (£m)[50] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[51] | 364.6 | 137.7 | 113.2 | 113.7 | 108.1 | 113.2 | 70.1 | 73.3 | 121.3 | 79.4 | 85.4 | 78.5 | 74.3 | 109.5 | 51.7 | 60.0 | 69.1 |
| Net revenue expenditure (£m)[50] | 2,273.8 | 833.2 | 651.0 | 789.6 | 645.8 | 651.0 | 494.3 | 482.7 | 748.0 | 432.1 | 609.8 | 483.8 | 397.2 | 625.4 | 405.2 | 416.4 | 429.5 |

Figure 8.3 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Housing and Homelessness

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Income deprivation rate (2019)[52] | 0.12 | 0.13 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.12 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.14 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.13 |
| Homelessness Rate per 1,000 Households (Jan-Mar 2025)[53] | 1.5 | 6.6 | 4.1 | 8.4 | 5.3 | 4.1 | 5.5 | 4.2 | 5.8 | 2.4 | 6.5 | 4.3 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 2.4 | 4.4 |
| Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement %[54] | 87.2% | 84.4% | 91.9% | 86.2% | 73.8% | 91.9% | 76.2% | 109.9% | 83.3% | 67.6% | 79.3% | 120.4% | 72.9% | 93.9% | 72.6% | 89.5% | 103.8% |
| Number of Households in TA per 1,000 (Jan-Mar 25)[55] | 3.9 | 22.6 | 9.2 | 18.0 | 18.0 | 9.2 | 11.9 | 10.8 | 29.0 | 23.0 | 18.0 | 17.1 | 19.3 | 9.2 | 10.9 | 9.6 | 11.7 |
| Area of land that is protected, including land designated as Green Belt (%)[56] | 47.9% | 41.0% | 67.0% | 35.7% | 46.3% | 67.0% | 27.0% | 40.5% | 40.8% | 82.7% | 32.8% | 38.9% | 68.0% | 65.5% | 29.1% | 32.3% | 38.3% |

Figure 8.4 – Children's Services and Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

| Metric | 1A | 3A | 4B | 4D | 5A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

[51] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[52] Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics
[53] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[54] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK
[55] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[56] Local authority green belt statistics for England: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK

| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of children in children's social care as % total population (2023-2024)[57] | 0.40% | 0.50% | 0.18% | 0.47% | 0.49% | 0.18% | 0.50% | 0.48% | 0.44% | 0.18% | 0.52% | 0.28% | 0.37% | 0.18% | 0.52% | 0.61% | 0.44% |
| Children's services total spend (£m)[58] | 298.1 | 152.4 | 43.8 | 101.8 | 124.3 | 43.8 | 64.1 | 65.8 | 140.3 | 31.2 | 82.3 | 44.3 | 55.4 | 42.3 | 56.6 | 91.8 | 51.9 |
| Number of registered pupils with SEND as % total population (2023-2024)[59] | 5.0% | 5.0% | 4.3% | 5.7% | 4.3% | 4.3% | 6.0% | 6.2% | 4.9% | 4.2% | 6.0% | 4.8% | 4.4% | 4.3% | 6.1% | 5.3% | 5.5% |
| Proportion of children in relative low-income families (under 16s) (FYE24) (%)[60] | 17.8% | 18.7% | 13.2% | 21.1% | 18.4% | 13.2% | 22.3% | 19.4% | 18.7% | 12.6% | 22.2% | 16.4% | 17.3% | 13.3% | 21.7% | 19.5% | 20.5% |
| Proportion of children in absolute low-income families (under 16s) (FYE24) (%)[60] | 15.1% | 15.8% | 11.3% | 17.9% | 15.7% | 11.3% | 18.9% | 16.4% | 15.9% | 10.8% | 18.7% | 14.0% | 14.8% | 11.3% | 18.3% | 16.4% | 17.4% |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received (2024/2025)[58] | 24,750 | 7,619 | 6,353 | 10,778 | 5,886 | 6,353 | 7,275 | 5,236 | 6,833 | 3,830 | 8,918 | 5,169 | 3,680 | 6,102 | 5,374 | 3,772 | 5,821 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received Per 100,000 Population (2024/2025)[58] | 261 | 1,452 | 1,444 | 1,985 | 1,467 | 1,444 | 2,129 | 1,613 | 1,452 | 1,326 | 2,117 | 1,581 | 1,471 | 1,443 | 1,953 | 1,440 | 1,957 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced (2024/2025)[58] | 8,470 | 2,505 | 2,254 | 3,711 | 1,849 | 2,254 | 2,516 | 1,851 | 2,210 | 1,423 | 3,189 | 1,648 | 1,304 | 2,160 | 1,789 | 1,136 | 2,080 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced Per 100,000 Population (2024/25)[58] | 562 | 478 | 512 | 683 | 461 | 512 | 736 | 570 | 470 | 493 | 757 | 504 | 521 | 511 | 650 | 434 | 699 |
| Active Education, Health and Care plan (EHCPs) by Home District (As of Jan 2025)[58] | 20,687 | 5,951 | 6,005 | 8,731 | 2,949 | 6,005 | 5,715 | 6,018 | 4,938 | 3,847 | 7,054 | 4,849 | 3,199 | 5,755 | 4,871 | 2,279 | 4,583 |
| Active EHCPs by Home District rate per 10,000 (mid-2024)[58] | 360 | 277 | 361 | 451 | 176 | 361 | 464 | 511 | 257 | 347 | 470 | 399 | 303 | 360 | 474 | 219 | 448 |

[57] KCC analysis (districts) & ONS data (Medway) - https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2024
[58] Data from individual councils
[59] KCC analysis (districts) & LG inform data (Medway) - https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/search/26797?text=Number+of+total+EHCP
[60] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2024

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Active EHCPs by School District (as of Oct 2025)[58] | 22,247 | 8,169 | 5,641 | 8,437 | 6,155 | 5,641 | 6,021 | 4,430 | 7,404 | 3,396 | 6,967 | 4,480 | 3,293 | 5,446 | 5,222 | 4,586 | 3,700 |
| Active EHCPs by School District rate per 10,000 (as of Oct 2025)[58] | 387 | 381 | 339 | 436 | 368 | 339 | 488 | 376 | 385 | 306 | 465 | 369 | 312 | 341 | 508 | 441 | 362 |
| No. of Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) Y12&Y13 (2024)[58] | 1,689 | 658 | 420 | 611 | 476 | 420 | 447 | 346 | 590 | 245 | 521 | 333 | 279 | 405 | 357 | 350 | 298 |
| NEET Rate per 10,000[58] | 348 | 385 | 283 | 370 | 360 | 283 | 425 | 351 | 385 | 237 | 404 | 335 | 329 | 285 | 415 | 422 | 337 |
| Child in Need Plans (Mar 2025)[58] | 3,706 | 1,487 | 820 | 1,399 | 1,195 | 820 | 865 | 826 | 1,347 | 534 | 1,052 | 773 | 659 | 793 | 675 | 784 | 794 |
| Child in Need Plans Rate per 10,000[58] | 87 | 92 | 65 | 104 | 94 | 65 | 104 | 95 | 93 | 62 | 103 | 85 | 82 | 65 | 100 | 100 | 105 |
| Child Protection Plans (Mar 2025)[58] | 1,428 | 582 | 324 | 522 | 465 | 324 | 333 | 306 | 531 | 190 | 427 | 280 | 247 | 317 | 259 | 314 | 291 |
| Child Protection Plans Rate per 10,000[58] | 34 | 36 | 25 | 39 | 37 | 25 | 40 | 35 | 37 | 22 | 42 | 31 | 31 | 26 | 38 | 40 | 38 |
| Looked After Children (LAC) by placement address (Mar 2025)[58] | 1,967 | 838 | 228 | 901 | 658 | 228 | 631 | 450 | 768 | 155 | 755 | 289 | 294 | 219 | 533 | 509 | 411 |
| LAC by placement address - Rate per 10,000[58] | 46 | 65 | 22 | 82 | 65 | 22 | 94 | 64 | 66 | 22 | 91 | 39 | 46 | 22 | 97 | 81 | 67 |
| Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) looked after (Mar 2025)[58] | 328 | 114 | 30 | 184 | 92 | 30 | 119 | 87 | 100 | 25 | 141 | 61 | 62 | 30 | 103 | 47 | 86 |
| UASC looked after - Rate per 10,000[58] | 8 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 14 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 15 | 6 | 11 |
| Kent LAC Starts (2024/25)[58] | 745 | 353 | 93 | 299 | 271 | 93 | 205 | 176 | 320 | 77 | 245 | 103 | 131 | 90 | 156 | 205 | 163 |
| Kent LAC Starts Rate per 10,000[58] | 22 | 27 | 9 | 27 | 27 | 9 | 30 | 25 | 28 | 11 | 29 | 14 | 21 | 9 | 28 | 33 | 27 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Other Local Authority Looked After Children (OLA LAC) placed in Kent (Mar 2025)[58] | 1,611 | 799 | 219 | 593 | 603 | 219 | 424 | 365 | 717 | 162 | 501 | 231 | 315 | 206 | 358 | 449 | 282 |
| OLA LAC placed in Kent Rate per 10,000[58] | 38 | 62 | 21 | 54 | 60 | 21 | 63 | 52 | 62 | 23 | 60 | 32 | 49 | 21 | 65 | 72 | 46 |

Figure 8.5 – Adult Services

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Number of older adults in adult social care as % total population (2023-2024)[61] | 0.90% | 0.68% | 0.73% | 1.17% | 0.64% | 0.73% | 1.14% | 1.06% | 0.73% | 0.65% | 1.21% | 0.91% | 0.63% | 0.74% | 1.12% | 0.70% | 1.18% |
| Number of adults in adult social care as % total population (2023-2024)[61] | 2.60% | 2.41% | 2.27% | 2.98% | 2.36% | 2.27% | 3.06% | 2.73% | 2.14% | 2.28% | 3.03% | 1.49% | 2.68% | 2.29% | 2.93% | 2.12% | 2.99% |
| Adult social care total spend (£m)[62] | 634 | 202.8 | 162.3 | 268.9 | 159.7 | 162.3 | 162.9 | 149.2 | 185.6 | 109.1 | 214.8 | 124.5 | 83.6 | 155.3 | 117.4 | 115.7 | 162 |
| No. of people aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year (2024-2025)[62] | 405 | 92 | 81 | 232 | 47 | 81 | 157 | 120 | 77 | 41 | 197 | 91 | 47 | 81 | 109 | 34 | 134 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year - rate per 100,000 population (2024-2025)[62] | 27 | 18 | 18 | 43 | 12 | 18 | 46 | 37 | 16 | 14 | 47 | 28 | 19 | 19 | 40 | 13 | 45 |
| No. of people aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing | 4,212 | 1,369 | 922 | 1,921 | 1,053 | 922 | 1,184 | 1,053 | 1,251 | 565 | 1,540 | 856 | 529 | 896 | 870 | 790 | 1,127 |

[61] KCC analysis (districts) & LG inform data (Medway) - https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=23182&mod-area=E06000035&mod-group=AllUnitaryLaInCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup

[62] Data from individual councils

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| long term support during the year (2024-2025)[62] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year - rate per 100,000 population (2024-2025)[62] | 279 | 261 | 210 | 354 | 262 | 210 | 346 | 324 | 266 | 196 | 366 | 262 | 211 | 212 | 316 | 301 | 379 |
| Number of people accessing short term support during the year (18-64) (2024-2025)[62] | 4,363 | 1,111 | 993 | 2,259 | 674 | 993 | 1,490 | 1,206 | 947 | 663 | 1,827 | 926 | 605 | 958 | 1,114 | 436 | 1,250 |
| People accessing short term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-2025)[62] | 46 | 27 | 30 | 58 | 21 | 30 | 62 | 51 | 19 | 6 | 61 | 38 | 31 | 31 | 56 | 21 | 59 |
| Number of people accessing short term support during the year (65+) (2024/2025)[62] | 13,876 | 3,883 | 3,724 | 6,269 | 2,739 | 3,724 | 4,055 | 3,358 | 3,423 | 2,459 | 5,058 | 2,936 | 1,979 | 3,565 | 3,126 | 1,787 | 3,419 |
| People accessing short term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (65+) (2024/2025)[62] | 413 | 341 | 328 | 400 | 328 | 328 | 406 | 385 | 334 | 329 | 409 | 353 | 378 | 329 | 403 | 302 | 396 |
| Number of people accessing long term support during the year (18-64) (2024/2025)[62] | 8,750 | 2,947 | 1,955 | 3,848 | 2,298 | 1,955 | 2,375 | 2,122 | 2,683 | 1,196 | 3,060 | 1,810 | 1,210 | 1,901 | 1,863 | 1,635 | 2,141 |
| People accessing long term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-2025)[62] | 92 | 56 | 44 | 71 | 57 | 44 | 70 | 65 | 57 | 41 | 73 | 55 | 48 | 45 | 68 | 62 | 72 |
| Number of people accessing long term | 14,833 | 4,995 | 3,693 | 6,145 | 3,876 | 3,693 | 3,929 | 3,335 | 4,489 | 2,469 | 4,887 | 2,988 | 2,283 | 3,549 | 3,041 | 2,586 | 3,373 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| support during the year (65+) (2024/2025)[62] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| People accessing long term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (65+) (2024-2025)[62] | 442 | 438 | 326 | 392 | 464 | 326 | 393 | 383 | 438 | 331 | 395 | 359 | 436 | 327 | 392 | 437 | 390 |

Figure 8.6 – Democratic

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Size of electorate[63] | 1,348,857 | 477,468 | 407,167 | 464,222 | 367,424 | 407,167 | 298,941 | 275,325 | 428,883 | 269,662 | 362,685 | 287,626 | 228,839 | 390,803 | 238,205 | 238,491 | 252,519 |
| Councillor numbers (including District and County)[63] | 658 | 205 | 214 | 239 | 151 | 214 | 149 | 144 | 180 | 154 | 181 | 143 | 118 | 203 | 123 | 85 | 129 |
| Councillor to electorate ratio (current)[63] | 2,043 | 2,329 | 1,903 | 1,942 | 2,433 | 1,903 | 2,006 | 1,912 | 2,385 | 1,755 | 2,001 | 2,008 | 1,947 | 1,924 | 1,937 | 2,794 | 1,958 |
| Level of civic participation (2023-2024) (%)[64] | 40.6% | 35.6% | 43.9% | 42.1% | 20.4% | 25.1% | 24.0% | 26.4% | 21.2% | 27.5% | 25.2% | 22.6% | 24.0% | 25.0% | 22.1% | 19.0% | 28.1% |

[63] Publicly available data
[64] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202324-annual-publication

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# Kent LGR Business Case: Option 5A

# V2.0

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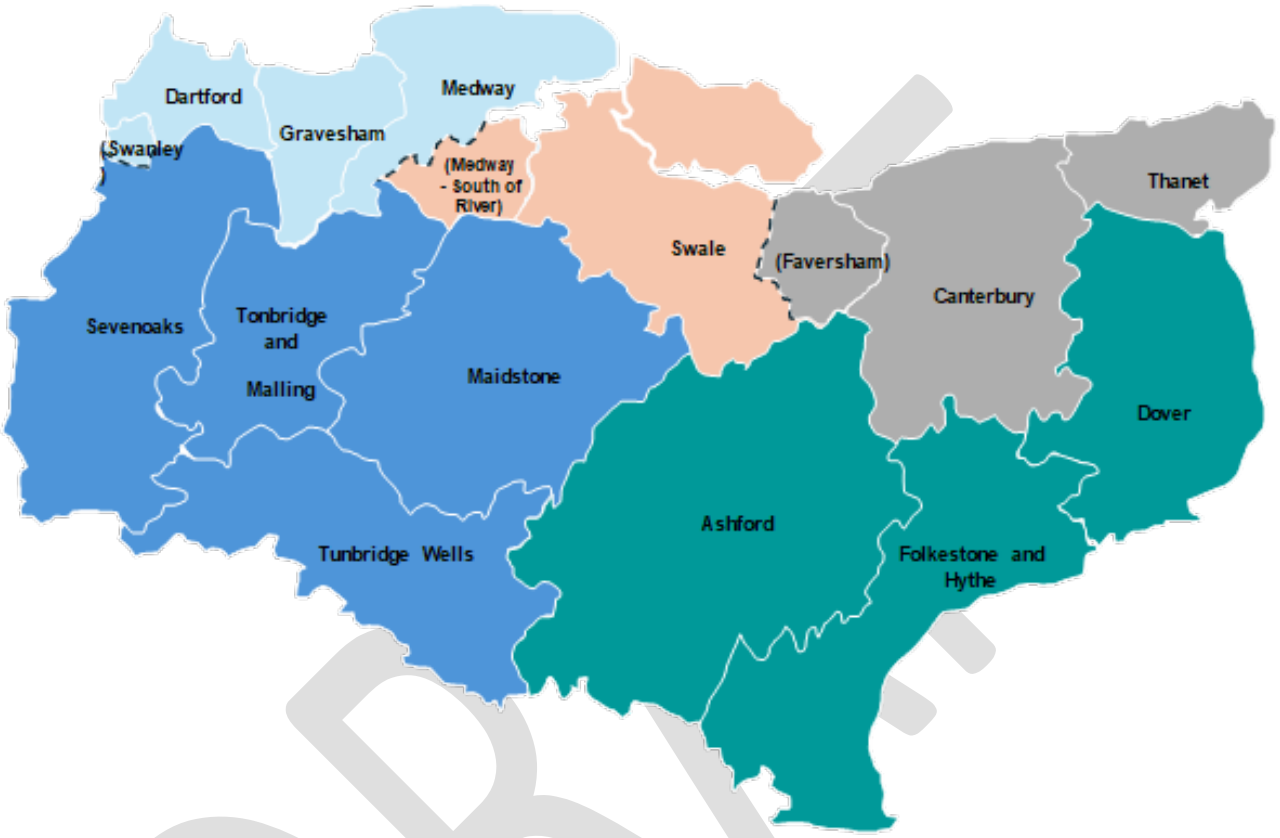
# Foreword (placeholder)

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# Executive summary

**Introducing Option 5A**

Option 5A sets out a five-unitary model of local government in Kent, built around natural places and identities, that will maximise the benefits of local, connected government and provide strong capacity for growth. The model is supported by the Borough Councils of [Councils to be inserted].




**Key:**

*White line – District Boundary*

*Dotted line – Boundary Change*

| Unitary | Population | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **North Kent**<br>• Dartford<br>• Gravesham<br>• Medway west of River Medway<br>• Swanley | 330,536 | A strategically important logistics and infrastructure hub, North Kent will drive economic growth through its proximity to London, major transport corridors (M25, M2), and international gateways like Ebbsfleet and the Port of Sheerness. It will focus on clean growth, advanced manufacturing, and professional services, with a diverse population and strong urban regeneration potential. |
| **West Kent**<br>• Maidstone<br>• Sevenoaks (excluding Swanley)<br>• Tonbridge & Malling<br>• Tunbridge Wells | 544,814 | West Kent offers a mix of rural and urban economies, a thriving visitor and tourism sector, with increasing focus on innovation and service industries. Defined by strategic connectivity and a highly skilled workforce, supporting professional services, life sciences and creative |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | sectors. The area has a high proportion of knowledge-based employment and is well-positioned to attract inward investment from London and beyond. Green infrastructure, heritage towns and quality of life are key drivers of investment in the sub-region. |
| **East Kent**<br>• Canterbury<br>• Faversham<br>• Thanet | 342,934 | East Kent is defined by its international gateways, strong cultural heritage, and growing sectors in health, life sciences, and the creative economy. Canterbury leads as an education and cultural centre. Thanet and surrounding coastal towns offer regeneration potential and tourism appeal, supported by lower land values. |
| **Mid Kent**<br>• Medway east of River Medway<br>• Swale excluding Faversham | 340,286 | A growing business hub in the Kent region with a demographically diverse population, Mid Kent is set up to drive the economy through business growth. It will focus on leveraging its local sector mix involving high value technology, engineering manufacturing and knowledge intensive businesses through the Chatham Innovation Park. Mid Kent will benefit from the business growth and will focus on skill retention and growth, shared infrastructure, ambition and innovation. The area also benefits from a strong network of local Universities and Colleges that will provide a sustainable pipeline of skilled workers to support the business growth in the region. |
| **South Kent**<br>• Ashford<br>• Dover<br>• Folkstone & Hythe | 373,115 | As Kent's own international hub, South Kent will unlock significant economic potential. South Kent will drive economic growth by leveraging its strong footprint in the logistics and distribution industries through the Channel Corridor. The area also benefits from a robust and growing life sciences industry that currently houses the Discovery Park which is home to 160 companies spanning international pharmaceutical companies inviting further investment and economic growth. |

## **Purpose and approach** (see section 1)

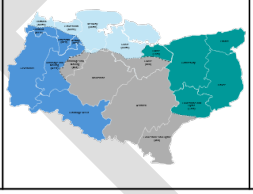
The reorganisation of local government presents a valuable opportunity to redesign a system that better serves the diverse needs of Kent and Medway's residents.

The 14 councils of Kent have collaborated to develop a model reflecting established population and economic centres as well as community and workplace patterns.

Through this joint effort, the councils have developed five business cases addressing the government's six reform criteria, proposing to replace the current two-tier system with more efficient and resilient unitary authorities.

These authorities aim to support devolution, enhance service delivery and strengthen community engagement.

Each proposal is underpinned by a shared evidence base, robust governance, transparent appraisal and extensive stakeholder and public consultation to form a united and evidence-led vision for the future of local government in Kent and Medway.

| | Option 1a | Option 3a | Option 4b | Option 4d | Option 5a |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Approach to drafting** | Kent County Council leading with some shared input around finance and services. | Common approach to drafting with input from councils. | | | |
| **Structure, formatting and branding** | Separate structure, formatting and branding. | Single approach to structure, formatting and branding across four business cases. A significant proportion of content across the four cases will be shared and clearly highlighted within the cases. | | | |

## **The Kent context** (see section 2)

Kent, located in the south east of England, is a geographically diverse and economically important area.

Known as the Garden of England and the UK's Gateway to Europe, it covers 3,739 sq. km with a population of about 1.93 million.

The county combines densely populated urban centres with extensive rural areas.

Its landscape includes the North Downs, The Weald, and a long coastline featuring the White Cliffs of Dover. Rivers like the Thames, Medway and Stour support trade and settlement.

Economically, Kent has evolved from its agricultural roots into a modern, mixed economy encompassing manufacturing, logistics, life sciences, tourism and digital industries.

Major assets include the Port of Dover, the Discovery Park science and technology hub and excellent transport links.

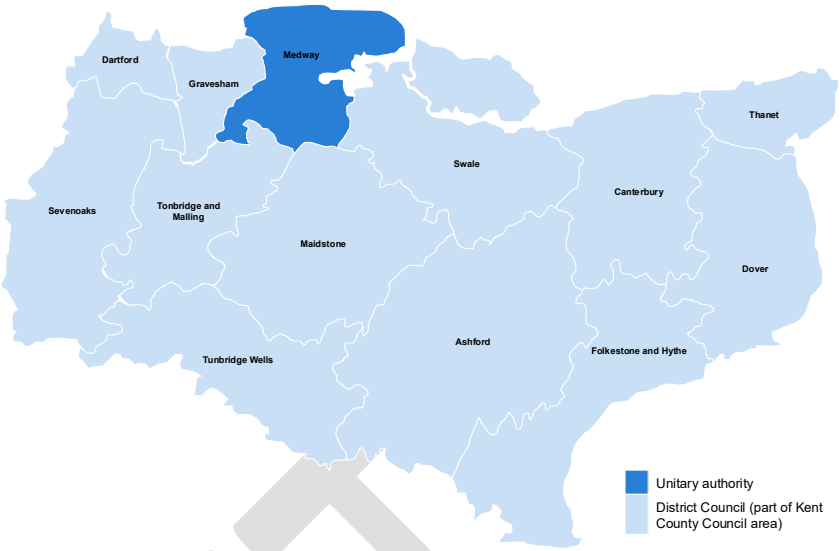
Kent's strategic location, skilled workforce and innovation hubs drive regional growth and support its case for devolution and local government reform.

Kent currently has a two-tier local government system.

At the upper tier is Kent County Council, while the lower tier consists of 12 district and borough councils.

Medway Council functions separately as a unitary authority.

In addition, there are more than 300 town and parish councils handling local-level services.




The current mixed model of service delivery creates complexity and all 14 councils recognise the potential benefits of moving towards a single-tier system with fewer organisations and a more unified governance structure.

**Challenges and opportunities** (see section 3)

Councils across the county face financial pressures and rising demand.

In Kent, key pressures include:

- uneven funding and tax bases
- escalating social care and border-related costs
- workforce shortages and morale issues
- fragmented governance across the two-tier system

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) offers a unique opportunity to create a more efficient, resilient and sustainable model.

By simplifying structures and pursuing devolution, Kent can streamline service delivery, strengthen financial stability, enhance collaboration across sectors, attract investment and build a greater sense of place to ensure more cohesive, accountable and community focused local government services.

**Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation** (see section 4)

Our vision for local government in Kent is:

**Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially-sustainable and accountable local public services delivered in partnership with communities**.

LGR is the catalyst for transformation and reform, creating resilient, digitally-enabled councils rooted in local identity and strong partnerships.

It is crucial that devolution and LGR are linked: structural reform unlocks the powers, funding and flexibility needed to make decisions locally and drive growth.

Kent's ambition is to deliver better outcomes for all residents through sustainable, accountable and community-focused public services.

All councils in Kent are united in their support for devolving powers to a single strategic authority.

This will ensure decisions about Kent are made in Kent, by those who know its communities best.

LGR and devolution are intrinsically linked. To fully realise our vision, we need the powers, funding and countywide collaboration that only a devolution deal and a new strategic Kent authority can provide.

We are committed to securing a devolution deal for Kent at the earliest possible opportunity.

**The case for Option 5A**

Option 5A strikes the best balance between local place-shaping and strategic delivery. It is the only option that both designs councils around natural communities which have existed for hundreds of years, and coherent geographies, and provides a robust platform for growth and investment. Option 5A will strengthen the engagement with people and place that effective delivery depends on.

Option 5A resolves historic boundary misalignments around Swanley and Faversham, bringing local government boundaries in line with established health geographies (HCPs), as well as children's social care and education commissioning arrangements, whilst also mirroring communities for worship and prayer. It also reflects the way local media and civic networks already operate across the County's natural community groupings. These boundary misalignments, noted since 1969, would finally be addressed through this reorganisation, setting sustainable boundaries fit for the next 50 years.[1]

Importantly, Option 5A puts capacity and support where it is most needed. Against a range of metrics, there are four discrete regions within the County that have specific population needs (North, East, Mid and South Kent) - be that in terms of life expectancy, wider health determinants, skills attainment or economic factors - and one region (West Kent) which has less acute needs. Option 5A structures the new Unitary Councils in a way to match this need, with more agile Councils in those four areas to support communities through greater democratic representation. They also align with health, education, skills and employment geographies to improve outcomes for local people. This model therefore ensures tailored local focus whilst maintaining strategic coherence.

Option 5A provides the strongest relationship between the new councils and a future Strategic Authority, which will enable effective devolution of powers and resources for Kent.

Studies suggest that Kent's growth potential could include more than 400,000 homes (circa 1 million additional residents) and 480,000 jobs beyond what is encapsulated within existing adopted Local Plans. This growth potential would see the overall population of Kent rise to around 3 million. With growth forecast in the areas where Option 5A currently shows the lower population numbers (North, Mid, East and South Kent), this model will future-proof local government by aligning with the long term growth projections. As the population expands, the five council model will naturally equalise in size, ensuring responsive, resilient and locally attuned governance.

[1] https://archive.org/details/1969-royal-commission-local-gov-vol-1-report/mode/2up)

The benefits of Option 5A are clear: better-quality housing, improved jobs/skills opportunities and improved health outcomes for our residents. It will also simultaneously deliver sustained economic growth for both Kent and the wider UK economy. This option will realise the unlocked potential that Kent has to offer.

We have summarised the key arguments for why the five-unitary model is best for Kent.

| Key theme | Arguments | Government Criteria |
|---|---|---|
| **Reflects natural communities and geographies** | • Delivers authorities fully enabled to drive growth across the area by aligning housing delivery in the right areas, economic hubs and transport infrastructure, alongside established travel to work, education and health trends.<br>• Uses the once in a generation opportunity to reorganise three local government boundaries to best fit our sense of place.<br>• Reflects where we expect growth in Kent in the next 50 years and unlocks that growth by building regional architecture which harnesses those opportunities. | Criteria 1, ,3, 4, 5, 6 |
| **Delivers housing and economic growth across the whole area.** | • Reflects local housing markets, and the migratory effect of London, while building scale to plan strategically to deliver housing growth across Kent.<br>• Enables the future growth of Kent and establishes logical economic areas as the right foundation for sustainable, long-term growth.<br>• Consolidates the existing travel to work trends spanning bus, rail and road connectivity. | Criteria 2, 3, 6 |
| **Savings of £65.7m which will pay back the investment in 14 years.** | • Generates recurrent savings of £65.7m which will pay back the initial investment in 14 years.<br>• Entails greater investment in the short term, but designs councils that ensure strong service delivery, place-based public service reform and sustainable growth, alongside providing greater scope to deliver long-term financial sustainability. | Criteria 2 |
| **Reflecting partnerships and how services are delivered** | • Builds councils where health and care partnerships and supporting health architecture will operate together, providing the right footprint for prevention and early intervention and for wider public service reform.<br>• Reflects how adult social care, children's services and education are commissioned | Criteria 3, 6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Aligns with acute hospital demand supporting health and care integration, partnership working and public service reform.<br><br>• Reflects existing police boundaries allowing for safer communities and opportunities to continue good community engagement. | |
| **Strengthening cultural and historic identities** | • Builds boundaries that reflect local needs, historic and future community identities and the natural and infrastructural geography of Kent.<br><br>• Establishes councils that are closest to communities in Kent and reflect local communities, cultures and the identities of areas within Kent. | Criteria 1, 4, 6 |
| **Establishing truly local authorities** | • Establishes five councils across Kent and Medway maximising how local councils in Kent can realise the benefits from LGR. | Criteria 1, 5 |
| **Strong governance and healthy decision-making** | • Establishes five constituent authorities to a Strategic Authority and more constituent authorities provides stronger governance, debate and decision-making and better reflect the needs of local communities and the areas they reside in. | Criteria 5 |
| **Councils designed around communities** | • Establishes councils focussed on communities allowing for more tailored and targeted service delivery, agile decision-making, community empowerment, co-creation and purposeful engagement.<br><br>• Designs councils around communities and how they live and work in Kent, providing the right foundations to build community resilience, stronger emergency planning, intelligence and prevention into how public services work. | Criteria 4, 6 |
| **Fostering strong partnerships to connect communities** | • Consolidates many council partnerships and shared services across Kent to build better resilience and support positive outcomes for our residents.<br><br>• Retains existing deanery and diocese community relationships for the Christian faith, as well as patterns of worship within the Sikh communities of Kent further strengthening local identity and allowing our residents to continue building their strong communities. | Criteria 1, 4, 6 |

**Base case**

This is a Type B proposal entailing modifications to existing Kent council boundaries under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Section 5 includes a base case which meets the government's criteria and the modifications proposed.

**Implementation plan** (see section 6)

Kent's LGR implementation plan aims to follow a phased and collaborative approach across all councils, leveraging a well-established shared programme with strong governance and joint planning.

The process is structured into preparation, foundational, shadow authority, officer leadership and go-live phases, each with clear priorities to ensure a smooth transition while driving ambitious public service reform alongside devolution.

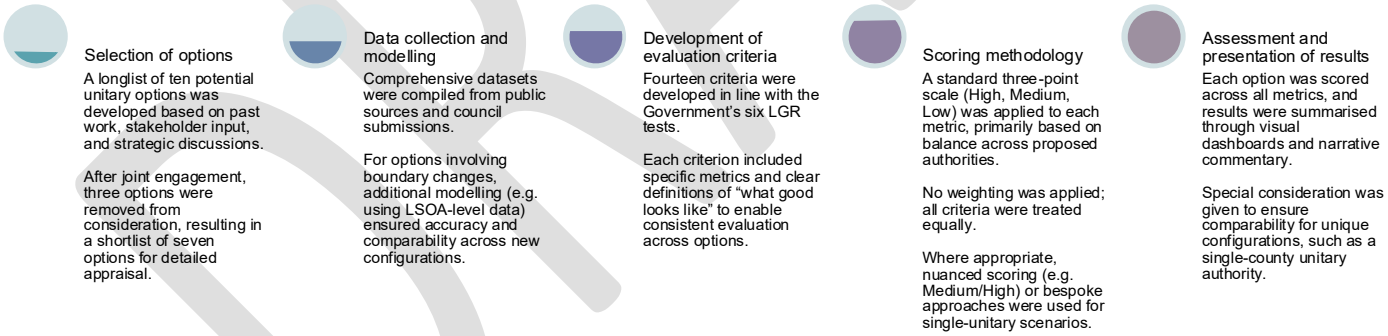
The programme builds on Kent's history of joint working and lessons from previous LGR efforts, supported by targeted governance, workstreams and stakeholder engagement to mitigate risks related to service disaggregation, aggregation, ICT and working together, aiming for a seamless, efficient transition that benefits residents and public services over the long-term.

**Options appraisal** (see Appendix 1)

A rigorous and collaborative process undertaken by the 14 Kent local authorities to appraise potential council governance options. The aim was to provide a robust, consistent, and evidence-based foundation to support local decision-making on which options should advance to full business case development.

The appraisal followed national guidance and was aligned with the Government's six criteria for local government reorganisation, as set out in correspondence from the Secretary of State in February and June 2025. Importantly, the process did not rank or recommend any preferred option but provided a shared evidence base to inform council decisions.

**Key stages of the appraisal process:**




Council Leaders reviewed the appraisal findings, supported by resident and stakeholder views. While the appraisal did not determine a preferred option, it served as an objective and structured basis for informed political judgement and democratic decision-making on which options should proceed to business case development.

**Financial modelling** (see Appendix 2)

Finance officers across all 14 Kent councils have reviewed and adjusted the financial modelling in order to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to government.

The key driver of difference between options are the number of councils being proposed.

Due to the assumptions applied within the modelling, implementation costs and recurring costs of disaggregation increase as the number of councils proposed increases.

The headline numbers for Option 5A are set out below:

| LGR option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Option 5A** | 139.1 | 65.7 | (46.0) – (68.1) | 19.7 – (2.4) | 14.0 years – no payback |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*
***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

The range of disaggregation costs has been agreed through the collaborative working of Kent finance officers. Our business case assumes increases in commissioned spend at the lower end of that range. There is evidence that councils with a population of 250-350k have lower unit costs across adult nursing and residential and S251 looked after children and children in residential care.[2] While the cost of care packages is complex this may relate to councils closer to communities being better able to tailor services and care packages to the strengths and needs of communities.

Government has been clear that whilst financial sustainability is a consideration, it is not the only indicator against which proposals will be judged. Option 5A delivers payback over the longer term whilst also placing resources where they are needed most to support local communities. The economic growth forecasts which come from that – potentially unlocking nearly 500,000 jobs which are not within existing Local Plans – and the financial return to the Treasury as a result should not be underestimated or ignored.

**Data sources** (see Appendix 3)

A common data set was used for all analyses presented in this case.

Details of the data set including its source, structure and variables, are provided in Appendix 3.

[2] Local Authority Interactive Tool 2023/24 and ASC-FR returns

# Section 1: Purpose and approach

This section includes:


## Purpose of the business case

## A collaborative approach across all Kent councils


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# Purpose of the business case

## Responding to the Government's request

On 5 February, the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, wrote to all leaders within Kent inviting them to submit options for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The letter reiterated the government's ambition to see the current two-tier system replaced with larger unitary authorities that are better able to deliver services, support economic growth and operate effectively within a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).

The government's letter set out six criteria for successful LGR which informs the structure and content of business cases submitted by Kent councils.

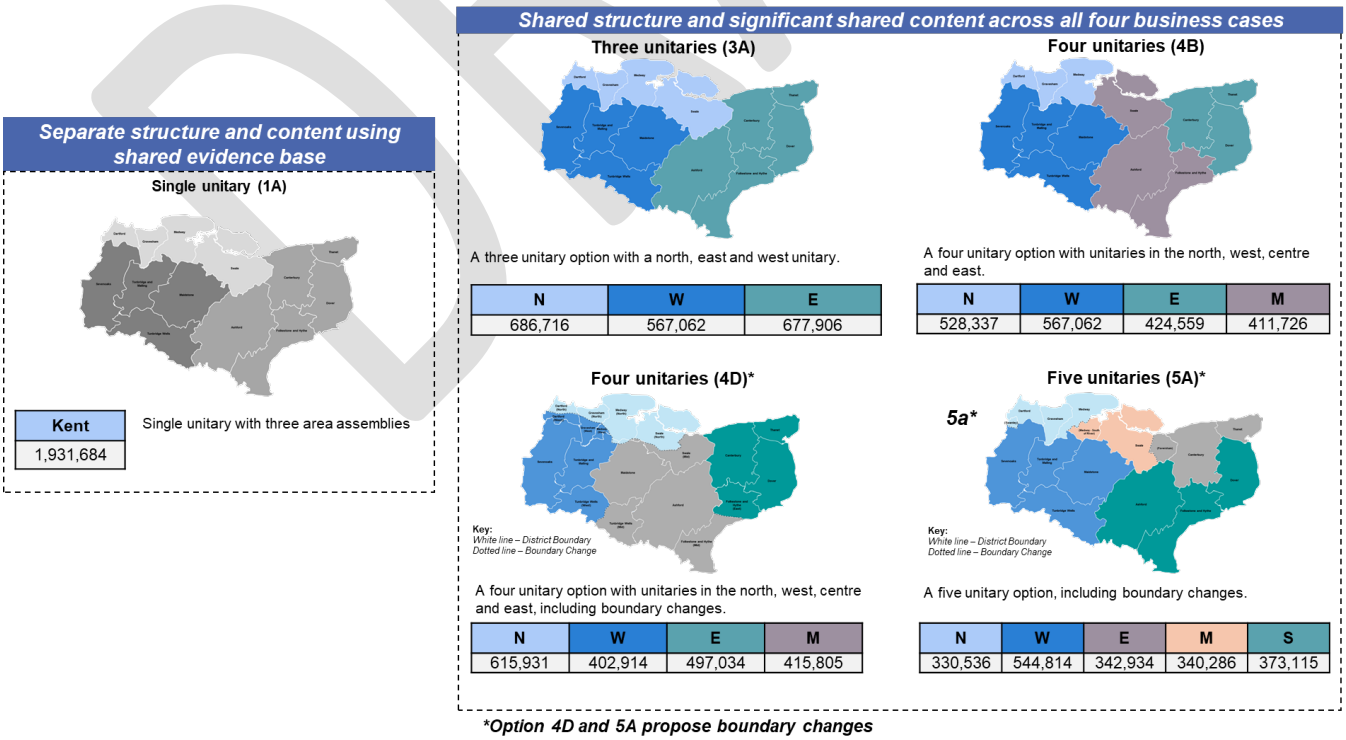
1. Establishing a single tier of local government
2. Efficiency, capacity and resilience to shocks
3. High-quality, sustainable public services
4. Collaboration to meet local needs
5. Enabling devolution
6. Strengthening community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

## Five business cases across Kent

This document is one of five business cases developed across Kent as part of a coordinated programme involving the 14 local councils.

Each business case draws on a shared evidence base, ensuring consistency and a common understanding of the context, challenges and opportunities for public sector reform.

***Figure 1:*** *The five business cases*



Option 1A has been developed by Kent County Council with a structure which varies from the other four cases.

The narrative for the 1A case has not been shared here but the supporting evidence base used is the same.

The other four business cases follow a standard structure aligned with government criteria.

Each document contains a significant amount of shared content as well as option-specific elements. That shared content is clearly marked throughout the documents.

Content that is all or primarily shared across the four cases includes:

- **Section 1:** Purpose and approach
- **Section 2:** The Kent context
- **Section 3:** Challenges and opportunities
- **Section 4:** Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation
- **Section 5:** Case for change
  - **Criteria 5:** Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities
  - **Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement
- **Section 6:** Implementation plan
- **Appendix 1:** Options appraisal
- **Appendix 2:** Financial modelling
- **Appendix 3:** Key data sources

The case for change (section 5) makes up a significant proportion of the proposal.

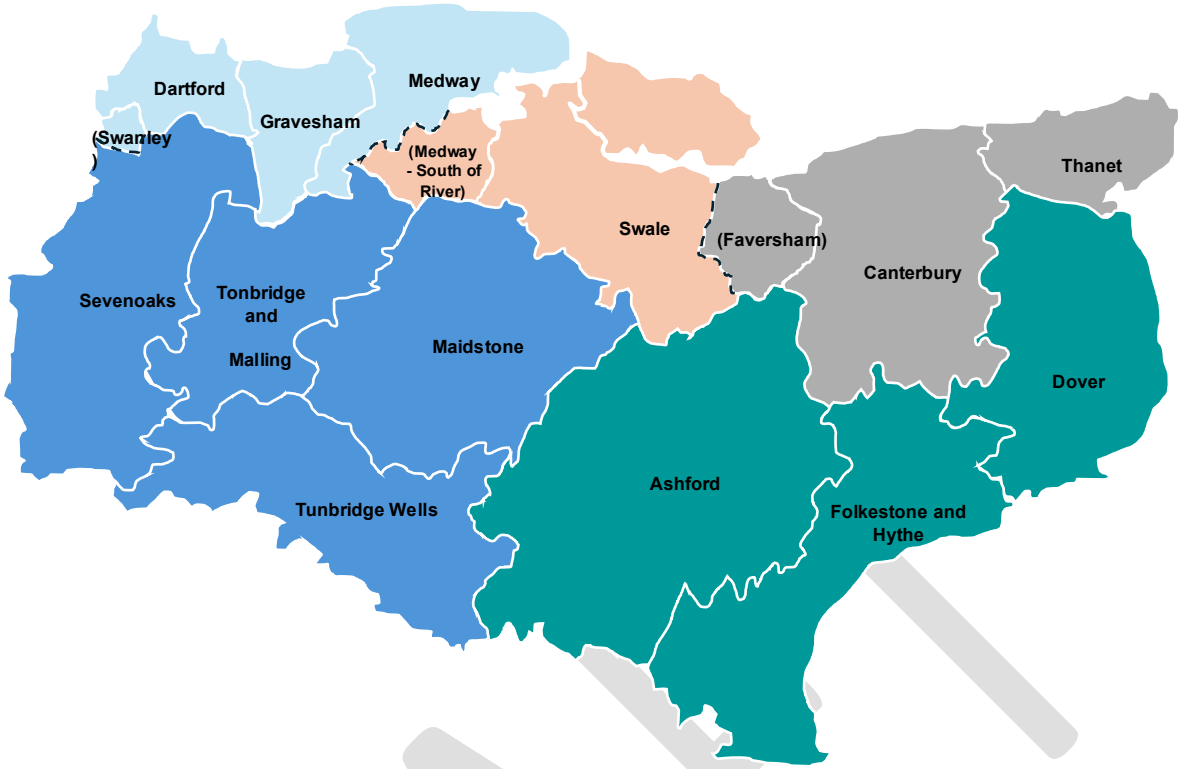
Within this section the majority of content is option specific, with some shared elements.

The case for change provides a clear and evidence-based narrative for why the proposed model is the most effective option for LGR in Kent.

**Business case for Option 5A**

This proposal is for a five council model of local government in Kent which has the support of **[Councils to be inserted]** because it:

- Maximises the local elements of local government in Kent by establishing councils better connected to communities;
- Provides capacity where it is most needed to support communities and improve outcomes for local people;
- Reflects local places and identities in the area; and
- Builds councils around natural boundaries and provides capacity for growth.




**Key:**

*White line – District Boundary*

*Dotted line – Boundary Change*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent | South Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Current councils | Dartford<br>Gravesham<br>Medway (25%)<br>Sevenoaks (18%) | Maidstone<br>Sevenoaks (82%)<br>Tonbridge and Malling<br>Tunbridge Wells | Canterbury<br>Swale (24%)<br>Thanet | Medway (75%)<br>Swale (76%) | Ashford<br>Dover<br>Folkestone & Hythe |
| Population | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |

*Note: For the purposes of proposals to Government, future council names are referred to geographically (e.g. as 'East Kent'). These are holding names which are subject to change following confirmation of the option to be implemented.*

# A collaborative approach across all Kent councils

**All Kent councils have prioritised working together, sharing information and full transparency throughout the LGR process. While five business cases are being submitted, we have minimised duplication and continually emphasised what we agree on over our differing views on specific council geographies.**

## Building on strong relationships

The Kent LGR governance framework is firmly rooted in established joint working among the 14 councils across Kent.

This longstanding tradition of partnership underpins every stage of the LGR process, ensuring inclusive and coordinated decision-making.

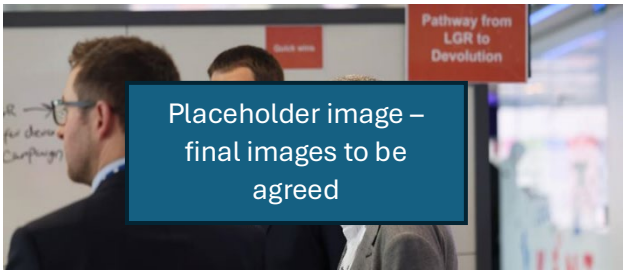
Our governance structure includes several key components:

- **Programme Board:** comprising the 14 Chief Executives, this board meets weekly to oversee progress, maintain strategic alignment and address emerging challenges across all councils.
- **Steering Group:** a smaller group of Chief Executives, Directors and Finance officers convene weekly to provide focused guidance on the development of the business cases, ensuring thorough evaluation and robust planning for reorganisation.
- **Leaders' meetings:** Held monthly, these sessions bring together Council Leaders to discuss and reach consensus on decisions, represent the voices of their communities and ensure residents' interests remain central throughout the process.
- **Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG):** All 14 Kent Finance Officers (S151s) across Kent have held regular meetings and worked together on all LGR related matters, including meeting on a weekly basis to review and challenge financial modelling.

We take pride in the collaborative spirit that has been sustained throughout the options appraisal and the development of multiple business cases.

This collective approach not only strengthens governance but also builds confidence among all stakeholders that decisions are made with shared commitment and mutual respect.

Importantly, this strong foundation will continue to serve us well beyond the decision point and the making of the Structural Changes Order, preparation for the shadow authorities and into the establishment of the successor authorities.






## Options appraisal process

The options appraisal was designed to provide a structured, evidence-based assessment of potential unitary options for Kent, helping to identify the options that should proceed to full business case development.

The approach included the following key steps:

1. **Option selection**: an initial longlist of 10 options was developed based on previous analysis submitted to government and local discussions regarding potential options. Through political engagement across Council Leaders, this was refined to a shortlist of seven options for full appraisal.

2. **Data collection and modelling**: data was gathered from publicly-available sources and direct council submissions which was used to model the potential structure and characteristics of each option, including assumptions where boundary changes were involved.

3. **Evaluation framework**: 14 evaluation criteria were developed, aligned to the government's six LGR criteria. For each criterion, specific metrics and definitions of "what good looks like" were agreed to enable consistent assessment.

4. **Scoring methodology**: each metric was assessed using a three-point scale (high, medium, low), based primarily on balance or distribution across proposed new councils. Additional guidance was applied where balance was not a relevant factor.

5. **Assessment process**: all options were scored against all metrics with results presented in dashboards and supported by narrative commentary. The output was comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad. No weighting was applied and the appraisal did not rank or recommend a preferred option.

Following the completion of the appraisal, Council Leaders met to consider the results alongside the views of their own councils and communities.

At this meeting, they agreed on a set of preferred options to proceed to the next stage, recognising both the evidence from the appraisal and the broader political and public context.

This consistent and transparent methodology ensured a shared evidence base to inform this proposal.

**Appendix 1** of this document outlines the step-by-step process, evaluation criteria and scoring methodology in detail for the options appraisal exercise.

## Stakeholder and public engagement

To ensure local voices have been central to the process, a coordinated, countywide programme of public and stakeholder engagement was carried out between 8 September and 6 October 2025.

This proactive engagement aligned with MHCLG guidance and reflected Kent's political commitment to meaningful community involvement.

A standardised resident survey, agreed across all 14 councils, captured views on local identity, service expectations and future priorities.

Alongside this, a joint stakeholder programme involved talking to key organisations across sectors, with each council engaging its local networks including residents, town and parish councils, voluntary groups and businesses.

Insights from both the survey and stakeholder discussions have directly informed the development of the business case and continue to guide local decision-making. Further details can be found in **Section 5, Criteria 4**.

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# Section 2: The Kent context

This section includes:

**Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy**

**Existing local government structures**

**Partnership landscape**

DRAFT

# Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy context

**Kent is a diverse and strategically-located county in the south east of England and serves as the UK's gateway to continental Europe. 'Kent' is used to describe the geographical area covered by Kent County Council, Medway Unitary Council and all 12 district councils. The county features a mix of urban and rural settlements such as the Weald and Romney Marsh spread across a large geographic expanse. Kent has a population of approximately 1.9 million with a varied demographic profile. The economy includes key sectors such as construction, life sciences, agriculture, manufacturing, logistics and tourism, supported by major transport links including ports, motorways and railways with high-speed routes into London. The county's geography encompasses coastline, countryside, including national landscapes, and historic towns and villages, contributing to its unique regional identity.**

***Figure 2:*** *Map of Kent*




## Kent geography

Kent is a geographically diverse and economically significant county in the south east corner of England, often referred to as the UK's gateway to continental Europe.

It borders Greater London to the north west, Surrey and East Sussex to the west and south west, and is flanked by the Thames Estuary, the North Sea, the Strait of Dover and the English Channel.

This strategic location, coupled with major transport infrastructure, positions Kent as a vital hub for national and international trade and connectivity.

Covering approximately 3,739 sq. km, the county is home to around 1.93 million people, distributed across a varied landscape of urban and rural settlements.

High-density urban centres such as Medway, Dartford and Thanet (with more than 1,300 people per sq. km) contrast with more sparsely populated, rural districts like Sevenoaks and Ashford, reflecting a population profile in which 73.9% live in urban areas and 26.1% in rural communities.

The county's physical geography is marked by several distinct features.

The North Downs, a prominent chalk ridge, runs west to east through the county.

To the south, The Weald offers rolling, wooded terrain shaped by clay and sandstone.

Kent's extensive and evolving coastline, from the iconic white cliffs of Dover and Thanet to the low-lying landscapes of Romney Marsh and the shingle headland of Dungeness, continues to be shaped by erosion, sedimentation and land reclamation.

Situated in north Kent, Medway forms one of the county's most significant urban areas defined by its estuarine setting and close proximity to London.

Principal rivers such as the Medway and the Stour help define the county's natural geography.

The Medway, in particular, has long served as a vital route for trade and transport, linking inland settlements with the Thames and the North Sea.

Economically, Kent balances its rural heritage with increasing urbanisation and diversification.

Historically celebrated as the Garden of England for its orchards, hop gardens and fertile farmland, agriculture remains a cultural hallmark even as its economic influence has declined.

The region's rich heritage is a significant asset, reflected in its array of listed buildings, historic landmarks and world-renowned sites such as Canterbury Cathedral, Dover Castle, The Historic Dockyard Chatham and the Archbishop's Palace in Maidstone.

These heritage features not only reinforce the county's cultural identity but also enhance its attractiveness as a destination for visitors and investment.

In recent decades, the county's economy has shifted towards manufacturing, logistics, retail, tourism and life sciences, anchored by major hubs such as Discovery Park, Kent Science Park, and the North Kent Enterprise Zone.

This expanding economic base is supported by strong transport links including the ports of Dover and Sheerness, the M2 and M20 motorways and international high-speed rail connections.

This combination of rich natural assets, historic identity and modern infrastructure underpins Kent's evolving role and capacity to deliver sustainable growth within the regional and national economy.

***Table 1:*** *Population and geography data for Kent*

| Council area | Population (mid-2024)[3] | Geography (sq.km)[4] | Population density[5] |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Medway*** | 292,655 | 193.7 | 1,510.7 |
| ***Ashford*** | 140,936 | 580.6 | 242.7 |
| ***Canterbury*** | 162,100 | 308.7 | 525.0 |
| ***Dartford*** | 125,011 | 72.7 | 1,718.8 |
| ***Dover*** | 119,768 | 315.4 | 379.8 |
| ***Folkestone and Hythe*** | 112,411 | 356.9 | 315.0 |
| ***Gravesham*** | 110,671 | 99.0 | 1,118.0 |
| ***Maidstone*** | 187,767 | 393.3 | 477.4 |
| ***Sevenoaks*** | 122,748 | 370.3 | 331.5 |
| ***Swale*** | 158,379 | 373.4 | 424.1 |
| ***Thanet*** | 142,691 | 103.6 | 1,377.2 |
| ***Tonbridge and Malling*** | 136,853 | 240.1 | 569.9 |
| ***Tunbridge Wells*** | 119,694 | 331.3 | 361.3 |
| ***Total*** | **1,931,684** | 3,739.2 | 516.6 |

## Kent population

Kent has a population of approximately 1.9 million, making it one of the largest counties in England by population.

The demographic profile of the county is varied and reflects significant differences in age structure, ethnicity and population growth trends across its 13 council areas.

Kent's population includes a balanced mix of age groups but with distinct patterns across the county.[6]

- Children and young people (0–19 years) make up around 22% of the population. The largest numbers are found in Medway (75,236), Swale (38,217), and Maidstone (44,943).

- Working-age adults (20–64 years) represent the majority of the population at around 59%. Medway (169,350), Maidstone (107,212), and Canterbury (88,840) have the largest working-age populations, reflecting their roles as employment and commuter hubs.

- Older people (65+ years) comprise approximately 19% of Kent's population. Coastal and rural districts such as Canterbury (36,194), Dover (29,736), and Folkestone & Hythe (28,903) have proportionately larger older populations, highlighting the appeal of these areas for retirement and the resulting demand for health and social care services.

Compared to the national average, Kent has a slightly higher proportion of older residents, particularly in its coastal communities, while areas closer to London, such as Dartford and Gravesham, are experiencing population growth among younger and working-age adults due to ongoing housing development and improved transport links.

[3] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[4] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about

[5] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[6] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

Kent continues to see strong population growth, driven by both internal migration from other parts of the UK and international migration.

The availability of more affordable housing, good transport connectivity and lifestyle factors attract young families, professionals and retirees alike.

Inland districts such as Ashford and Maidstone have experienced significant growth through planned housing developments, while urban centres such as Gravesham and Dartford are seeing demographic change shaped by proximity to London and regeneration schemes.

Kent remains a predominantly White British county with 83.2% of residents identifying as such.

However, the population is becoming increasingly diverse.

Minority ethnic groups now represent 16.8% of the total population with Asian communities being the largest minority group making up 4.4% of the population.

Ethnic diversity is most pronounced in urban areas and towns close to London.[7]

Gravesham has nearly one in three residents identifying as non-White British and is home to one of Europe's largest Sikh Gurdwaras.

In Dartford, 52% of school-age children are now classified as non-White British, highlighting generational change.

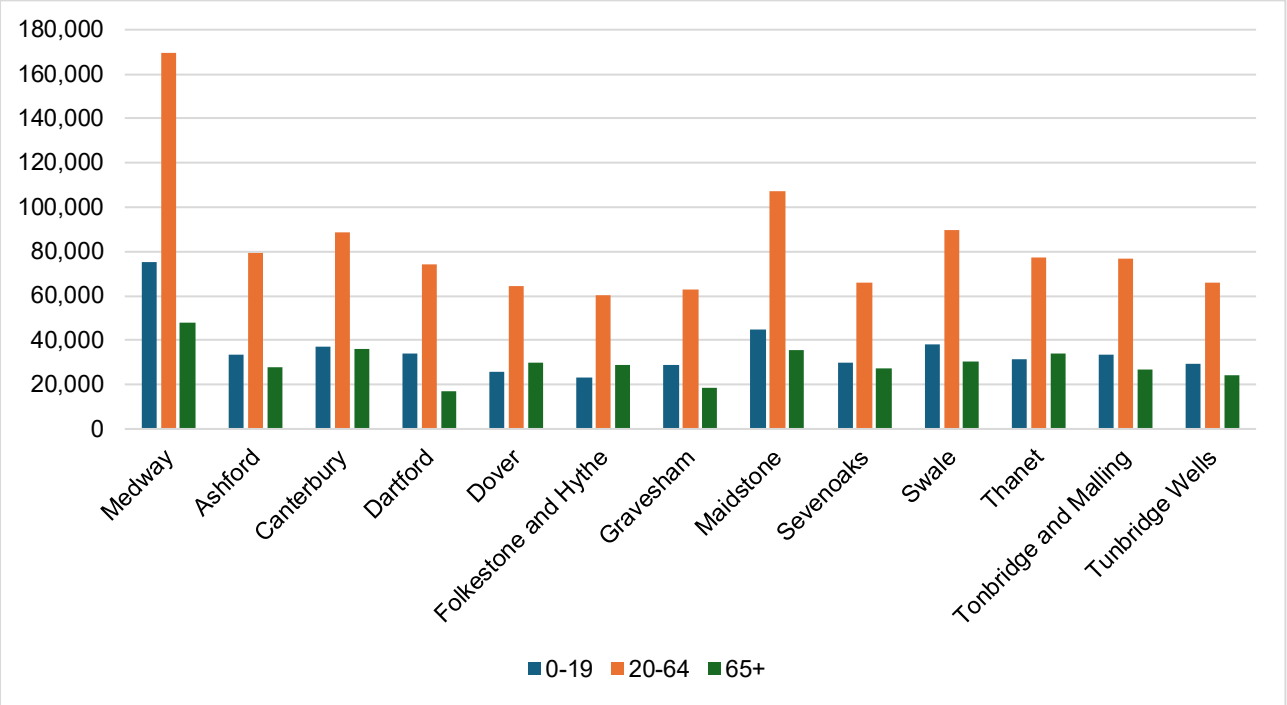
Elsewhere, local factors shape distinct community profiles: Maidstone and Folkestone and Hythe have significant Nepalese communities linked to the nearby barracks and the Gurkha regiment, alongside a growing Eastern European population.

Together, these patterns reveal a complex and locally-varied picture of diversity across Kent.

***Figure 3:*** *Population across Kent (mid-2024)*[8]

[7] https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-kent/summary-of-kent-facts-and-figures/people

[8] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales




## Kent economy

Kent is a dynamic and strategically-important region, often referred to as the UK's Gateway to Europe.

Located in the south east and bordering London, it plays a vital role in national trade, economic growth and innovation.

It is home to thriving sectors including agriculture, logistics, advanced manufacturing, food and drink, life sciences, tourism and the creative and digital industries.

Annual trade through the Port of Dover exceeds £122 billion[9], underscoring Kent's importance as a national and international logistics hub.

Kent is also a centre for innovation. Discovery Park in Sandwich, one of the UK's leading science parks, contributes an estimated £324 million[10] annually to the UK economy through its cluster of life sciences and technology businesses.

Other major business clusters include Kent Science Park in Sittingbourne, Kings Hill in West Malling and Innovation Park Medway, each providing high-value jobs and fostering collaboration with universities and research institutions.

The county's growing network of business parks, enterprise zones and research institutions further strengthens its innovation ecosystem.

[9] https://www.locateinkent.com/why-kent/kent-economy/

[10] https://www.insidermedia.com/news/south-east/kents-discovery-park-provides-324m-of-value-to-uk-economy

Kent's economic vibrancy is matched by strong civic leadership. The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) drives the region's long-term growth strategy, focused on infrastructure, innovation, skills, productivity and the ambition for inclusive prosperity.[11]

Housing and construction are fundamental to Kent's economic vitality, not only by generating significant employment within the sector but also by directly contributing to the government's national target of 1.5 million new homes this parliament[12].

This ambition is intrinsically linked to broader economic growth, as new housing and infrastructure projects stimulate productivity and prosperity, aligning with initiatives like the Kent and Medway Growth Deal.

While the industry faces challenges such as skill shortages and past insolvencies, Kent's specific demographic and economic projections underscore the critical need to strategically plan for and support continued growth in housing and infrastructure to meet future demands.

With excellent transport links to London and mainland Europe, a high quality of life and a strong track record in regeneration and investment, Kent continues to attract residents, businesses and investors.

As the UK's primary trade gateway to the continent, Kent is well-positioned to drive forward regional and national economic priorities.

These strengths also make Kent a compelling candidate for a future devolution deal, enabling greater local control to unlock further growth, tailor investment and deliver on long-term ambitions for the region.

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[11] https://www.kmep.org.uk/

[12] https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-07-30/hcws48

# Current local government structures

**All 14 councils across Kent and Medway recognise the opportunities that arise from moving towards a standardised single tier of local government with significantly fewer separate organisations, each with their own elected members, leadership and governance.**

Kent currently operates under a two-tier local government system comprising Kent County Council as the upper-tier authority, 12 district and borough councils and one separate unitary authority, Medway Council, which operates independently of the county structure.

Additionally, more than 300 town and parish councils take responsibility for delivery at a more local level.

***Figure 4:*** *Current boundary lines in Kent*

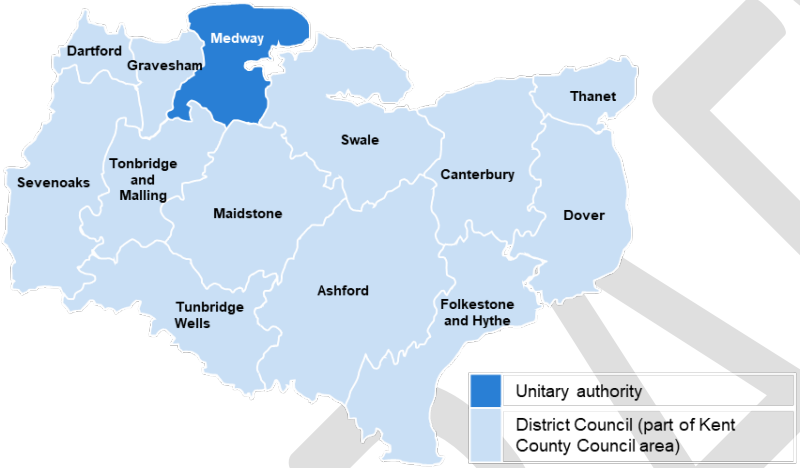



***Table 2:*** *Characteristics of areas in current boundary lines*

| Council | Population (mid-2024) [13] | Geography (sq.km) [14] | Councillors | Net Revenue Budget (£m) [15] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Medway*** | 292,655 | 193.72 | 59 | 346,727 |
| ***Ashford*** | 140,936 | 580.64 | 47 | 26,710 |
| ***Canterbury*** | 162,100 | 308.74 | 39 | 23,580 |
| ***Dartford*** | 125,011 | 72.73 | 42 | 29,009 |
| ***Dover*** | 119,768 | 315.35 | 32 | 28,274 |
| ***Folkestone and Hythe*** | 112,411 | 356.91 | 30 | 22,886 |
| ***Gravesham*** | 110,671 | 98.99 | 39 | 17,943 |
| ***Maidstone*** | 187,767 | 393.34 | 49 | 28,323 |
| ***Sevenoaks*** | 122,748 | 370.34 | 54 | 21,978 |
| ***Swale*** | 158,379 | 373.44 | 47 | 30,335 |
| ***Thanet*** | 142,691 | 103.61 | 56 | 21,979 |
| ***Tonbridge and Malling*** | 136,853 | 240.12 | 44 | 22,521 |
| ***Tunbridge Wells*** | 119,694 | 331.29 | 39 | 17,909 |

[13] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

[14] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about

[15] FY2025/26 data received from KFOG

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Kent County Council*** | 1,931,684 | 3,739.22 | 81 | 1,698,857 |
| ***Total*** | **1,931,684** | **3,739.22** | **658** | **2,337,031** |

The current mixed model of service delivery presents ongoing challenges for strategic coordination, financial sustainability and service reform.

In two-tier areas, district councils are responsible for services such as planning, housing, waste collection and leisure while Kent County Council oversees county-wide functions including adult social care, children's services, public health, education, highways, waste disposal and libraries.

By contrast, Medway Council, as a unitary authority, delivers the full range of local government services directly.

The complexity of this system can result in lack of alignment, duplication, inefficiencies and inconsistencies in service provision, making it harder to respond effectively to cross-cutting challenges and to plan strategically at scale.

All 14 councils across Kent recognise the opportunities that arise from moving towards a standardised single tier of local government with significantly fewer separate organisations, each with their own elected members, leadership and governance.

Further details on challenges and opportunities can be found in **Section 3.**

The councils also recognise the need for a strategic authority to enable effective planning for sustainable economic growth.

It is essential preparations for this are dovetailed with the preparations and implementation of unitary local government across the Kent geography to avoid the need and additional cost and complexity of two phases of organisational change.

# Partnership landscape

**Local Government Reorganisation presents an opportunity to further strengthen joint working across the public sector and support partners in addressing long-standing challenges more effectively.**

Across Kent, there is an established culture of joint working between Councils and a wide range of public sector organisations including Kent Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the NHS and colleges and universities.

These partnerships provide a strong foundation for taking forward a more integrated and system-wide approach to service delivery.

There is a complete, coterminous boundary for all public sector bodies within the Kent and Medway area, the importance of which is set out in the government's white paper on devolution.

***Table 3:*** *Key partners across Kent*

| Key partners | Description |
|---|---|
| **NHS Kent and Medway** | Provides healthcare services across Kent and Medway. It oversees hospitals, GP practices, community and mental health support as well as and public health programs for the region's 1.9 million residents, ensuring accessible and high-quality care throughout both urban and rural communities. Sub county collaboration is achieved through distinct Health and Care Partnerships the geography of which is broadly reflective of local health economies. |
| **Kent Fire and Rescue Services** | Operates across Kent and Medway, delivering emergency response, fire prevention, and safety education. The service protects people, property and the environment by responding to fires, road traffic collisions, rescues and other critical incidents while promoting safety through community outreach. |
| **Kent Police and PCC** | Responsible for law enforcement and public safety across Kent and Medway. Kent Police handle crime prevention, investigation and emergency response while the PCC sets policing priorities, manages budgets and ensures the force remains accountable to the public. Service delivery comprises both pan Kent (and Essex) specialist activities with operational policing based on local divisions. Borough commands collaborate with partners in community safety partnerships to address crime and disorder challenge aligned to local needs and priorities. |

Through early engagement with partners during the interim submission phase, a number of consistent themes emerged.

Stakeholders expressed a clear desire to be involved meaningfully in shaping the future of local government and recognised the potential of reorganisation to enable improvements in service quality and outcomes for the public including through greater alignment of public services, driving efficiency and enhancing preventative approaches.

Partners emphasised the importance of maintaining stability in frontline services, particularly in health and social care, through any period of transition.

Our Kent partners have also consistently supported devolution for Kent and recognise the importance of securing a devolution deal alongside and at the same time as delivering LGR.

Feedback gathered through a range of existing forums, including strategic partnerships, parish networks, business improvement districts (BIDs) and sector-specific meetings, highlighted the need to ensure any future model supports delivery at the right geographic level.

The importance of sustaining local identity, improving responsiveness to community needs and maximising public sector investment were also key messages.

Engagement with staff and elected members across Kent councils has highlighted several practical considerations including concerns about uncertainty, capacity and skills shortages, challenges that LGR could help to address through more streamlined structures and clearer career pathways.

Nonetheless, careful change management will be essential to support staff through any transition.

The feedback from the interim engagement phase has directly informed the development of LGR proposals.

All models seek to build on existing partnerships, promote more joined-up decision-making and integrated service delivery, reduce silo working and ensure future structures are fit for purpose, both in meeting local needs and supporting strategic collaboration across the public sector.

They also provide a strong foundation for potential devolution arrangements, including the opportunity to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority where appropriate, aligning local governance with long-term ambitions for greater powers and funding.

# Section 3: Challenges and opportunities

This section includes:

**Key challenges to be addressed by Kent Councils**

**Opportunities through local government reorganisation**

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# Key challenges to be addressed by Kent Councils

**The government's White Paper highlights the challenges facing local government – challenges that are strongly felt in Kent. Maintaining the status quo is not a viable option and has been discounted due to the urgency and scale of the pressures on the current system and the need for structural reform to enable long-term sustainability.**

Local government in Kent is under growing pressure from financial constraints and rising demand for services. There is also a need for structural reform: the current two-tier system, comprising Kent County Council, Medway Council and 12 district councils has inbuilt duplication and inefficiency impacting service delivery, governance, workforce stability and community representation.

These issues are compounded by the county's unique geographic and demographic context.

Kent's financial landscape mirrors national challenges but is intensified by its strategic position and diverse councils.

Wide variation in council debt levels, taxbase strength and income capacity creates uneven financial baselines and sustainability risks.

Higher border-related costs present operational challenges to the county further straining the system.

Protecting existing government investment and identifying a more resilient model is essential.

Below is a summary of the key challenges for Kent, relevant to any future model.

***Table 4:*** *Challenges for Kent*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Funding & financial** | • Persistent financial constraints and the challenge of fair funding, especially when all councils are seeking additional resources.<br>• Rising social care costs, which threaten to consume budgets at the expense of other vital services.<br>• Managing the distribution of debt and services during disaggregation.<br>• Equalising tax bases and service levels across diverse areas ("levelling up, not down").<br>• Ensuring financial resilience in the face of uncertainty and change.<br>• Significant variation in financial viability across councils.<br>• Risk of councils being unable to meet rising demand in adult social care, children's services, school transport, homelessness and contract inflation.<br>• High and unpredictable costs linked to Kent's role in managing border and asylum-related responsibilities.<br>• Unequal Council Tax rates, taxbase strength and income-generating capacity across councils. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Risk of losing central government investment in coastal regeneration, public health, infrastructure and border-related services during transition. |
| **Workforce** | • Recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly for social care roles and in areas close to London.<br>• An ageing workforce with the risk of significant staff losses.<br>• Uncertainty and anxiety among staff during restructuring and transition.<br>• Cultural differences between councils, making it hard to realise opportunities and harmonise working practices.<br>• Staff morale and concerns about job security. |
| **Structure & governance** | • Fragmentation and disaggregation of services leading to inefficiencies and duplication.<br>• Siloed approaches between upper and lower tiers of government.<br>• Strategic misalignment and lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, both internally and for residents.<br>• Loss of identity for town and parish councils and the erosion of local democracy due to fewer councillors.<br>• Branding and image challenges for local government.<br>• Systemic complexity, overlapping responsibilities and inconsistent service delivery across Kent's 14 councils. |
| **Community & identity** | • Maintaining local character and identity amid large-scale restructuring and in future geographies for successor authorities.<br>• Ensuring continuity and quality of services for diverse and geographically dispersed communities.<br>• Meeting the needs of communities with different priorities and expectations.<br>• Addressing the risk that smaller voluntary and community sector organisations may not survive the transition.<br>• Variation in identity, demographics and economic conditions making consistent representation and service access more difficult. |
| **Service delivery** | • Protecting and enhancing key services (adults, children, SEND, homelessness) while managing demand and costs.<br>• Ensuring continuity of services during and after organisational change.<br>• Establishing the culture of the successor councils.<br>• Overcoming skill shortages and ensuring the right talent is in place.<br>• Managing the complexity of integrating services and delivering holistic support.<br>• Challenges arising from Kent's role as a gateway to Europe, including managing transport, borders and asylum-related services across multiple tiers.<br>• Lack of coordinated response for critical functions such as small boat arrivals and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Inconsistent stages of Local Plan development leading to disjointed housing delivery and varied approaches to shared planning challenges.<br>• Fragmentation of Housing Revenue Accounts across councils raising concerns about tenant equity and service consistency. |
| **Change & devolution** | • Managing the pace and uncertainty of change including delays in achieving devolution agreements.<br>• Achieving timely and effective restructuring without losing momentum.<br>• Navigating different cultures and leadership styles across councils and creating new cultural norms.<br>• Ensuring that future devolution delivers real benefits and is not just a structural change. |

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# Opportunities through local government reorganisation

**Regardless of the model selected by government, all future Kent councils will work together to maximise the opportunities arising from the simplification of local government structures and the devolution of powers and funding to a new strategic authority.**

Kent faces a pivotal moment to reshape its future through structural reorganisation.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) presents a strategic opportunity to streamline governance, tackle long-standing inefficiencies and build a more resilient, effective and financially sustainable system.

By moving toward a more unified model, Kent can unlock greater accountability, improve service delivery and position itself to fully capitalise on future opportunities for sustainable growth, investment and devolution.

Below is a summary of the key opportunities for Kent. These are discussed in relation to the proposed model.

***Table 5:*** *Opportunities for Kent*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Public service reform** | • Implementing whole-system approaches to public service reform (e.g. better integration with partners in health) and a more joined-up approach to council services (e.g. integrating adult social care with housing, children's services with cultural services, public health with wellbeing and housing, placemaking and custodianship services including highways maintenance and street cleansing and spatial planning with transport strategy.<br>• Streamlining and digitising processes across currently separated services, including AI, and creating data and evidence hubs to improve efficiency and support collaboration with partners.<br>• Aggregating services to build resilience and enable more holistic strategies across education, housing, skills and job creation.<br>• Creating a single front door for residents to access services, improving accessibility and user experience.<br>• Delivering structural reform that improves financial sustainability through economies of scale, streamlined service delivery and harmonised tax and income strategies. |
| **Growth and devolution** | • Securing devolution deals to unlock new powers and funding, enabling councils to drive growth and shape their own destinies.<br>• Developing a compelling sustainable growth narrative and pipeline to attract investment.<br>• Planning for growth in key areas such as ports, distribution depots, the Thames Estuary and leveraging proximity to London.<br>• Leveraging structural reorganisation as a platform for a more ambitious devolution deal. A strategically-aligned unitary structure would support the establishment of a Strategic Authority, enhancing control over inward investment, tourism and infrastructure planning, providing successor arrangements to Visit Kent and Locate in Kent which are now in administration. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Workforce and culture** | • Attracting and retaining top talent, especially in competitive areas near London and Essex.<br>• Succession planning and supporting staff development to address an ageing workforce.<br>• Empowering staff and fostering a positive, proactive culture.<br>• Supporting staff through change, enabling career development and building resilience in the face of organisational restructuring.<br>• Taking the opportunity for a strategic cultural reset to focus more on prevention and the transformation opportunities that come with partner alignment and systems working. |
| **Community and place** | • Focusing on resident-centred approaches including early intervention and impactful prevention.<br>• Enhancing place-shaping by planning places, infrastructure and services more holistically.<br>• Redesigning the sense of place and local identity, reconnecting people with their councils.<br>• Improving accessibility to councils and services for all communities, including those in larger or more diverse geographies.<br>• Designing governance arrangements that better reflect Kent's diverse communities, strengthening local accountability and enhancing trust between residents and local government. |
| **Collaboration and integration** | • Building wider partnerships across health, housing, policing, education and the voluntary/community and faith sector (VCFS).<br>• Sharing knowledge and best practice across Kent and beyond.<br>• Integrating services to deliver more holistic support and strategy.<br>• Creating a one-team culture around place, breaking down silos and enabling more inclusive, joined-up working.<br>• Enabling more cohesive sustainable economic development through unified Local Planning Authorities, ensuring continuity for major projects such as Otterpool Park near Folkestone and Heathlands near Maidstone, while improving cross-boundary management of shared constraints like nutrient neutrality and infrastructure viability. |
| **Trust and engagement** | • Re-establishing trust and confidence in local government.<br>• Improving engagement with politics and public perception of councils.<br>• Adopting fair funding models and ensuring best practice is shared and implemented.<br>• Enhancing local accountability and trust by designing governance arrangements that are more representative of Kent's diverse communities. |

# **Section 4:** Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation

This section includes:

**A shared vision for future local government in Kent**

**Design principles for reorganisation**

**How the vision and principles were co-developed**

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# A shared vision for future local government in Kent

**Our shared vision for Kent is:**

**Better outcomes for Kent residents through financially-sustainable and accountable public services delivered in partnership with communities.**

All Leaders recognise that LGR in itself will not deliver the change required. It must be the catalyst for fundamental reform in how we deliver our services, how we work with our partners and how we deliver for all communities across Kent.

Our ambition for Kent's future is bold and resident-focused. We will deliver local government that is financially resilient, community-rooted and digitally enabled, delivering services that are simpler, smarter and more joined up.

Over the next five years, our shared aspiration for Kent is to:

1 **Strengthen identity** and maintain a deep sense of place and belonging.

2 **Build trusted, transparent relationships** with residents through open communication and active engagement.

3 Provide **seamless, resident-first experience** with easy, secure access to services.

4 Deliver **place-based, people-centred services**, focused on early intervention, prevention and improving life chances.

5 **Use data and technology smartly** to personalise support, anticipate needs and improve outcomes.

6 **Work in strong partnership** with statutory partners including health, education and the police as well as community organisations to meet residents' needs.

7 **Build community resilience** to social, economic and environmental challenges through inclusive, forward-thinking services.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment to residents, staff and place, balancing ambition with stability, innovation with identity and change with care.

## LGR and devolution

All of the councils in Kent are supportive of devolving powers to a strategic authority to ensure decisions about the county are made in the county.

We do not underestimate the vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport and the benefits it would bring in terms of public service reform.

This is an opportunity to improve life chances for all.

Aligning the timeline of the strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation, by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services or to reaggregate services to go into a strategic authority shortly after.

This approach would require additional cost and create further disruption to staff as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government.

All councils in Kent support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority in April 2028 to operate alongside the future councils.

This will enable a seamless transition, enable synergies in programme management and leadership capacity and provide clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government in Kent will work.

Clarity for partners is critical given our ambitions regarding public service reform.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving service outcomes.

Our ambitions for devolution and the link to LGR is articulated further against Criteria 5.

**Why Option 5A is best placed to deliver on our vision**

Option 5A provides the strongest balance between local representation and strategic capability, combining responsive service delivery with effective governance across the wider region. It designs councils around natural communities and logical geographic boundaries, such as the River Medway, addressing historic anomalies in council borders identified as early as the 1966–1969 Royal Commission on Local Government.

The model builds on the best principles of local government reorganisation - capitalising on the benefits of a resident-centred approach that strengthens engagement between people and place. By doing so, Option 5A enhances place-shaping, ensures decisions reflect local identity and priorities, and provides a robust platform for economic growth and strategic investment, providing the building blocks which could deliver an additional 400,000 homes and 500,000 jobs in the region over the next fifty years, supported by the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Option 5A safeguards the uniqueness and diversity of Kent's communities, ensuring that local voice and identity are not lost within overly large administrative structures. It also establishes a framework for closer alignment with health, transport, and service geographies, supporting integrated service delivery. This includes addressing historic misalignments regarding Swanley and Faversham where the current district boundaries do not align with how services work and how communities identify across Kent. The improved coherence of the new boundaries will facilitate more logical travel-to-work patterns and stronger connectivity between districts, promoting efficiency and wellbeing across the region.

Our councils will be closer and connected to the people they represent and work for and provide the best democratic representation for Kent residents – delivering capacity within those Councils where it is needed most. Five councils also provides the strongest relationship between councils and a Mayor for the Strategic Authority which will drive devolution of powers to Kent.

# Design principles for future Kent Councils

**To achieve our shared vision for Kent, a set of guiding principles have been agreed by its Leaders. While decisions on the detailed design and delivery models of future councils will be a matter for the respective leadership teams, these principles provide a blueprint for future council design.**

***Table 6:*** *Future Council design principles*

| Design principles | Description |
|---|---|
| **Service and resident-centric** | • Design services around resident needs with a resident-first mindset.<br>• Maintain strong community identity and accountability.<br>• Ensure equity in service access and outcomes across Kent. |
| **Integrated and joined up** | • Enable seamless, joined-up service delivery across public services.<br>• Build on existing partnerships and promote shared responsibility, and budgets and co-locate where appropriate.<br>• Embed co-production and community-based service design. |
| **Data-driven and digitally enabled** | • Invest in modern digital infrastructure which allows our service delivery and enabling activity to be joined up, and automated where appropriate.<br>• Leverage data and AI to support early intervention, improve decision-making, and target resources effectively.<br>• Ensure transparency and open data to build trust and inform priorities. |
| **Financially resilient and efficient** | • Adopt place-based financial planning and maximise asset efficiency.<br>• Create efficient systems with flexible resource allocation based on demand.<br>• Secure long-term funding and manage transition costs carefully. |
| **Empowered and future-focused workforce** | • Retain and support skilled staff through predictable roles and strong leadership.<br>• Break down silos with collaborative problem-solving structures.<br>• Modernise terms and conditions for a more agile and attractive public service offer. |
| **Clear, consistent and bold leadership** | • Be brave, honest and aspirational in setting direction and expectations.<br>• Deliver clear, shared vision and values, internally and externally.<br>• Ensure messages on devolution, change and local ambition are well understood. |

These principles will be fundamental to navigating the transition, enabling Kent to go beyond safe and legal to deliver world-class public services and a better everyday experience for residents.

## How the vision and principles were developed

The vision for Kent was developed through extensive work with local government leaders, reflecting a shared commitment to addressing key challenges and seizing future opportunities.

On 17 September 2025, Leaders and Chief Executives from across the 14 councils of Kent and Medway came together to co-create a shared vision for the future of local government.

This moment marked a significant step in the LGR journey, recognising LGR and devolution as unique shared opportunities to fundamentally reshape the way local public services are delivered.

The full-day event was carefully designed to help everyone work together, learn from each other and foster strategic thinking among senior leaders.




The aim was to better understand the current landscape of challenges and opportunities, to hear from others who have been through LGR and devolution journeys, and to begin developing a long-term, unifying vision for the future of Kent.

Participants were supported throughout by a facilitation team which guided discussions, captured key insights and ensured all voices were heard.

The vision for Kent emerged through genuine collaboration and a shared desire to improve outcomes for residents regardless of the final council configuration that is chosen for LGR.

The conversations acknowledge ongoing challenges such as financial constraints, workforce uncertainty and service fragmentation, with a shared commitment to tackling these as we progress through LGR.

***Figure 5:*** *Sketches from workshop on 17th September*






## How the vision and design principles will be used

The outputs from the event serve as the foundation for continued work on Kent's LGR journey.

They will inform more detailed design work, engagement with stakeholders and the development of a compelling case for change.

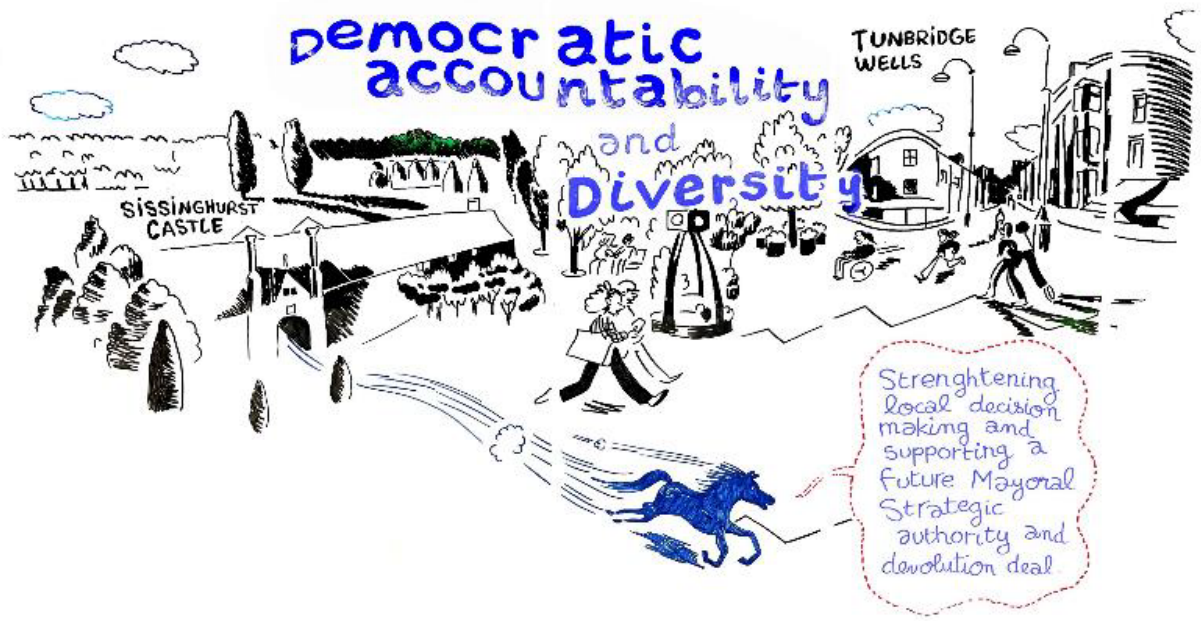
Most importantly, they represent a shared commitment by Kent's leaders to act collectively in the interests of residents, staff, and communities.

This forward-looking framework sets a foundation for a more resilient, responsive and cohesive Kent by 2028.

This vision provides a clear strategic direction for the future of local government in Kent.

It will guide future design discussions, inform service transformation and tie in with the region's approach to devolution.

It will be used to align decision-making, support engagement with residents and partners and ensure implementation remains focused on outcomes for people and communities.



# Section 5: The case for change

This section includes:


## The summary case for Option 5A

## Base case

## Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local Government

## Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience

## Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services

## Criteria 4: Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)

## Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

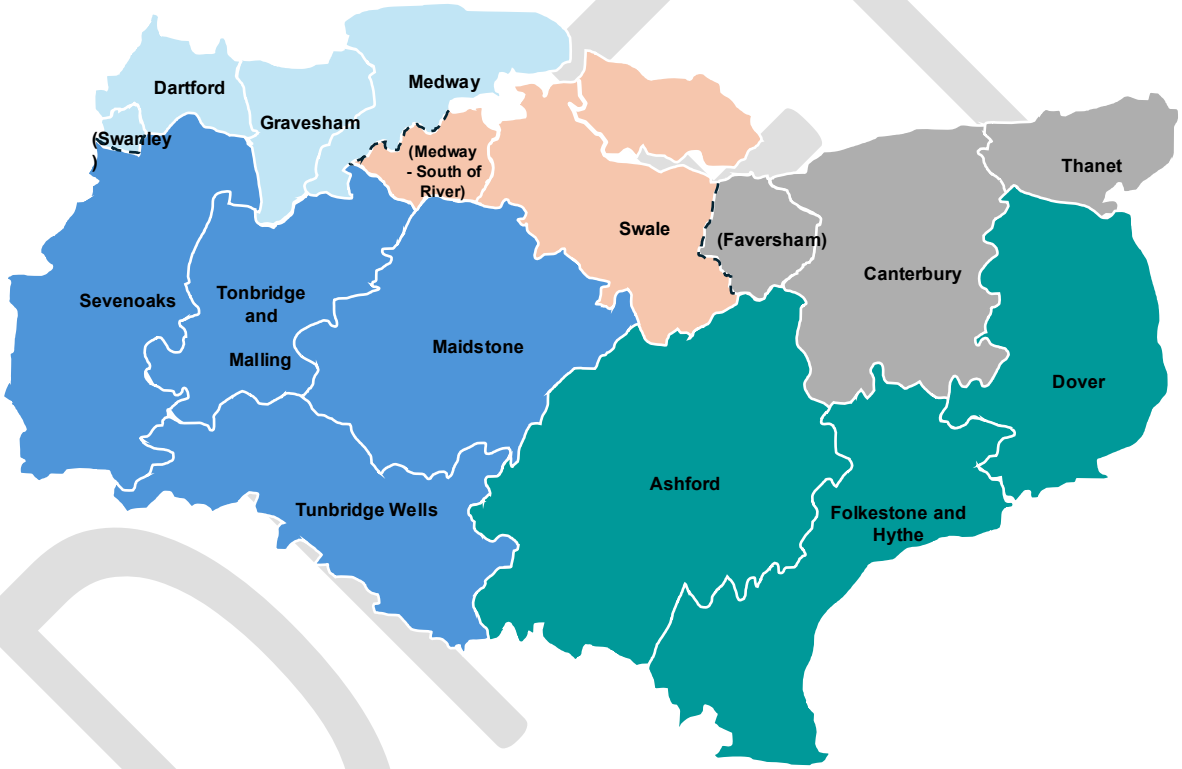
## Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment


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# The summary case for Option 5A

This proposal is for a five-council model of local government in Kent which has the support of Dartford and Gravesham Councils because it:

- Maximises the local elements of local government in Kent by establishing councils better connected to communities;
- Provides capacity where it is most needed to support communities and improve outcomes for local people;
- Reflects local places and identities in the area; and
- Builds councils around natural boundaries and provides capacity for growth.




**Key:**

*White line – District Boundary*

*Dotted line – Boundary Change*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent | South Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Current councils | Dartford<br>Gravesham<br>Medway (25%)<br>Sevenoaks (18%) | Maidstone<br>Sevenoaks (82%)<br>Tonbridge and Malling<br>Tunbridge Wells | Canterbury<br>Swale (24%)<br>Thanet | Medway (75%)<br>Swale (76%) | Ashford<br>Dover<br>Folkestone & Hythe |
| Population | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |

## How the case for change is structured against government criteria

What follows is the case for change detail, setting out how the proposed model meets the government's six criteria.

It is a combination of shared content across four options (3A, 4B, 4D and 5A) and content specific to the individual options.

Sections and sub-sections are set out below, including how they align to Government criteria, as stated in the letter dated 5 February 2025.

***Table 7:** Structure of case for change and link to government criteria*

| Section headings | Sub-section headings | Govt criteria |
|---|---|---|
| **Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government** | Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base | 1a |
| | Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery | 1b |
| | Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure | 1d |
| **Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience** | Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency | 2a, 2b |
| | Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies | 2c |
| | Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation | 2d |
| | Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government | 2e |
| **Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services** | Improving delivery of key services | 3a, 3c |
| | Public service reform | 3b |
| **Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs** | Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design | 4a, 4c |
| | Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance | 4b |
| **Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities** | Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent | 5a, 5b |
| | Population sizes that support devolution | 5c |
| **Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent | 6a, 6b |
| | Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) | 6a, 6b |

***Table 8: Structure of case for change and link to Government criteria***

| | |
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| **Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government** | **These five councils are built around the natural communities and geography of Kent.**<br><br>• Option 5A will take advantage of Kent's future growth potential. Option 5A delivers authorities fully enabled to drive growth across the area by aligning housing delivery in the right areas, economic hubs and transport infrastructure, |

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| | alongside established travel to work, education and health trends.<br><br>• Option 5A reorganises three local government boundaries to best fit our sense of place. It uses the once in a generation opportunity of reorganisation to restore historic boundaries that reflect our rich and diverse community identity.<br><br>**These five councils recognise future growth potential across Kent and provide scope and capacity to deliver housing and economic growth across the whole area.**<br><br>• Option 5A reflects local housing markets, and the migratory effect of London, while building scale to plan strategically to deliver housing growth across Kent.<br><br>• Option 5A is designed to enable the future growth of Kent and establishes logical economic areas as the right foundation for sustainable, long-term growth.<br><br>Option 5A consolidates the existing travel to work trends spanning bus, rail and road connectivity. Our people will remain well connected locally and to the wider Kent area helping to retain local and region wide cultural identity. |
| **Criteria 2: Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks** | **These five councils will generate savings of £65.7m which will pay back the investment in 14 years.**<br><br>• Option 5A will generate recurrent savings of £65.7m which will pay back the initial investment in 14 years. This reorganisation is a once in a lifetime opportunity to align boundaries with how Kent works so should be driven by the best long-term outcomes for Kent.<br><br>Option 5A does entail greater investment to produce local councils but the price of services more closely aligned to the needs of individual communities is a price worth paying. |
| **Criteria 3: High quality and sustainable public services** | **Reflecting partnerships and how services are delivered**<br><br>• Option 5A builds councils where health and care partnerships and supporting health architecture will operate together, providing the right footprint for prevention and early intervention and for wider public service reform. Aligning councils to reflect these core partnerships will deliver better outcomes for our residents.<br><br>• Option 5A reflects how adult social care operates in the West council and in the North council where Swanley is under the North area team with Dartford and Gravesham. These historical sub-divisions are a consequence of where communities in those areas draw their services from, and Option 5A seeks to crystalise |

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| | those communities as well as delivering an efficient model for procurement of commissioned services which operate on those footprints currently.<br><br>• Option 5A retains existing shared services and partnerships ensuring these services continue to keep the community safe, address homelessness and deliver critical services such as police, water and safety services. These provide an advantageous platform to assist transition in key areas of corporate governance and internal control, potentially before vesting day<br><br>• Option 5A reflects how children's services operate, broadly reflecting the CSWT areas for the North, South, East and West councils and shared Health Child Programmes.<br><br>• Option 5A reflects how education is commissioned, where Swanley is commissioned with Dartford and Faversham is commissioned with Canterbury and Thanet.<br><br>• Option 5A aligns with acute hospital demand such as connecting Western Swale with Medway, and Eastern Swale with the East Kent area. This alignment supports health and care integration, partnership working and public service reform as well as creating further opportunities through those synergies to improve health outcomes for residents living in some of the most deprived wards in the country.<br><br>Option 5A reflects existing police boundaries allowing for safer communities and opportunities to continue good community engagement. |
| **Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs** | **Strengthening cultural and historic identities**<br><br>• Option 5A builds boundaries that reflect local needs, historic and future community identities and the natural and infrastructural geography of Kent.<br><br>• Option 5A establishes councils that are closest to communities in Kent and reflect local communities, cultures and the identities of areas within Kent, future-proofing those in light of future population growth forecasts within the County.<br><br>**Building agile and action-oriented communities**<br><br>Option 5A establishes councils that foster a stronger community focus. These councils will bring our communities closer together, allow for more tailored and targeted service delivery, and offer more agility in decision making to meet local needs, address challenges and build strength in the region. |

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| **Criteria 5: Supporting devolution arrangements mostly shared across cases)** | **These five councils will unlock devolution for Kent by establishing truly local authorities under a strategic authority.**<br><br>• Option 5A establishes five councils across Kent and Medway maximising how local councils in Kent can realise the benefits from LGR but keeps services closer to the diverse communities each unitary will serve<br><br>**These five councils will enable strong governance and healthy decision-making in the strategic authority.**<br><br>• Option 5A establishes five constituent authorities and more constituent authorities provides stronger governance, debate and decision-making and better reflect the needs of local communities and the areas they reside in.<br><br>**These five councils are fit for the future growth that they and the strategic authority will drive across Kent.**<br><br>Option 5A reflects where we expect growth in Kent in the next 50 years and unlocks that growth by building regional architecture which harnesses those opportunities. West Kent is large but we expect significant growth in the rest of the County based on previous studies which would have the effect of equalising those population differentials over a period of time. |
| **Criteria 6: Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | **These five councils are closer to and designed around the communities of Kent.**<br><br>• Option 5A designs councils around communities and how they live and work in Kent, providing the right foundations to build community resilience, intelligence and prevention into how public services work.<br><br>• Option 5A creates councils that will develop stronger emergency planning allowing for quicker and more efficient response to issues in the community.<br><br>• Option 5A creates councils that are smaller than other proposals (but in line with previous LGRs in England). The smaller councils enable community empowerment, co-creation and purposeful engagement with our local communities to drive outcomes.<br><br>**These five councils retain and will foster strong partnerships to connect communities**<br><br>• Option 5A consolidates many council partnerships and shared services across Kent to build better resilience and support positive outcomes for our residents. |

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| | Option 5A retains existing deanery and diocese community relationships for the Christian faith, as well as patterns of worship within the Sikh communities of Kent (with the largest Gurdwara in Europe seeing its catchment area as Gravesham, Dartford, Swanley and Strood, for example), further strengthening local identity and allowing our residents to continue building their strong communities. |

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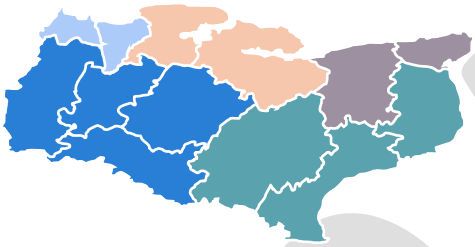
# Base case

**Note: requires KC review of legal form**

This is a Type B proposal entailing modifications to existing Kent council boundaries under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This section details the base case from which the proposal has been developed.

Our Base Case proposal, based on unmodified district council boundaries, is for five new Councils using the existing boundaries of:

- North council: Dartford and Gravesham (Population 235,682)
- West council: Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells (Population 567,062)
- East council: Canterbury and Thanet (Population 304,791)
- Mid council: Medway and Swale (Population 451,034)
- South council: Ashford, Dover and Folkestone and Hythe (Population 373,115)



| N | W | E | M | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 235,682 | 567,062 | 304,791 | 451,034 | 373,115 |

We submit the above in line with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. It meets the government criteria as follows:

Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local Government

The base case establishes unitary local government across Kent and Medway, broadly reflective of local places, economies and housing market areas.

Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience

The base case will deliver annual savings of £65.7m and contribute to the financial sustainability of local government in Kent.

Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services

The base case creates councils closer and better connected to their communities and so provides a good basis for prevention, early intervention and strengths-based approaches.

Criteria 4: Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)

The base case is aligned with our shared vision and creates councils that better reflect the diverse nature of Kent communities.

Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

The base case would create five constituent authorities to the strategic authority and increase the local connection of the councils and the representation and decision-making at the devolved level.

Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

The base case creates councils better linked to communities which will enable community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

**Request for modification**

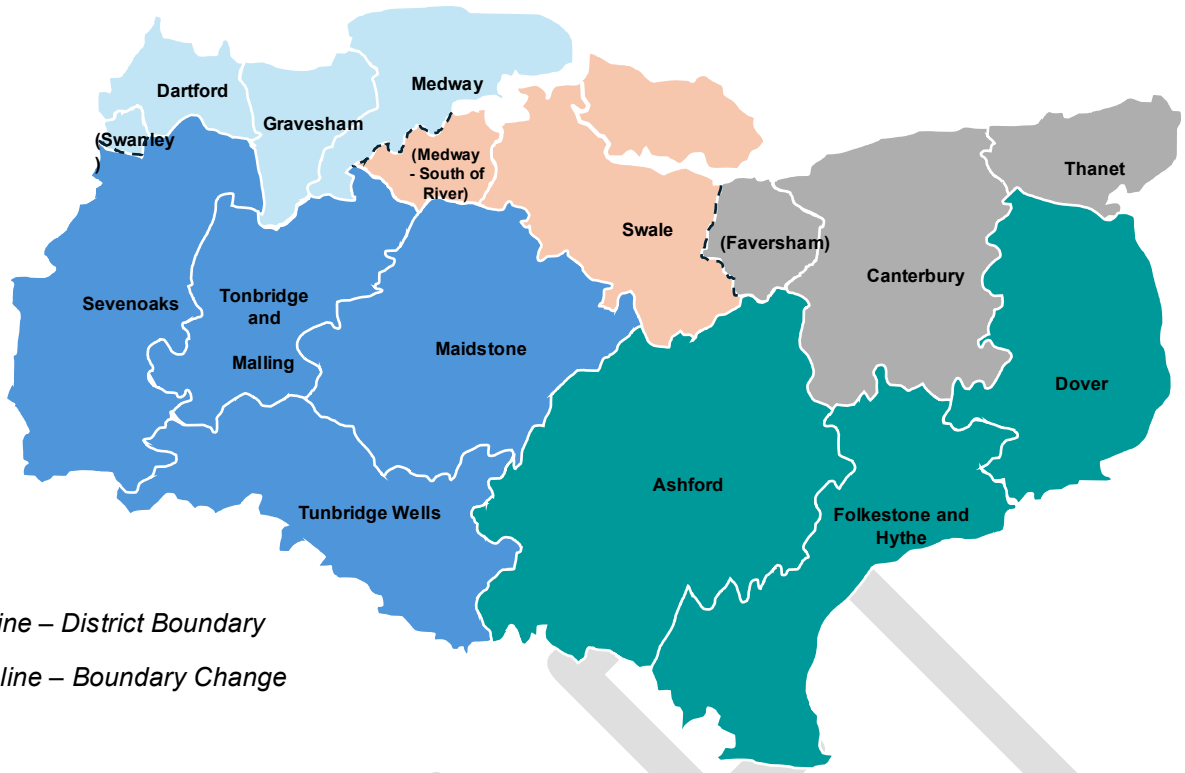
However, and in line with government guidance and wider provision within the Act, we request that the Secretary of State immediately modifies this submission and replaces it with the modified proposal contained in this document which is the submission we are seeking to implement. This modified proposal better meets the government's criteria as set out in Section 5.

The proposal uses the existing District boundaries of Ashford, Folkestone and Hythe, Canterbury, Dartford, Dover, Gravesham, Maidstone, Thanet, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells. It entails change to the boundaries of Medway, Sevenoaks and Swale.

The proposal uses the South and West councils from the base case and requests the following modifications:

1) Swanley (currently in Sevenoaks District) to align with North council rather than West council;
2) Wards (currently in Medway council) west of Medway river to align with North council rather than Mid council; and
3) Faversham and surrounding area (currently in Swale district) to align with East council rather than Mid council.

**Definitions**
**Swanley:** encompasses the wards of Swanley St Marys and Swanley White Oak
**Wards west of Medway:** encompasses the wards of All Saints, and Riverside, Hoo St Werburgh and High Halstow, Strood North and Frindsbury, Strood Rural, Strood West, Cuxton and Halling and Peninsula.
**Faversham and surrounding area:** encompasses the wards of Boughton and Courtenay, Priory, St Anns and Abbey and Watling.




**Key:**

*White line – District Boundary*

*Dotted line – Boundary Change*

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent | South Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |

**Rationale for modifications**

Two of these are long running historic boundary issues whereby Swanley in Sevenoaks is much more clearly associated with Dartford and Faversham in Swale is clearly more associated with Canterbury in east Kent.

These issues are widely acknowledged in Kent and were reflected as far back as a 1969 Royal Commission[16] which proposed the creation of just two unitary authorities for East and West Kent. In a similar vein to the geography proposed by Option 5A, the Royal Commission proposal identified that the boundary between the two should see Faversham as part of the East Kent authority and Sittingbourne placed in the West as outlined in the below figure.

[16] archive.org

***Figure 6: 1969 Royal Commission boundary proposal***



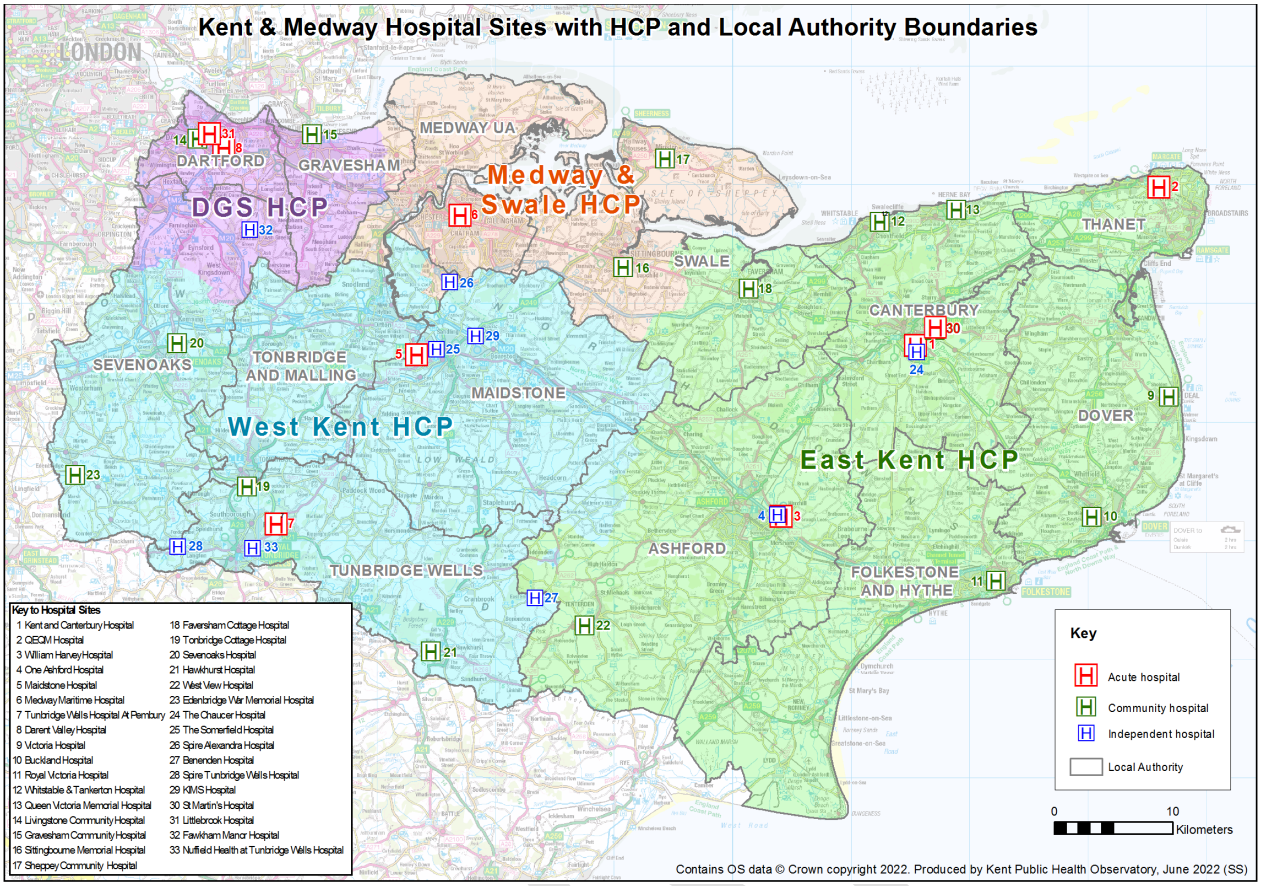

A change in Government in 1970 resulted in the proposals being reconsidered and this was to lead to the 1972 Local Government Act based on newly established County Councils and District Councils in the shire areas.

As part of the process of transition and in advance of presenting the Bill that was to become the 1972 Act, Government undertook consultations in 1971 with the then existing local authorities in Kent on what they wished to see. This included Swanley Parish Council (as it then was) which expressed support for amalgamation with the then existing Dartford Rural District Council.

Historical maps have also been identified dating from the seventeenth century showing these linkages.

These modifications will also bring local government into line with the Health and Care Partnership boundaries which include Swanley with Dartford and Gravesham and Faversham in the East Kent Health and Care Partnership. These boundaries have been established using local authority wards so can be easily mirrored through this modification. This will allow for a truly joined up and targeted approach to health and social care integration across local government and health partners. This is important in the context of these councils vesting in 2028 in advance of the Casey Commission.

***Figure 7: Kent & Medway hospital sites with HCP and local authority boundaries***




Faversham residents associate much more strongly east towards Canterbury than in the current Swale district. In response to a Boundary Commission review in 2015, Faversham Town Council commented that the "residents do not look to the villages of the proposed Mid Swale but look eastward to the rest of Faversham, which has the shopping streets, the swimming pool, the library etc. In so far as they need to look beyond their own town for things, Faversham people tend to go not to Sittingbourne but to Canterbury for shopping, education, entertainment and healthcare."[17]

The third boundary change is to reflect that the current Medway council is split along the Medway river which acts as a natural boundary for travel and has shaped how people travel, work and live in the area. The challenges presented by the River Medway are recognised by Medway Council, with their draft Local Plan reflecting that "the river bisects the area and movement is constrained by three main crossings"[18] and that this contributes to a challenging environment in which to accommodate Medway's development needs. Again, in historical terms, prior to the boundary changes introduced in 1974 and further cemented in 1998, the land to the west of the River Medway was part of the wider Gravesham area and under the jurisdiction of the municipal authority in place at the time, whilst the area to the east of the River Medway was more closely associated with Sittingbourne.

[17] https://favershamtowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Town-Council-response-to-Local-Government-Boundary-Commission-England-draft-proposals.pdf

[18] MEDWAY LOCAL PLAN 2041 (REGULATION 19, JUNE 2025)

# **Criteria 1:** Establishing a single tier of local government

This section includes:

**Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base** **Criteria 1a**

**Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery** **Criteria 1b**

**Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure** **Criteria 1d**

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# Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base

**Criteria 1a.** Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

**These five councils are built around the natural communities and geography of Kent, rather than being engineered to meet statistical balance and to fit with historic boundaries. They reflect how people live, work and travel and where different industries are around the area so are the right foundation for service delivery and driving growth. They recognise future growth potential across Kent and provide scope and capacity to deliver housing and economic growth across the whole area.**

**Option 5A is designed to enable the future growth of Kent and establishes logical economic areas as the right foundation for sustainable, long-term growth.**

The new council authorities will provide the right scale for planning and delivering large-scale infrastructure essential for sustainable growth. They will enable more joined-up spatial and economic planning, ensuring that future development is coherent and aligned across boundaries. In the early years, the new councils will continue to deliver housing and infrastructure projects planned by the former district and borough councils as their Local Plans are implemented or adopted. Over time, this model will build on established economic areas and support longer-term ambitions for a Mayoral Strategic Area, creating a strong foundation for coordinated investment, growth, and strategic leadership across the region. The benefits of the councils in delivering more strategic and joined up growth and infrastructure across their areas will only start to become apparent post 2035.

***Table 9: Distinct growth potential for each council***

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent** | • From its close proximity to London, North Kent is served by significantly important transport links, industry-recognised colleges and excellent schools, and is supported by a diverse portfolio of available employment land. Additionally, fertile land continues to support a robust agriculture industry, with the area home to a growing wine production sector.<br>• Economically, Dartford, Gravesham, Strood and Swanley form a closely connected business network that is driving strong growth across North Kent. Gravesham and Strood provide an established base of engineering and manufacturing businesses, while Dartford and Ebbsfleet are emerging hubs for creative, digital and professional services. Major inward investment such as Amazon's logistics hub, alongside the regional retail and leisure draw of Bluewater, underline the area's appeal to global brands.<br>• The two main crossings across the River Thames (Dartford Crossing and the new Lower Thames Crossing).<br>• The forthcoming Lower Thames Crossing will further enhance connectivity and supply chain opportunities, while the new Technical Excellence College in Gravesend will strengthen the local skills base and support delivery of major infrastructure schemes. Together these assets reinforce North Kent's position as one of the fastest-growing and most competitive economies in the South East.<br>• The Ebbsfleet Garden City is a collection of interconnected neighbourhoods that combines homes, workplaces, shops, and community facilities. More than |

| | |
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| | 4,000 new homes have already been delivered, with a long-term ambition to provide up to 15,000 in total. |
| **West Kent** | • West Kent offers a mix of rural and urban economies, a thriving visitor and tourism sector, with increasing focus on innovation and service industries.<br>• Defined by strategic connectivity and a highly skilled workforce, supporting professional services, life sciences and creative sectors.<br>• The area has a high proportion of knowledge-based employment and is well-positioned to attract inward investment from London and beyond.<br>• Green infrastructure, heritage towns and quality of life are key drivers of investment in the sub-region.<br>• Tonbridge & Malling, whilst predominantly rural, has key market towns, contributing to its strength in small-scale industry, logistics, and a growing professional services sector which can be leveraged to support the regional economy.<br>• Tunbridge Wells serves as a cultural and economic centre in West Kent, with a strong residential property market and an educated workforce. These strengths can drive regional skills development and attract investment.<br>• Maidstone, the county town of Kent, hosts a concentration of public services and legal institutions, and is an important employment hub for the region. In the future council, this area will be key in coordinating public service delivery and supporting economic growth. |
| **East Kent** | • East Kent presents numerous economic opportunities, particularly through its thriving tourism and cultural sectors and a growing creative and digital industry. Canterbury has received Levelling Up Funding to transform its public spaces and heritage to reflect its status as an international visitor destination and World Heritage Site. This money will be used to support regeneration projects that improve its attractiveness, welcome visitors and boost its economy.<br>• The area's coastal position provides a strong foundation for green energy development with key projects including the Thanet Offshore Wind Farm and Green Port Ramsgate.<br>• Proposed wider housing developments across the area will play a pivotal role in the future of East Kent with developments such as the South East Faversham development (due to commence in 2026) which includes proposals for up to 2,500 new jobs in commercial, industrial, retail, and office spaces as well as 2,500 new homes or the Mountfield Park development to the south of Canterbury which is planned to deliver around 4,000 new homes over 20 years, along with commercial space, two primary schools, a health centre, and sports facilities.<br>• There is a strong network of high performing universities and colleges across East Kent, University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University for example, which have the potential to support and, in some cases, drive economic development across the area. |
| **Mid Kent** | • Mid Kent benefits from excellent transport networks, including the vital M2 motorway which runs through the area. In support of its strategic location, a c£100M improvement scheme at junction 5 of the M2 was recently completed, providing a significant upgrade to one of the country's busiest and historically dangerous intersections. Situated at the crucial junction of the M2 and A249, the upgrade is expected to enhance travel between the Isle of Sheppey, |

Maidstone and the M20 motorway – one of the main routes linking Dover to London and Sheerness.

- Mid Kent's economy has overseen evident business growth in recent years and presents significant potential for the future. With a local sector mix that involves high value knowledge economy industries, Mid Kent benefits from both Chatham's dedicated Innovation Park, a quality environment for high value technology, engineering, manufacturing and knowledge intensive businesses, as well as Sittingbourne's Kent Science Park, home to Nobel Prize-winning discoveries and one of the largest communities of ambitious agritech, biotech and biopharma businesses. This cluster of high-tech companies share similar skills, infrastructure, ambition and offer opportunities for collaboration, innovation and skills retention.
- Underpinned by a strong network of local Universities and Colleges which provide a sustainable pipeline of skilled workers, Mid Kent has tangible potential to promote future growth of higher value jobs and priority sectors.

**South Kent**

- As a hub for international travel, South Kent presents significant economic potential. Driven by its strategic location, diverse sectors, and ongoing infrastructure investment, the area benefits from strong industries in logistics and distribution along the Channel Corridor, and a thriving visitor economy supported by multiple Levelling Up awards. It is also a focus for major residential and commercial development, including growth areas such as Ashford, the coastal towns, and the new Otterpool Park Garden Town at Westenhanger - a project planned to deliver up to 10,000 homes and around 10 schools, creating a sustainable and well-connected new community for the region.
- Provides links to the continent through the port services, the Channel Tunnel and Ashford Internation Station (anticipating the recommencement of international services).
- South Kent also has an established life science industry. Discovery Park Enterprise Zone, formerly Pfizer's Research and Development facility at Sandwich is a large employment site comprising high quality research and development buildings, offices and ancillary facilities set within a landscaped campus. One of the UK's top performing Enterprise Zones, Discovery Park is home to over 160 companies, from international pharmaceutical companies to biotech entrepreneurs, and provides a vibrant community of skilled professionals in high value industries.
- In recent years, South Kent has also developed a strong reputation for creative and digital industries, with a burgeoning arts and culture scene driving recent regeneration activity. At its heart is Folkestone's Creative Quarter, an urban village which includes artists, performance artists, dressmakers, dancers, photographers, graphic designers, writers and filmmakers spread across 90 restored buildings.
- An area proud of its historical legacy, South Kent provides tangible potential for future innovative growth in high value knowledge-based and creative industries.

**Case study:** A strategic approach delivered by Kent Thameside facilitated the implementation of Fastrack, a nationally recognized successful bus rapid transit system. Its success has in part been due to the fact that major new developments have been planned and built around the Fastrack route at their core. This has changed travel patterns across north Kent. Proposals to extend

Fastrack eastwards in Medway which are currently being explored would align well with the North council.

***Case study – Implementation of Fastrack – Bus Rapid Transit System***

A strategic approach delivered by Kent Thameside facilitated the implementation of Fastrack, a nationally recognized successful bus rapid transit system. Its success has in part been due to the fact that major new developments have been planned and built around the Fastrack route at their core. This has changed travel patterns across north Kent. Proposals to extend Fastrack eastwards in Medway which are currently being explored would align well with the North council.

**LGR provides the opportunity to connect Kent with better aligned travel patterns.**

**Supporting regional markets**

Kent's regional markets are critical to the economic activity of the region. Across the region wholesale & retail and administrative & support services are economically aligned including in Dartford and Gravesham, and Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells. Dartford and Medway (specifically west of the River Medway) also share regional synergies in human health & social work activities and similar synergies are apparent in the East Kent area. Option 5A recognises the importance of the regional markets and the need for strong alignment driven by sensible geographies and economic logic.

**Sustainable tax base**

The five-council model ensures balance between strength of key economic indicators and alignment to functional and recognised geographies which enable and supports economic growth.

West Kent has a strong council tax base of **c.214,098** to support service delivery whilst the distribution across the remaining councils is quite even, ranging from **c.107,603 to c.132,865** Band D equivalent properties. The council tax base in West Kent is comparatively higher than in the other councils, attributable to its position as the principal economic hub within the Kent area.

Differences in average band D rates between current councils within each proposed council are modest, ranging up to **£108,** minimising disruption for residents and reducing administrative complexity during transition.

The business rate tax base of **£110million** is higher in West Kent given its economic presence in the Kent area. Business rates tax bases amongst the remaining councils are also strong, with each council generating between **£48 million and £77 million** in retained business rates. All five authorities have the economic capacity to operate independently and sustainably.

The imbalance in council tax base and retained business rates between the West Kent council and others is countered by the very strong growth potential in the smaller councils, particularly North and East, which will support longer-term economic growth and decentralisation of economic activity away from the West Kent region and into the rest of the region.

Each authority will be able to tailor economic and employment strategies to local needs, while aligning with the wider strategic ambitions of Kent.

| North | West | East | Mid | South |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **GVA per capita (productivity)[4]** | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |
| **Council tax base (no. of band D equivalent properties)[19]** | 111,995 | 222,260 | 120,136 | 110,931 | 138,203 |
| **Retained business rates[20] (£m)** | 74.3 | 109.5 | 51.7 | 60.0 | 69.1 |
| **Unemployment Rate (%) Apr 24-March 25[21]** | 3.9% | 3.1% | 4.7% | 4.0% | 3.5% |
| **Deprivation score (2019)[22]** | 0.26 | 0.31 | 0.32 | 0.21 | 0.39 |

Whilst West Kent currently presents as being larger against a number of metrics under Option 5A compared to the four other councils, successive studies have shown that the growth potential within Kent largely exists outside of West Kent, with up to 400,000 homes and nearly 500,000 jobs being the potential under an accelerated growth programme. This has the potential to equalise the distribution of wealth, housing and population across the five councils proposed under this model as well as creating economic growth and opportunities for local people in some of the most deprived wards in the Country.

**Option 5A builds councils around the natural communities and geography of Kent**

The five councils each represent a distinct identity within Kent, matching historical alignments and community connections in each council.

***Table 10: Councils based on distinct local places***

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent** | • Stretching from the River Thames in the north to the crest of the North Downs in the south, North Kent is an area rich in historic character and a place buzzing with creativity, being home to a growing community of artists and creative industries.<br>• Through the economically important towns of Dartford, Gravesend, Northfleet, and Strood, much of North Kent's history lies in its strategic riverside location linking to the new world, and subsequently as an industrial area from cement to paper, and industries still using the river frontage today. From its more recent economic heavy industry legacy, North Kent is now undergoing catalytic regeneration, as evident through the activity of the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation.<br>• To the south are historic rural villages and swathes of Green Belt, ancient woodland, and AONB countryside, complemented by nationally recognised |

[19] Respective district council and council authority council tax webpages
[20] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[21] LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and council authorities - Office for National Statistics
[22] Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics

| | |
|---|---|
| | green spaces – North Kent has four Green Flag awards. Each rural community presents a unique and important local identity.<br>• As a place, North Kent benefits from excellent transport infrastructure, with three of Kent's main roads passing through the boundaries: the M25 and M20 motorways and the A2 dual carriageway.<br>• North Kent also enjoys the provision of the UK's only High-Speed rail line and Ebbsfleet International Station. The existing North Kent rail line serves towns in the northern urban area of the region, whilst the Victoria Line serves smalls towns and villages along its route. These stations link major centres across the region which provides good support for future growth. In addition there is also the burgeoning river-based Uber Boat. |
| **West Kent** | • Defined by hilly, wooded countryside with chalk Downs, valleys, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.<br>• Covering 92% of its District, Sevenoaks has one of the highest levels of Green Belt in the UK and includes two Natural Landscapes, Kent Downs and High Weald.<br>• The region includes iconic heritage sites such as Hever Castle, Leeds Castle, Tonbridge Castle, Chartwell (home of Sir Winston Churchill), Knole House, and Sissinghurst Castle.<br>• Historic towns and villages like Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Westerham, and Edenbridge feature timber-framed buildings, Georgian pubs, and medieval architecture.<br>• Scheduled ancient monuments include Eccles Roman Villa, the White Horse Stone, Oldbury Hill, and the High Rocks neolithic settlement.<br>• The area is home to Grade I listed landmarks such as Penshurst Place, Ightham Mote, Scotney Castle, and the Archbishop's Palace in Maidstone.<br>• Cultural hubs include The Pantiles in Royal Tunbridge Wells, The Amelia Scott centre, and Maidstone Studios—celebrating 40 years of broadcast excellence.<br>• West Kent has 8,487 listed buildings or structures, 166 conservation areas, 90 scheduled ancient monuments, and 41 historic parks and gardens. |
| **East Kent** | • There is a rich, varied history across East Kent. Canterbury Cathedral is one of the oldest and most famous Christian structures in England, Whitstable is famous for oysters which have been collected in the area since Roman times, the Isle of Thanet has inspired many famous authors, architects and artists such as Charles Dickens and JMW Turner, and Faversham has been home to Britain's oldest brewer, Shepherd Neame, since 1698, with Kent being the centre of hop-growing in England.<br>• East Kent is also home to the largest glasshouse complex in the UK, Thanet Earth, estimated to produce around 400 million tomatoes, 33 million cucumbers and 20 million peppers each year. Not only is this a key site for the cultivation of fruit and vegetables, it is a leading centre to drive innovation in the agriculture industry and works with communities across East Kent both in terms of education and promoting sustainability.<br>• The natural coastal links in East Kent provide a walking and cycling trail that spans the area (the Viking Coastal trail and the Whitstable to Iwade element of the King Charles III England Coast Path walk). |

**Mid Kent**

- From the rolling landscapes of the Kent Downs to the bustling market towns of Rochester and Sittingbourne, Mid Kent presents an important place in the nation's history.
- With a rich cultural and creative heritage, Mid Kent boasts the country's second oldest cathedral, tallest Norman Castle, a vast network of local theatres, strong connections with Charles Dickens, one of England's most celebrated authors, and Kent's only Football League Club in Gillingham FC. It is also an area of significant military importance, with the historic Chatham Dockyard and the Royal Engineers HQ and Royal School of Military Engineering located in the area. Mid Kent is also home to the Royal Engineers Museum - Kent's largest military museum and one of the most important military collections in the UK.
- Mid Kent also possesses significant natural assets, none more so than the River Medway in the west which provides a strong sense of place and identity, as well as a natural hard border with North Kent. To the north, the area benefits from the Isle of Sheppey's beautiful beaches and wildlife reserves. Known as the Garden of England, the south and east of the area provide important natural landscapes, and also land of significant agricultural importance, with a high proportion of the UK's apple, pear, cherry and plum orchards, as well as many of its remaining hop gardens.

**South Kent**

- South Kent is a vibrant and culturally rich area. From the economic hubs of Ashford, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe to a renowned rural backdrop with strings of enchanting towns and villages dotted with oast houses, hop fields, vineyards and orchards that ultimately give way to the glittering coast, South Kent is a place of idyllic contrast. Folkestone is a place based around the arts and food, which has led to successful regeneration and investment. A new unitary would be able to build upon this.
- A location of strategic importance, both historically and for the future, South Kent is home to a series of key national landmarks, arguably none more high profile than Dover Castle. Known as the Key to England, Dover Castle has been in our nation's first line of defence for 20 centuries and includes the Secret Wartime Tunnels where the Royal Navy planned WW2's critical Operation Dynamo (Miracle of Dunkirk).
- Looking forward, South Kent contains some of the country's most important transport hubs including Ashford International railway station, the Eurotunnel at Folkestone and the Port of Dover, one of the world's busiest maritime passenger ports – international infrastructure with the potential to support future economic growth in the area.

## Council tax harmonisation

Council tax harmonisation is an important and sensitive area. Council tax rates must be consistent by the eighth year of a unitary authority and there are currently significant disparities in council tax rates across Kent.

***Table 11:*** *Current council taxbase, rates and yield*

| Current council | 2024-25 final taxbase[23] | Current combined Band D rate[24] | Current Tax Yield |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ashford | 49,832 | £1,799 | £89,636,805 |
| Canterbury | 53,348 | £1,851 | £98,732,177 |
| Dartford | 41,029 | £1,796 | £73,679,473 |
| Dover | 40,875 | £1,825 | £74,604,137 |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 40,466 | £1,907 | £77,159,931 |
| Gravesham | 35,995 | £1,842 | £66,296,691 |
| Maidstone | 68,264 | £1,904 | £129,958,194 |
| Medway | 90,913 | £1,755 | £159,523,255 |
| Sevenoaks | 52,395 | £1,855 | £97,168,160 |
| Swale | 50,368 | £1,812 | £91,242,368 |
| Thanet | 46,454 | £1,874 | £87,054,908 |
| Tonbridge & Malling | 53,478 | £1,849 | £98,879,623 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 48,361 | £1,816 | £87,822,911 |
| **Total** | **671,778** | | **£1,231,758,633** |

The baseline council tax point to which the rates will be harmonised will be set through key decision by the shadow authorities.

This is a sensitive political decision as it is likely to result in an increase in council tax rates for residents in areas which currently charge lower rates.

Council tax harmonisation is governed by the referendum limits so the increase will be in line with what is legal and acceptable under the current system.

This also means the total council tax bill across Kent will be lower than if all current councils increased rates at the maximum allowed as would be typical in local government.

This is because residents who currently pay rates at, or higher than, the baseline rate set by the shadows will have their council tax rate frozen or potentially reduced to align with the baseline rate.

While there are many different scenarios including the baseline rate and the rate of increase, council tax harmonisation can be achieved within seven years and we have not assumed any increase in council tax rates into the financial modelling.

Option 5A maintains areas with more closely aligned council tax rates within each unitary, limiting the impact of potential council tax changes on Kent residents.

[23] Financial data return submitted by councils

[24] Financial data return submitted by councils

# Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery

**Criteria 1b.** Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.

### Geographies and population

To be able to meet local needs, and particularly to deliver early intervention services councils need to understand and be close to their communities. Option 5A establishes five councils with populations significantly larger than the average of current councils but which are of the right scale to enable effective service delivery, including being future proof for when the population of Kent and Medway grows to over 2,010k by 2042[25]. Notably, the council population sizes are within the parameters of the government criteria.

***Table 12: Geographies and population in 2024 and 2032 forecasts***

| | North | West | East | Mid | South |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Geographic area (sq.km)[26]** | 287 | 1,267 | 503 | 429 | 1,253 |
| **Population density (people per sq.km)** | 1,151 | 430 | 682 | 793 | 298 |
| **Forecast population 2032 ONS[27]** | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| **Forecast growth** | 3% | 5% | 4% | 3% | 5% |

The above figures are drawn from existing Local Plans, but should the aforementioned accelerated growth potential be realised, this would see areas such as North, East, Mid and South Kent predominately benefiting from population growth of around 1 million additional residents, and on an equitable split, this would see each taking on around 200,000 more residents than indicated in the table above, thereby equalising population numbers across the five areas. Option 5A has been designed to take into account this growth potential; creating the building blocks for economic growth under a Mayoral Strategic Authority and future-proofing Local Government structures for years to come.

### Sensible geographies

The model reflects the diversity of Kent's geography, from dense urban areas to rural and coastal districts. Areas range from 287 sq.km (North Kent) to 1,267 sq.km (West Kent). The proposed boundary split prioritises using the River Medway as a boundary to demarcate the proposed

[25] Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[26] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
[27] Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics

Medway area and creates a more even population distribution in the mid Kent area by taking population stress off Swale. These changes create anticipated benefits for Medway as they strengthen local identity, potentially lower homelessness issues and provide a better platform to achieve North Kent's high growth potential.

West Kent represents the largest council by population and geographic area but is a coherent grouping of communities, often with strong commuting links to London. While West Kent is forecast to grow, we expect significant growth in East and North Kent, supported by current local plans and which will be enhanced by the establishment of unitary councils focused on their communities.

Densities range from 298 people per sq.km (South Kent) to 1,151 people per square km (North Kent). North Kent's higher population density is due to the potential split of Medway region along the River Medway through a boundary change.

### Travel infrastructure

Kent benefits from a comprehensive strategic transport network.

Major motorways including the M2, M20, M25, and M26 provide vital road links to London, the wider south east and key ports such as Dover and Folkestone.

These roads primarily connect Kent from the east to west through the districts and eventually into London.

While the east to west connection is strong, the north to south connection through Kent is less direct, particularly for those not commuting into London.

The county is also well-served by rail, with services operated by Southeastern on the North Kent Line, Chatham Main Line and the UK's only domestic high-speed rail service, High Speed 1 (HS1), which connects Kent to central London via St Pancras International in under 40 minutes.

### Travel to work patterns across Kent

The figure below shows the distribution of workers across Kent, along with commuting flows into and out of these areas.

Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) are defined as geographic zones where at least 75% of residents work within the same area and at least 75% of workers also live there.

These areas represent self-contained local labour markets with boundaries statistically designed to reflect real-world commuting patterns.

The eastern Kent area has a greater local catchment of employees, with the majority of people working within 5km of their home.

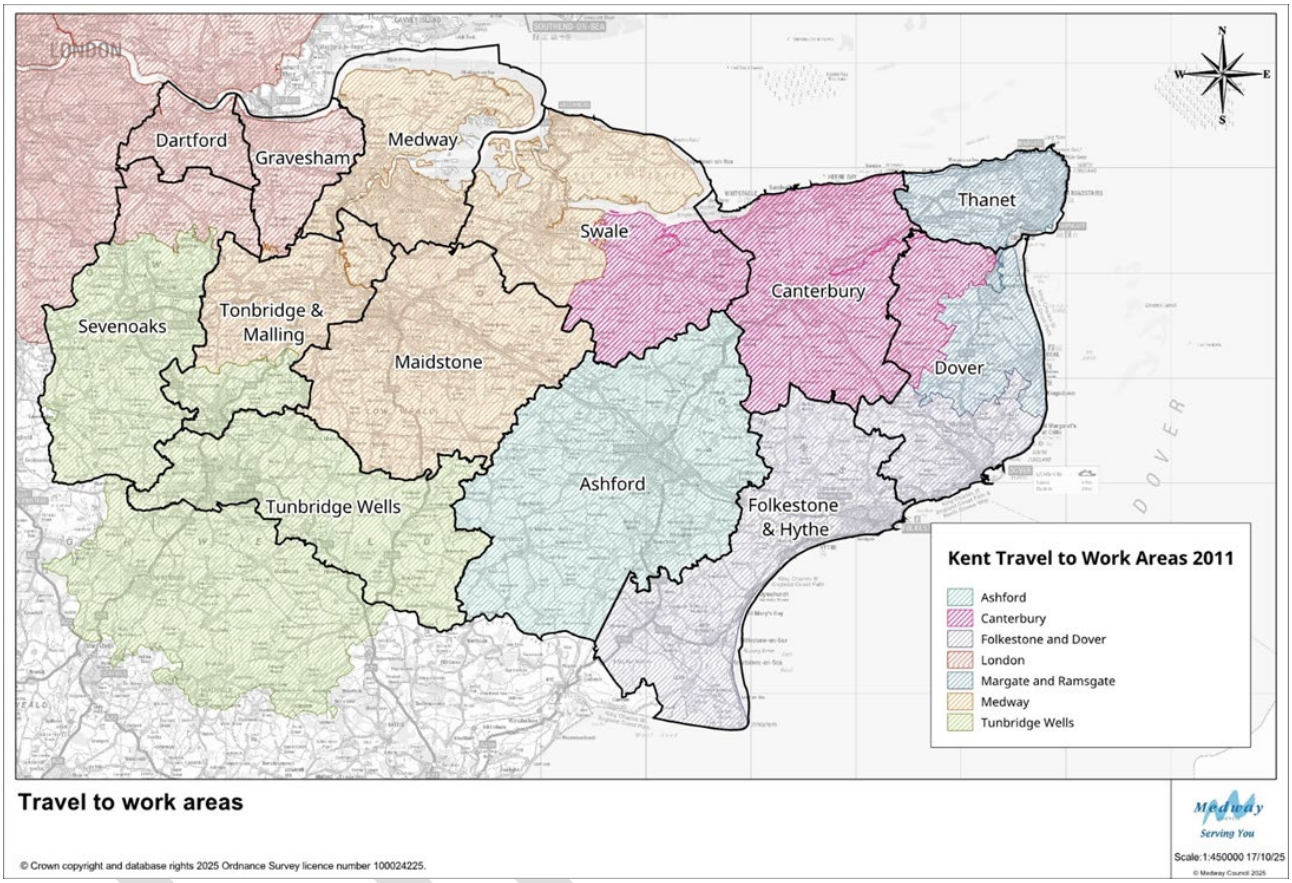
In contrast, western Kent residents tend to travel, reflecting those who work locally in addition to those who travel slightly further to work in London.

**Option 5A consolidates the existing travel to work trends spanning bus, rail and road connectivity.**

Councils should be built around cohesive geographies and the travel to work data clearly demonstrates distinct patterns in movement across Kent.

The figure below shows the distribution of workers across Kent, along with commuting flows into and out of these areas. Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) are defined as geographic zones where at least 75% of residents work within the same area, and at least 75% of workers also live there. These areas represent self-contained local labour markets, with boundaries statistically designed to reflect real-world commuting patterns.

***Figure 8: Travel to work areas in Kent***




People in the North council typically commute to London with a clear boundary to the east of the River Medway. This includes Swanley which is currently in Sevenoaks but has clear ties with the North Kent council through travel to work and the Health and Care Partnerships.

The Mid council is bounded by the river Medway which acts as a natural barrier for travel flows and the travel to work patterns around Faversham which typically look east towards Canterbury.

The West council has some travel to work north to Medway but the majority is self-contained with a focus on Tunbridge Wells.

The East council reflects travel to work patterns by including the Faversham area as part of an East authority.

The South council brings together significant travel to work alignment between the ports of Dover and Folkestone.

***Table 13: Travel to work flows within and across councils***

| | |
|---|---|
| **North Kent** | • North Kent, particularly Dartford and Gravesham, exhibits strong outward commuting flows to London and surrounding counties like Essex.<br>• Dartford stands out with 7.8% of workers commuting by train, more than double the Kent average, highlighting its role as a key London commuter hub. Gravesham follows closely behind with 5.3% using trains.<br>• In contrast, Medway is more self-contained, with over 52% driving to work and only 4% commuting by train. Despite being well-connected, many Medway residents work locally. |
| **West Kent** | • There are clear rail links across West Kent with the main train line running from Maidstone, through Tonbridge and into Sevenoaks, whilst also servicing Tunbridge Wells.<br>• West Kent shows distinct characteristics of a wealthier commuter belt, particularly Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells, where over 42% of residents work mainly from home, significantly higher than the Kent average (31.1%).<br>• Train usage is also relatively high: Sevenoaks has 5.4% train commuters, with Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells around 3%. At the same time, car use remains substantial, especially in Maidstone (50.1%), the largest borough by workforce. |
| **East Kent** | • East Kent shows lower reliance on rail and higher proportions of people walking or driving to work, indicating more localised employment or limited transport options.<br>• In Canterbury, 10.8% of people walk to work, the highest in Kent, reflecting its compact city layout and university economy. Rail usage remains modest (2.3%) compared to other areas.<br>• Thanet has a high car dependency (around 50%) and relatively low train usage (~2.4%), suggesting fewer commuting options or jobs located closer to home. Thanet, with 3.5% using buses, has the highest bus usage in Kent, possibly reflecting socio-economic factors or transport access challenges. |
| **Mid Kent** | • Mid Kent is marked by high car dependency, especially in Swale (54.8%) This reflects limited public transport access or jobs distributed across rural and suburban areas. |
| **South Kent** | • Ashford residents are dependent on cars (50.9%). Ashford, however, benefits from HS1 rail links, which likely contribute to 2.5% train usage, the highest in Mid Kent. Folkestone & Hythe shows similar patterns, although with more walking commuters (9.1%), possibly linked to a denser urban core. |

**Option 5A reorganises three local government boundaries to fit our place.**

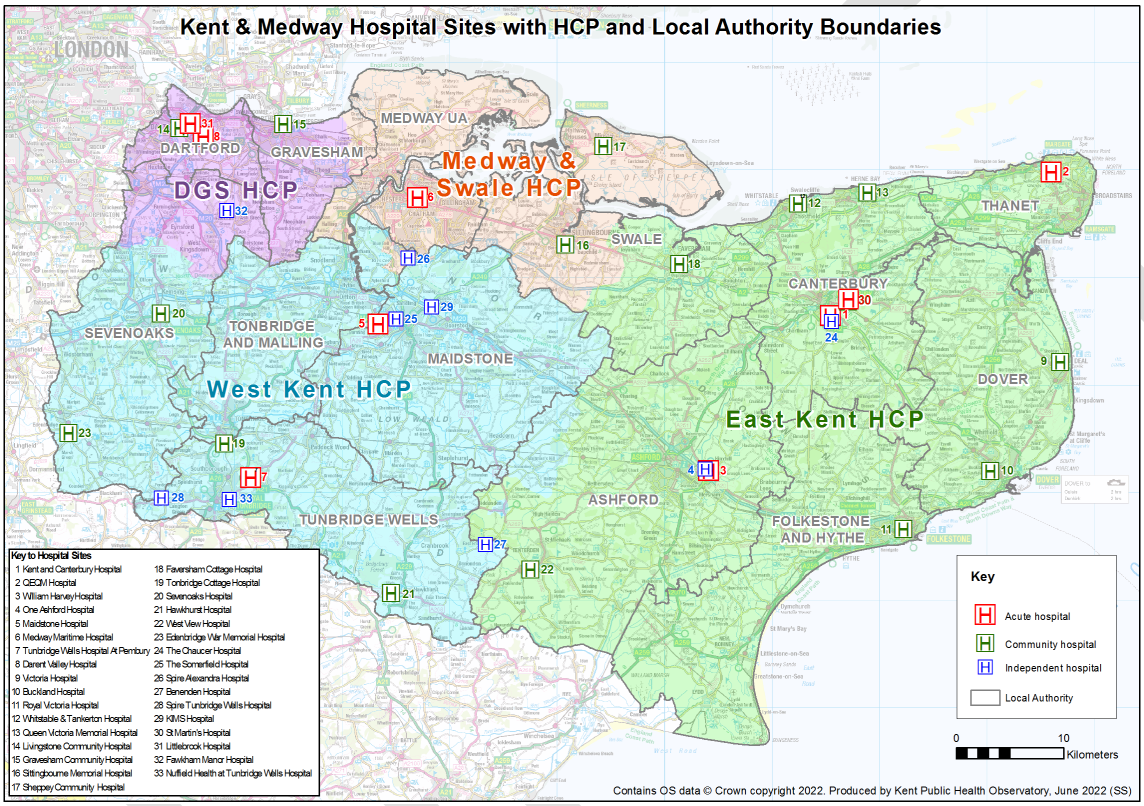
Option 5A uses the opportunity of reorganisation to fix historic misalignment between boundaries and communities.

Two of these are long running historic boundary issues whereby Swanley in Sevenoaks is much more clearly associated with Dartford and Faversham in Swale is clearly more associated with

Canterbury in east Kent. These issues are widely acknowledged in Kent and were reflected as far back as a 1969 Royal Commission.[28]

These modifications are already reflected in the Health and Care Partnership boundaries which include Swanley with Dartford and Gravesham, and Faversham in the East Kent Health and Care Partnership. These boundaries have been established using local authority wards so can be easily mirrored through this modification. This will allow for a truly joined up and targeted approach to health across public sector partners. It also provides a stronger footprint for health and care partnering and integration, important in the context of these councils vesting in 2028 in advance of the Casey Commission.

***Figure 9: Hospital sites across Kent & Medway***




Under current Education commissioning arrangements Swanley is already grouped with Dartford and Gravesham, reflecting the links between those communities.

Faversham residents associate much more strongly east towards Canterbury than in the current Swale district. In response to a Boundary Commission review in 2015, Faversham Town Council commented that the "residents do not look to the villages of the proposed Mid Swale but look eastward to the rest of Faversham, which has the shopping streets, the swimming pool, the library etc. In so far as they need to look beyond their own town for things, Faversham people tend to go not to Sittingbourne but to Canterbury for shopping, education, entertainment and healthcare."[29]

The inclusion of Swanley into the North council provides more opportunities to plan for new settlement growth along the Victoria rail line by including a joined-up length of the Victoria line rail route from Swanley to Strood. The rail line would fall within the council area from Swanley through

[28] archive.org

[29] https://favershamtowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Town-Council-response-to-Local-Government-Boundary-Commission-England-draft-proposals.pdf

the south of Dartford and Gravesham and through the west of Medway to Strood. Although the line runs through Green Belt, stations are provided at intervals serving small towns and communities which could be explored for new settlement growth in the future.

The third boundary change is to reflect that the current Medway council is split along the River Medway which acts as a natural boundary for travel and has shaped how people travel, work and live in the area. Council services, such as education commissioning, and social housing market areas clearly support this division which will reduce disruption caused by reorganisation.

All current Medway Council social housing stock is east of the River Medway demonstrating how the river divides coherent housing market areas, and a reflection of the way local authority structures have existed within the County of Kent prior to 1998.

The challenges presented by the River Medway are recognised by Medway Council, with their draft Local Plan reflecting that "the river bisects the area and movement is constrained by three main crossings"[30] and that this contributes to a challenging environment in which to accommodate Medway's development needs. Historically the areas of Cliffe, Strood, Halling and Cuxton (all currently part of Medway) were recognised as being part of Gravesham so modifying this boundary has historic precedent as well as demonstrating the community identity links between the west of Medway and Gravesham.

**Option 5A reflects local housing markets while building scale to plan strategically deliver housing growth across Kent.**

LGR provides the opportunity to think differently and more strategically, beyond current district boundaries. We must use this opportunity to learn from the areas with the strongest track record of delivery and apply best practices across the new councils.

The five new councils will:

- Be ideally positioned to coordinate local planning, helping to ensure that growth is both deliverable and supported by the infrastructure residents expect.
- Support the delivery of Mayoral or Mayoral Strategic Areas (MSA) organised around key economic centres.
- Reflect local housing markets while retaining sufficient scale to plan strategically and negotiate effectively with government and developers.
- Boost economic growth by reshaping council boundaries to concentrate and direct economic activity in suitable and logical areas.
- Strike the right balance between local efficiency and strategic oversight, creating economies of scale for faster, more consistent planning decisions whilst retaining the breadth to take a county-wide strategic view of development and positioning Kent for future devolution.

***Table 14: Housing and homelessness metrics for five council option***

| Metric | North | West | East | Mid | South |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

[30] MEDWAY LOCAL PLAN 2041 (REGULATION 19, JUNE 2025)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024)[31]** | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 2.4 | 4.4 |
| **Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement (%)[32]** | 72.9 | 93.9 | 72.6 | 89.5 | 103.8 |

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[31] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[32] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK

# Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure

**Criteria 1d.** Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

**The five-council model optimises governance and strengthens local leadership by improving democratic representation across Kent ensuring councillors can deliver for their residents. This makes decision-making quicker, clearer and more effective opening up opportunities to deliver savings through more efficient leadership.**

## Current electoral arrangements

As set out in the table below there are currently a total of 658 councillors across Kent, including 81 county councillors, 518 district councillors and 59 unitary councillors in Medway.

Kent County Council is divided into 72 electoral divisions with 63 single-member divisions and nine two-member divisions.

Councillor to electorate ratios vary across Kent, but the combined ratio is 1:2,102.

***Table 15:*** *Councillor to electorate ratios across Kent*

| Council | District/ unitary councillors | County councillors | Total councillors | Electorate | Electorate per councillor | Divisions | Wards |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Medway** | 59 | N/A | 59 | 206,567 | 3,501* | N/A | 24 |
| **Ashford** | 47 | 7 | 54 | 100,660 | 1,864 | 7 | 39 |
| **Canterbury** | 39 | 8 | 47 | 111,160 | 2,365 | 8 | 21 |
| **Dartford** | 42 | 6 | 48 | 86,560 | 1,803 | 6 | 20 |
| **Dover** | 32 | 7 | 39 | 88,820 | 2,277 | 5 | 17 |
| **Folkestone and Hythe** | 30 | 6 | 36 | 84,940 | 2,359 | 6 | 13 |
| **Gravesham** | 39 | 5 | 44 | 77,240 | 1,755 | 3 | 17 |
| **Maidstone** | 49 | 9 | 58 | 133,960 | 2,310 | 8 | 22 |
| **Sevenoaks** | 54 | 6 | 60 | 90,200 | 1,503 | 6 | 26 |
| **Swale** | 47 | 7 | 54 | 111,460 | 2,064 | 6 | 24 |
| **Thanet** | 56 | 7 | 63 | 104,500 | 1,659 | 5 | 23 |
| **Tonbridge and Malling** | 44 | 7 | 51 | 100,240 | 1,965 | 6 | 19 |
| **Tunbridge Wells** | 39 | 6 | 45 | 87,340 | 1,941 | 6 | 14 |
| **Total** | **577** | **81** | **658** | **1,383,647** | **2,103** | **72** | **279** |

**As a unitary authority, Medway has a different governance structure, explaining its higher ratio than other areas across Kent*

### What we know about elections to new councils

Elections to shadow authorities will take place in May 2027.

The Boundary Commission (LGBCE) recommends using existing boundaries, e.g. divisions or wards, as building blocks for these first elections but the guidance is to focus on the number of councillors rather than drawing proposed electoral maps at this stage.

Between May 2027 and next elections in May 2032, there will be a review of electoral boundaries and new arrangements put in place.

We understand LGBCE's preference is to avoid significant changes in councillor numbers so arrangements for 2027 should align closely to expectations of councillor numbers from 2032 onwards.

### Efficient and locally focused democratic arrangements

Our proposal also maintains effective representation within the new councils. The five-council model will create a new democratic model that is more efficient, delivering savings but remaining at a scale that allows for local focus in those areas with the most acute community needs which drives contact with, and the workloads of, local Councillors. It reduces duplication, simplifies decision-making, and ensures that the right powers are held at the right level to deliver effective, accountable leadership.

Each newly established council will be governed by a Cabinet system, comprising up to ten Cabinet members. This structure is designed to enhance operational efficiency and streamline leadership within each council.

Adopting this Cabinet-based model presents an opportunity to reduce the overall number of councillors across Kent and Medway by 46%. Such a reduction is consistent with the government's direction, as articulated in the English Devolution White Paper, which advocates for fewer elected officials holding the appropriate powers to enable local government to focus more effectively on serving residents.

This reorganisation not only creates operational efficiencies but also ensures that representation within each council remains robust. Councillors will continue to provide strategic leadership, support the council's governance framework, and effectively represent both the electorate and local stakeholders.

Our proposal does not require the redrawing of existing ward or Parish Council boundaries, with these building blocks maintained. This allows local identifies to be respected and allows the implementation of LGR to progress at the pace that is required.

***Table 16: Councillor to electorate ratios***

| | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent | South Kent | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Electorate**[33] | 231,636 | 403,300 | 234,885 | 239,406 | 274,420 | 1,383,647 |

[33] Electorate at date of May 2025 Kent County Council elections and latest available electorate data for Medway

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Proposed number of councillors** | **59** | **93** | **61** | **61** | **69** | **343** |
| **Electorate to councillor ratio** | **3,926** | **4,337** | **3,851** | **3,925** | **3,977** | **4,003 (average)** |

* Electorate figures source: data provided by Kent County Council related to elections in May 2025 and ONS data for Medway.

### Reference points for councillor ratios

Set out below are some examples of councillor-to-electorate ratios for newly-formed unitary authorities in recent years, with a focus on larger authorities which are more relevant for comparison.

***Table 17: Examples of councillor to electorate ratios***

| Council | Established | Councillors | Electorate | Electorate per councillor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dorset** | 2019 | 82 | 297,726 | 3,631 |
| **Buckinghamshire** | 2020 | 97 | 420,610 | 4,336 |
| **North Northamptonshire** | 2021 | 68 | 263,915 | 3,881 |
| **West Northamptonshire** | 2021 | 76 | 307,611 | 4,048 |
| **Somerset** | 2023 | 110 | 446,698 | 4,061 |
| **North Yorkshire** | 2023 | 90 | 478,539 | 5,317 |

### Caveats on proposed councillor numbers

Once the geographies are agreed, the constituent councils of each area will prepare and agree what is required for first elections to each council.

# **Criteria 2:** Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience


| | |
|---|---|
| **Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency** | **Criteria 2a and 2b** |
| **Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies** | **Criteria 2c** |
| **Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation** | **Criteria 2d** |
| **Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government** | **Criteria 2e** |


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# Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency

**Criteria 2a.** As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.

**Criteria 2b.** There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.

## Government guidance on population size

Population size can be used as a proxy for the size and scale of councils.

Government has outlined a population size of 500,000 or more as a guiding principle, not a hard target.

There is recognition there should be flexibility and all proposals, regardless of the population size being proposed, should set out the rationale clearly.

All councils across Kent agree that, given the implementation complexity of any LGR, new local government structures should be in place for generations to come.

As a result, projected future populations as well as current population sizes are considered for each proposed council.

## The argument for 5A: populations designed around future growth

Each council is large enough to deliver services efficiently, withstand financial pressures, and invest in transformation, while remaining connected to place.

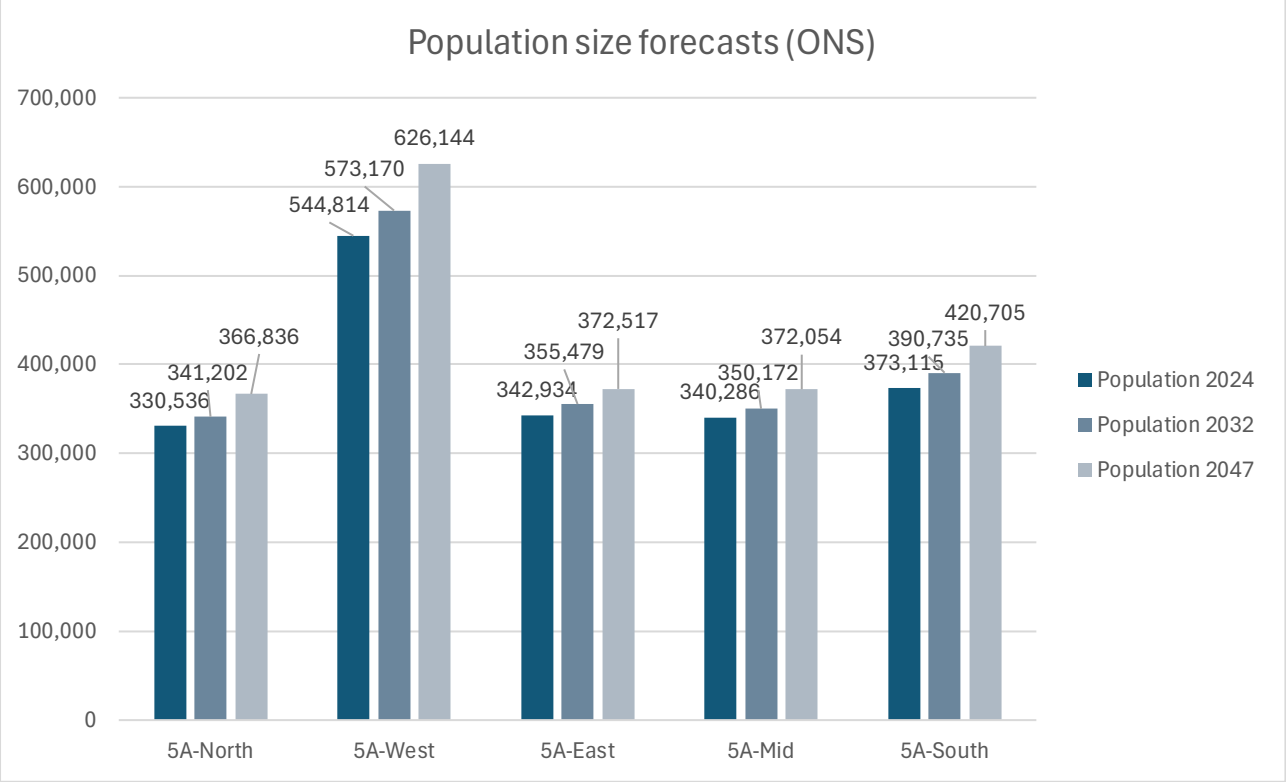
Current populations range from 331k to 545k but the smallest council by population is the North council which is expecting significant growth rates, partly driven by infrastructure and relationships with London.

Option 5A proposes five new authorities that, as of today, would each feature in the largest 20 unitary authorities in England by population. Option 5A is a fair and balanced position for our future governance.

This balance ensures that no single authority is overburdened, particularly in areas with higher levels of need, and that each has the scale to attract and retain specialist expertise. The model is set up to absorb future shocks and manage demand in high-pressure services such as adult social care and children's services.

These new authorities are expected to be in place for the long term, and it is therefore appropriate to look to long term population growth estimates.

***Figure 10: Population size forecasts (ONS)***




The West council has a larger population but this geography is coherent regarding infrastructure, travel zones and community links and Option 5A is designed around respecting those natural communities. West Kent also has lower levels of need than populations in the other council areas. The other councils have significant growth potential and are forecast to grow to 366k-421k by 2047. Option 5A will drive that growth and provides capacity for services to manage capacity to deliver into the future rather than requiring further reorganisation.

As articulated elsewhere in this business case, the modelling above is based on official modelling data in the interests of transparency and integrity, but such statistics do not take into account two important factors.

- Demand for services – areas outside of West Kent (North, Mid, South and East Kent) all currently present with acute needs in terms of deprivation and the drivers of health inequalities. North, Mid, South and East Kent all present with average life expectancy differences between males and females of between 4.22 and 4.41 years, whereas in West Kent this differential is only 3.47 years. Similarly, in terms of unemployment, in West Kent the unemployment rate is an average of 2.5%, whereas in the other areas of Kent under Option 5A it is between 3.5% and 4.2% underlining the case for more agile, responsive Councils to support community needs in those areas.
- Future growth potential – under accelerated growth potential modelling, the areas covered by North, East, Mid and South Kent demonstrate the potential to add around 400,000 homes and 500,000 jobs beyond the statistics outlined above. This would have the effect of equalising the bars in the chart above whilst simultaneously providing opportunities for local communities in those areas to improve employment prospects, quality of housing and health outcomes.

# Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies

**Criteria 2c.** Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.

### Collaborative working on finance across Kent councils

All 14 S151 officers are members of the long-standing Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG).

In relation to LGR, it has been responsible for the following key activities:

- developing working relationships and shared understanding of finances, which will be a key enabler of successful LGR;
- informing a shared financial baseline; and
- reviewing and collectively updating assumptions behind a base case model for inclusion in proposals to government.

### Approach to modelling the financial impact of LGR

Refer to ***Appendix 2: Financial modelling*** for more detailed description of assumptions, approach and results of the financial modelling.

Finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have reviewed and informed the financial modelling to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to government.

The financial model aims to:
- quantify the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options; and
- compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings, costs and payback.

The financial model estimates savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs calculated with reference to a series of benchmarked LGR business cases, the characteristics of the options being put forward and the characteristics of local government in Kent.

### Assumptions in financial modelling

While being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all KFOG agrees LGR does not provide the solution combating the scale of the financial challenge being faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The KFOG has agreed the following position:

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.
- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.

- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be paid for.
- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new councils may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new councils.

**Financial modelling results**

The results of the financial modelling are shown below.

Option 5A will have one-off implementation costs of £139.1m, recurring disaggregation costs of between £46.0m and £68.1m and recurring reorganisation savings of £65.7m which suggests a phased payback period of between 14.0 years and no payback.

***Table 18: Financial modelling summary results***

| LGR option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Option 5A** | 139.1 | 65.7 | (46.0) – (68.1) | 19.7 – (2.4) | 14.0 years – no payback |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

The range of disaggregation costs has been agreed through the collaborative working of Kent finance officers. Our business case assumes increases in commissioned spend at the lower end of that range. There is evidence that councils with a population of 250-350k have lower unit costs across adult nursing and residential and S251 looked after children and children in residential care. While the cost of care packages is complex this may relate to councils closer to communities being better able to tailor services and care packages to the strengths and needs of communities.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there will be ongoing savings in transitioning from fourteen to five local authorities in terms of leaner management structures and other economies of scale, the differential between each option is relatively small in comparison to the overall spend within existing Kent authorities. Furthermore, there is no compelling evidence to support that the unit cost of adult and children's commissioned services would be higher in unitary authorities; this is the main driver for the differentials between the options presented for Kent.

Commissioned services account for 80.3% of KCC total spend on social care services. Under Option 5A opportunities exist to ensure the geographical alignment of social care services with NHS boundaries, increasing the ability to undertake collaborative strategic commissioning at scale, maximising the benefits to residents and wider public sector purse.

National benchmarking indicates that unitary authorities typically have lower per capita spend and lower average unit costs for both children's and adult commissioned social care services. Were the new unitarity councils to achieve a 1% reduction in the cost of care packages commissioned by KCC as has been forecast elsewhere in similar proposals, this would reduce the indicative payback period of Option 5A to 6.6 years.

The District Council Network analysed current unitary authorities in England and reported only a faint relationship between a council's population and outcomes which more often favoured smaller councils.[34] This showed that projected outcomes are better at the median population (c.275k) than for councils over 500k population.[35] The research also identified that councils over 350k population typically spend more per resident and charge higher levels of council tax.[36]

Option 5A is a Type B proposal entailing modifications to existing Kent council boundaries. A financial provision for the costs associated with the additional complexities brought about by these modifications, both in terms of boundary changes and additional data and service disaggregation considerations, has been incorporated into the financial modelling for Option 5A.

***Figure 11: Payback period graph***

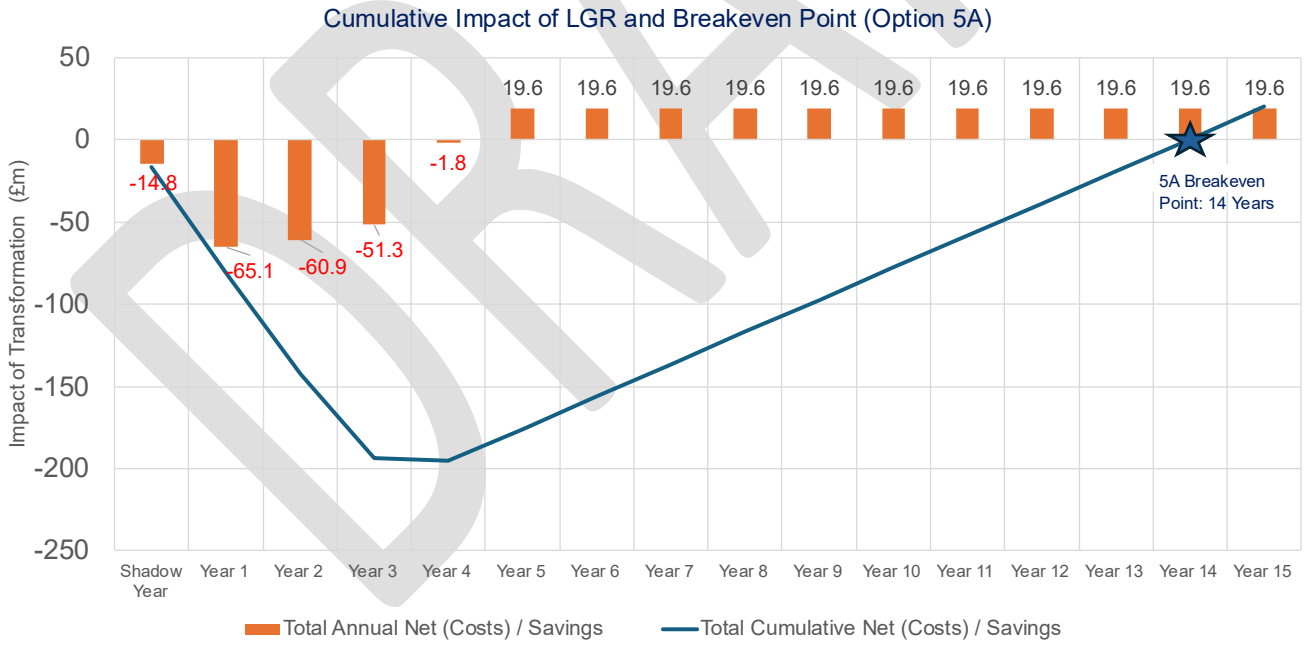



*Chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest end of the range

[34] DCN analysis of existing unitary councils: bigger isn't better
[35] Ibid
[36] Ibid

# Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation

**Criteria 2d.** Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets and from the flexible use of capital receipts to support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

## A complex transition regardless of the option selected

LGR is inherently complex, and the size and number of councils in Kent means the Kent LGR programme will be one of the most complex implementations nationally, regardless of the option selected.

This has the potential to impact public service delivery in the short term if transition is not managed effectively.

The 14 councils have made progress on transition planning, including considerations of quick wins and capturing of key joint actions. Refer to 'Section 6: Implementation Plan' for further details.

## Transition costs, investing in service delivery

In the medium to long term, substantial benefits can be realised from moving from 14 to 5 councils. This consolidation enables long-term efficiencies and our financial modelling indicates a positive payback period and return on investment.

Option 5A is focused on the long-term future of local government in Kent. We acknowledge that the costs of establishing five councils including some boundary changes is likely to be comparatively higher in the short term. However, the longer-term benefits of utilising this once in a generation platform to design councils that are the right size and shape for ensuring strong service delivery, public service reform and sustainable growth, alongside providing greater scope to deliver financial sustainability, sits at the heart of the government's LGR policy agenda.

Option 5A builds on the positive foundations delivered by existing shared working and partnership arrangements and provides new strategic working opportunities that would naturally form due to the alignment of authority boundaries with the existing key partner landscape.

## Opportunities for transformation

All councils across Kent have taken steps to modernise, including more effective use of data and introducing digital approaches to service delivery.

This transformation activity has already improved outcomes and enabled cost savings.

However, all councils recognise LGR presents an opportunity to transform services and ways of working more fundamentally.

On 17 September 2025, Kent councils met to discuss the future vision for Kent.

As part of these discussions, the below key ambitions for service transformation were captured:

1. Clear focus for transformation on the needs of residents.

2. Establish a consistent, whole-council approach and culture across services, breaking down silos and joining up the experience for residents accessing multiple services.
3. Digitise and automate resident journeys for more transactional services, while maintaining alternative routes for those who need them.
4. Increase focus on prevention and a more holistic person-centred approach, especially for those with more complex needs (see Criteria 3: Public service reform).

To enable this transformation the below enablers were discussed:

- continual focus on cultural change and effective communications;
- joining up key data sources across services to support seamless working across services, better understand resident needs and achieve better, more proactive decision-making;
- meaningful transformation strategies and wider approach to public service reform in advance of Day 1, informing meaningful corporate plans with clear ambitions and actions; and
- linking transformation to a shared Kent-wide approach to public service reform (see Criteria 3).

Specific transformation plans, including funding arrangements for investment will need to be agreed as part of the budget-setting process and Medium Term Financial Strategy for each new council.

Across Kent, capital receipts are expected to support this to some extent.

However, investment in transformation will be on the basis it delivers cost savings and is therefore self-funding over the medium to long term.

Option 5A proposes sensible geographies that align with existing communities, provides long term balanced populations with the strongest alignment to transport networks, travel-to-work areas and public service geographies, all of which provide firm foundations from which to deliver strong and sustainable service transformation.

Option 5A offers the least disruptive platform from which transformation can take place in a meaningful way; informed by the communities served, delivered through a higher level of retained staff who know their communities and have pride in the services they deliver, and building on the partnership working and collaboration already in place.

To maximise the benefits of all options proposed, the implementation of a Strategic Authority or a countywide partnership framework would facilitate coordination on cross-boundary issues like economic development and emergency planning, maintaining Kent's coherence as a unified economic and social system.

# Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government

**Criteria 2e.** For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.

## The Kent financial context

None of the 14 councils in Kent are in Best Value intervention or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support.

However, Medway Council has been granted a capitalisation direction under the government's Exceptional Financial Support.

There is collective concern regarding the financial sustainability of the current system, particularly given rising demand in adult social care and children's services, rising costs and increasing levels of debt.

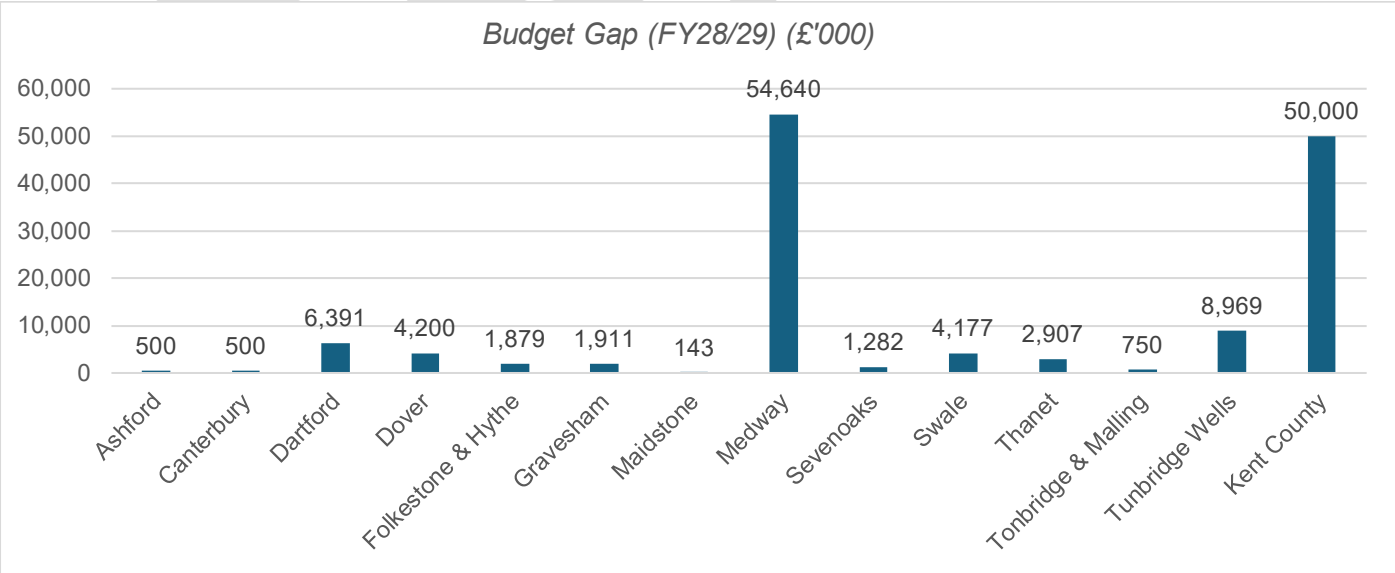
The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery across county and districts.

## Existing budget challenges

The forecast total gross budget gap, including assumed funding from reserves, for all councils by 2028/29 is £138.2m, which includes £54.6m within Medway and £50.0m within Kent County Council.

These figures exclude consideration of the impact of Fair Funding 2.0.

***Figure 12: Budget gap (FY 28/29)***




All existing councils will continue to focus on delivering savings and managing their ongoing budget gaps regardless of LGR.

However, the starting point for all new councils is expected to be stretched, with ongoing need for savings to be identified.

**Projected budget position for new councils under Option 5A**

| Local Authority | Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£'000) |
|---|---|
| North Kent | 30.6 |
| West Kent | 25.0 |
| East Kent | 13.3 |
| Mid Kent | 53.1 |
| South Kent | 16.2 |
| **Total** | **138.2** |

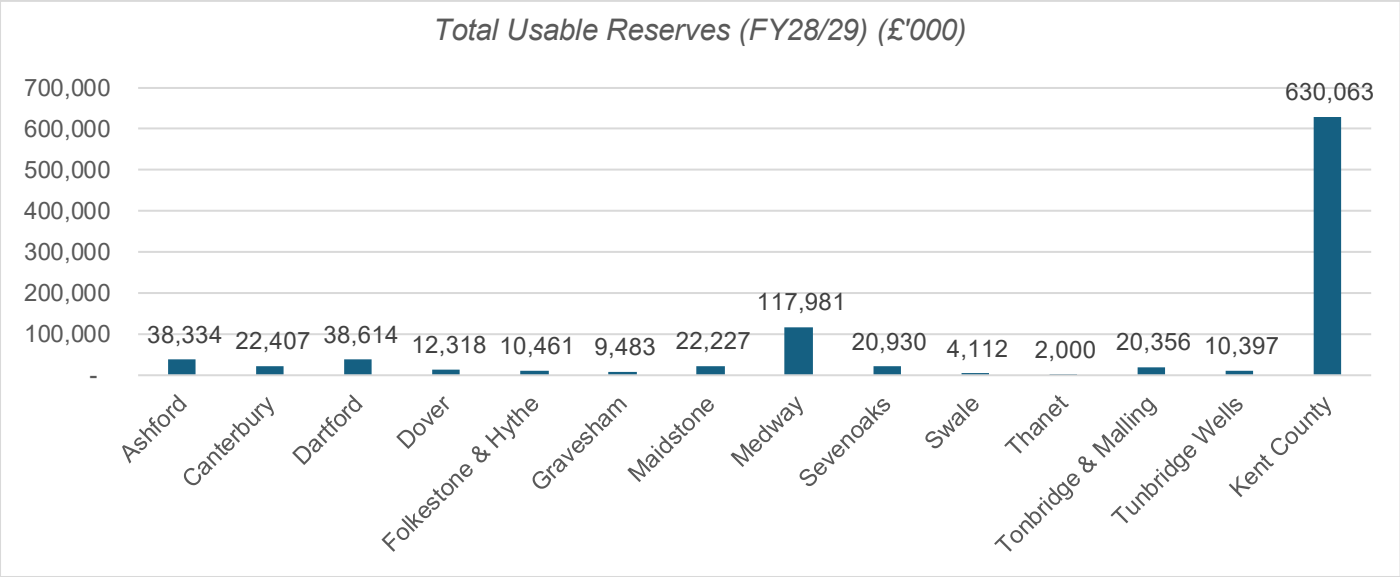
The forecast total gross budget gap (including assumed funding from reserves) for all Kent councils by 2028/29 is £138.2m; this includes £54.6m within Medway and £50.0m within Kent County Council which, when combined, constitutes 75.7% of the total figure. Option 5A provides the most equitable split of the forecast gross budget gaps of all options proposed because it disaggregates the budget gaps of Kent and Medway across a wider base, supporting a more favourable and balanced starting position for each new council.

### Current reserves levels

Across Kent councils, Total Usable Reserves are forecast to be £959.7m.

This includes the full value of the Kent County Council's usable reserves of £630.1m.

***Figure 13: Total Usable Reserves (FY28/29) (£'000)***




*Note – for all districts, this amount related to General Fund balance, Earmarked Reserves, Capital Receipts Reserve and Capital Grants Unapplied.*

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the new councils post reorganisation.

It will be the decision of each new council to determine how to use its resources to pay for the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

**Projected reserves levels under Option 5A**

| Local Authority | Total Usable Reserves (FY27/28) (£'000) |
|---|---|
| North Kent | 189.0 |
| West Kent | 247.8 |
| East Kent | 137.3 |
| Mid Kent | 202.8 |
| South Kent | 182.8 |
| **Total** | **959.7** |

All unitary authorities have healthy reserves levels above £137m and are all moderately balanced, in the range of £137m to £247m. West Kent's budget gap is significantly higher at £247.8m whilst North, Mid and South Kent are well balanced.

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## Existing council debt

The external debt position reported across all Kent councils is £1.7bn on a net revenue of £2.3bn with a total financing cost of £123.6m. 67% of the borrowing and 87% of net revenue and 87% of the financing cost is within Kent County Council and Medway.

The combined financing ratio across all Kent councils is 5.3%.

***Table 19: Borrowing and financing costs across Kent councils***[37]

| Local Authority (£'000) (26/27) | General Fund Borrowing (External) | Financing cost | Net Revenue | Financing ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ashford | 95,375 | 402 | 9,009 | 4.5% |
| Canterbury | 120,358 | 5,417 | 31,800 | 17.0% |
| Dartford | - | 370 | 21,531 | 1.7% |
| Dover | 102,600 | 1,424 | 20,088 | 7.1% |
| Folkestone & Hythe | 53,000 | 2,628 | 35,504 | 7.4% |
| Gravesham | 101,955 | 2,777 | 25,693 | 10.8% |
| Maidstone | 65,000 | 4,183 | 27,945 | 15.0% |
| Medway | 442,468 | 21,731 | 481,631 | 4.5% |
| Sevenoaks | 13,934 | 1,040 | 21,868 | 4.8% |
| Swale | 13,000 | 2,802 | 31,400 | 8.9% |
| Thanet | 6,622 | 371 | 26,749 | 1.4% |
| Tonbridge & Malling | - | - | 27,346 | 0.0% |
| Tunbridge Wells | - | 529 | 21,535 | 2.5% |
| Kent County Council | 716,039 | 79,890 | 1,531,280 | 5.2% |
| **Total** | **1,730,351** | **123,573** | **2,313,379** | **5.3% (Average)** |

### The projected debt position for new councils under Option 5A

The District borrowing costs, net financing costs and net revenue have been combined, and the County costs have been apportioned based on population data.

| Local Authority (£'m) (26/27)[38] | General Fund Borrowing (External) | Financing cost | Net Revenue | Financing ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Kent | 336.8 | 22.4 | 432.7 | 5.2% |
| West Kent | 278.4 | 28.1 | 526.6 | 5.3% |
| East Kent | 257.2 | 20.6 | 338.0 | 6.1% |
| Mid Kent | 468.7 | 32.5 | 655.7 | 5.0% |

[37] Financial data return submitted by councils
[38] Financial data return submitted by councils

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South Kent | 389.3 | 19.9 | 360.4 | 5.5% |
| **Total** | **1,730.4** | **123.6** | **2,313.4** | **5.3%** |

**Five councils driving long term financial sustainability**

Option 5A supports Kent establishing a firmer financial footing. Council tax bases are sufficient across all five authorities.

***Table 20: Total GVA and Council Tax Base***

| | North | West | East | Mid | South |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total GVA (£ million) (2023)[39]** | 9,373 | 19,244 | 7,815 | 8,515 | 10,018 |
| **GVA per capita (£) (2023) [40]** | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |
| **Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (2025-26)[41]** | 109,603 | 214,098 | 115,481 | 107,603 | 132,865 |
| **Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes) (£) (2024-25)[20]** | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[42]** | 74.3 | 109.5 | 51.7 | 60.0 | 69.1 |
| **Non-Earmarked Reserves (£m) (2023-24)[43]** | | | | | |
| **Net revenue expenditure (£m) (2023/24)[22]** | 397.2 | 625.4 | 405.2 | 416.4 | 429.5 |

[39] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[40] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[41] Respective district council and council authority council tax webpages
[42] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[43] Respective district council and council authority Non-earmarked Reserves webpages

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# **Criteria 3:** Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Improving delivery of key services** | **Criteria 3a and 3c** |
| **Public service reform** | **Criteria 3b** |


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# Improving delivery of key services

**Criteria 3a.** Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.

**Criteria 3c.** Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

**Ensuring the delivery of high-quality, sustainable services – particularly in areas such as adult social care, children's services, SEND, homelessness, and wider public safety – stands at the heart of the future vision for local government in Kent.**

## Working together on the future of services

As part of the Kent LGR programme, the 14 councils have collectively agreed key service areas to explore in more detail through workshops, supplemented by additional discussions and data gathering.

Workshops were held in five key service areas, bringing together representation from across the councils of Kent and Medway to ensure multiple perspectives were shared.

These services were:

- Adult Social Care;
- Children's Services including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC);
- Housing and Homelessness;
- Highways Services; and
- Waste Services.

During these sessions, attendees considered the following:

- current service challenges;
- existing good practice and collaboration;
- future improvement opportunities shared across all LGR options; and
- opportunities and challenges specific to individual options where a proposal is being submitted to government.

In addition to the sessions held, colleagues from a wide range of services across Kent have had the opportunity to input to collective thinking on service-specific impacts through online forms with in excess of 125 responses.

There were a number of emerging themes and these were aligned with workshop discussions where the same themes were consistently identified.

We are continuing to engage with colleagues across the councils.

| Challenges of two tier working | How single tier working can improve performance and customer outcomes |
|---|---|

- **Service fragmentation:** Services split between county and district councils cause confusion over responsibilities, leading to resident frustration and delays.
- **Coordination and communication issues:** Lack of shared systems and contacts between tiers results in slow responses and missed opportunities.
- **Duplication of effort:** Overlapping services between councils waste resources and confuse residents with inconsistent messaging.
- **Strategic misalignment:** Differing priorities and leadership across tiers hinder cohesive planning and policy alignment.
- **Limited access to expertise and resources:** Smaller district teams often lack specialists and face challenges in recruitment and timely support.
- **Inconsistent service standards:** Variations in budgets and policies across districts lead to unequal service quality for residents.
- **Funding and commissioning challenges:** Fragmented funding and commissioning processes reduce flexibility and limit district influence over county decisions.

- **Consistent and integrated services**: Uniform standards and joined-up support for complex needs reduce disparities and improve outcomes for all residents.
- **Faster decision-making**: Simplified governance structures allow quicker, more coordinated responses and clearer responsibilities.
- **Efficiency gains**: Streamlined processes and reduced bureaucracy lead to cost savings and faster service delivery.
- **Strategic alignment**: Unified leadership and planning enable coherent strategies and better prioritisation across services.
- **Optimised resources**: Shared staffing and expertise increase flexibility, resilience, and effective demand management.
- **Enhanced data sharing**: Integrated systems improve planning, monitoring, and decision-making through better access to information.
- **Improved performance management**: Clear accountability and consistent use of key performance indicators (KPIs) enhance service monitoring and impact tracking.
- **Simplified customer access**: A single point of contact eliminates confusion, ensuring easier navigation and fewer misdirected queries.

Our shared view across Kent is that LGR must be the catalyst for fundamental reform in how we deliver our services, how we work with our partners and how we deliver for all communities.

From the engagement with services to date, it is clear there are opportunities to enhance service delivery by building on areas of good and innovative practice, alongside opportunities to operate differently post-LGR.

Initial discussions are the first steps in designing future service provision and we are committed to building on the momentum of our service specific workshops as we progress with reorganisation.

**Pan-Kent working**

There are functions and services which will be best delivered across Kent. This minimises the disruption from disaggregation but is driven by considering what the best geographic footprint and operating model for delivery of those services is.

A strategic authority across Kent and Medway provides a real opportunity to strengthen Kent as a whole and to focus the role of unitary authorities on their delivery role. The strategic authority will take a strategic role across Kent including:

- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

There are also services and organisations that operate across Kent that our approach to LGR would not disrupt including Adoption Partnership South East, Safeguarding Adults Board, elements of commissioning, Attendance Alliance for Kent and Medway, Kent Housing Group and Kent Resources partnership.

While not tying future councils into service delivery model decisions, we are supportive of partnership arrangements and other approaches that enables strategic functions, services and operations to be delivered across Kent where it is in the best interests of residents to do so.

**Summary Benefits**

Five unitary councils across Kent will deliver:

- Alignment with health and care boundaries: setting local government boundaries that align with acute healthcare demand and with the Health and Care Partnerships (HCP). This enables health and care providers to work more closely together, focus on prevention and sets the right foundation for public service reform.
- Local responsiveness and community engagement: Community-focused councils enable tailored, preventative service models and closer engagement with local needs and voices.
- Strategic capacity and integration: unitarisation on the right footprint supports strategic commissioning, investment, and integration across health, social care, housing, and digital services.
- Operational efficiency and value for money: Streamlined governance, unified systems, and contract consolidation unlock economies of scale and reduce duplication.
- Resilience and risk management: Aggregating resources, infrastructure, and contract risk mitigates shocks, ensures legal compliance, and supports long-term sustainability.
- Workforce sustainability and development: More strategic workforce planning, education partnerships, and flexible staffing address recruitment and retention challenges.
- Innovation and digital transformation: Integrated coherent authorities can invest in advanced technologies, data-driven decision making, and modernised service delivery.
- Retention of existing service delivery: The boundary changes will formalise the existing strong alignment of adult social care relationships between districts which will establish a good footprint for shared working, partnership and public service reform.
- Manageable geography for service delivery: Smaller, more compact areas have lower travel times for frontline service delivery teams. Option 5A therefore presents future unitary authorities with more manageable geographies for efficient, responsive service delivery with fewer logistical barriers.

## Adult Social Care and Children's Services spend data

During the Options Appraisal, analysis was carried out of the actual cost incurred by different councils for key county-wide services.

This was led by KCC and tested with finance officers across Kent.

It found:

- for all of the multi-council options being put forward there is significant misalignment between the costs of delivery and the funding provided for both adult social care and children's services, with some areas at more of a disadvantage than others.
- the impact of the Fair Funding Review has been considered and is expected to have some impact on funding allocation, but based on analysis to date, misalignment between costs and funding is expected to continue for any multi-council model.
- this disparity is important for all councils across Kent to be aware of and to take appropriate mitigating steps in LGR planning. The potential to share funding appropriately based on actual demand and costs is an opportunity for discussion.

**Five councils enable targeted spending**

Five councils focused on communities enables funding, grants and investment to be more targeted on the needs of the specific areas. In line with our public service reform ambitions this also enables a more strengths-based and community power approach whereby the councils are more targeted in where and how they intervene. This will support positive outcomes for residents and people receiving services while reducing the cost to the councils. On assessment, Option 5A presented the smallest variation in spend between authorities for Children's Services across the proposals for Kent.

***Table 21: Total expenditure on social care***

| **Total Expenditure** *(based on 23/24 spending)*[44] | **North** | **West** | **East** | **Mid** | **South** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Children's Social Care (£m)** | 55.4 | 42.3 | 56.6 | 91.8 | 51.9 |
| **Adult Social Care (£m)** | 83.6 | 155.3 | 117.4 | 115.7 | 162.0 |

## Adult Social Care (ASC)

Overview of current ASC delivery

Kent County Council and Medway Council deliver adult social care as part of their existing responsibilities with some place-based partnerships in place across the existing councils to bring integrated teams together to understand the needs of the population, agree plans to meet those needs and implement solutions.

[44] Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2023 to 2024 individual local authority data - outturn - GOV.UK

Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board oversees strategic planning and resource allocation for health and care services.

Delivery is planned and co-ordinated on the footprint of four health and care partnerships which bring together health providers, social care, public health, district councils and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Partnership for Better Health.

Kent County Council and Medway Council have a history of working together to great effect, with examples including:

- The Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board: a multi-agency partnership consisting of statutory and voluntary partner organisations, working together to keep adults at risk of abuse or neglect safe.
- The Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit (VRU): a partnership between the police, councils, health service providers and other key agencies to deliver a reduction in violence the county.

Evidence of shared posts demonstrates how working together across councils can build resilience, provide flexibility, offer value for money and deliver good outcomes.

***Case study – Joint Commissioning Post – Learning Disability and Autism***

The Kent and Medway Learning Disability and Autism Delivery Partnership was formed in January 2022.

It was established after a review of previous commissioning and alliance arrangements highlighted the need for a new whole-system approach.

This approach aims to improve health outcomes and maximise choice, control, independence and human rights for citizens with learning disabilities, autism or both.

In September 2023, NHS Kent and Medway and Kent County Council formed a legal partnership to jointly plan and commission services for neurodivergent citizens.

This Partnership for Neurodiversity Agreement allows for delegated functions under section 75 of the NHS Act (2006) if deemed necessary.

This agreement is further supported by a memorandum of understanding between Kent County Council, representing the partnership, and Medway Council, which aims to explore a tripartite agreement and facilitate discussions on resources for neurodivergent individuals in Kent and Medway.

The System Programme Lead is a pivotal role established in August 2022, focusing on senior system leadership and comprehensive programme management.

This position is instrumental in fostering collaborative improvement, working with various partners to design and implement projects aimed at enhancing the health, wellbeing and life chances of individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people across Kent and Medway.

Effective and sustainable delivery of Kent and Medway's Learning Disability and Autism programme is ensured through collaboration and whole-system leadership, underpinned by securing commitment from essential stakeholders across health, social care and the third sector.

**LGR provides the opportunity to consider strategically how shared services and posts across the future councils can enhance delivery.**

Key ASC delivery challenges

CQC inspections in 23/24 across Kent and Medway rated both as Requires Improvement.

The strengths and areas for improvement included:

- for Kent County Council strengths included co-production and lived experience, improved hospital discharge, high demand management and staff development. Areas of focus included communications and information, transitions, delays in support and staff morale.
- Medway Council strengths included positive staff interactions, person-centred support, effective transitions and partnership working. Areas of focus included accessibility of information waiting times, service gaps and staffing challenges.

Given the differences highlighted there is an opportunity for KCC and Medway ASC teams to share learning and areas of good practice in preparation for LGR.

Additional challenges include:

- **Demographic and geographical challenges:** more than one-fifth of Kent's residents are aged 65 and above (20.5%), a higher proportion than Medway's 17%, and this demographic is expected to grow considerably by 2040.
- Areas of deprivation exist across Kent, particularly in eastern Kent. Coastal regions face specific difficulties, including economic precarity, geographical remoteness, and the complexities of service provision.
- **Funding shortfalls and financial strain:** budgets are insufficient to meet the rising demand and complexity of care needs, leading to difficult decisions and financial pressure on the entire system.
- **Workforce crisis:** difficult to recruit and retain enough care staff with specific challenges in Kent due to geography (coastal) and competition from neighbouring councils, alongside shortages in specialist roles like Approved Mental Health Professionals.
- **Rising and complex demand:** an increasing number of older adults with multiple health conditions, plus more younger adults with complex disabilities, means services are stretched by growing and more intricate care needs.
- **Fragile care market:** the local market of care homes and home care providers is unstable and inconsistent.
- **Fragmented health and social care:** despite efforts, integrating NHS health services with council social care remains difficult, causing disjointed care pathways, delayed hospital discharges, and gaps in support.
- **Poor data and system integration:** information sharing across different services and partners is complex and fragmented, hindering effective coordination, strategic planning and the ability to gain insights from data.
- **Policies:** differing local policies, procedures and ways of working across the area can lead to different cultures across localities resulting in inconsistent experiences for people accessing services.

Future ASC delivery and opportunities through LGR

Regardless of the geographies of future councils, we are committed to transforming adult social care by:

- **Improved, innovative service delivery:** developing and implementing new models of delivery based on best practice.

- **Fostering collaborative partnerships:** strengthening meaningful collaborations across Kent to achieve improved outcomes for all residents.
- **Strategic housing integration**: adopting a unified, strategic approach to the planning and co-ordination with housing services across the wider footprint to achieve closer alignment of these services for the benefit of adults needing support, reduce inequalities and prevent escalating need.
- **Streamlining data and systems:** enhancing data sharing and analytics through integrated systems to drive insights and improve service delivery.
- **Building workforce resilience:** exploring shared service models and new approaches to strengthen the social care workforce and ensure its sustainability.
- **Optimising commissioning:** implementing a strategic, Kent-wide commissioning approach where appropriate to better shape and influence the market, delivering enhanced outcomes and improved value for money.
- **Localising care provision:** ensuring services are delivered closer to home, with a deeper understanding of communities and individual needs.

ASC delivery under Option 5A

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the five proposed councils making up Option 5A.

***Table 22: Adult social metrics***

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent | South Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Population Size (mid 2024)** | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25) | 19 | 19 | 40 | 13 | 45 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25) | 211 | 212 | 316 | 301 | 379 |
| People accessing short term support during the year, rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-25) | 31 | 31 | 56 | 21 | 59 |
| People accessing short term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 (2024-25) | 378 | 329 | 403 | 302 | 396 |
| People accessing long term support during the year (18-64), | 48 | 45 | 68 | 62 | 72 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | | | | | |
| People accessing long term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 436 | 327 | 392 | 437 | 390 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 1,452 | 1,443 | 1,953 | 1,383 | 1,957 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25) | 515 | 511 | 650 | 415 | 699 |

Key points in relation to the data:

The data seeks to identify at a high level the indicative demand on the system. This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

In the five unitary authority model, demand for services adult's social care services consistently is higher in East and South Kent.

For People over 18 with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support and People accessing short term support (18-64), there is the most notable disparity in the metrics when comparing unitary authorities, with 63% of total demand in these areas being in East and South Kent combined, and only 38% over demand in North, West and Mid Kent combined.

Metrics around People accessing long term support during the year (65+) suggests a fairly event split of demand across the 5 unitary model.

Safeguarding concerns, in terms of both the rate of those received and commenced, are greater in East and South Kent. Whilst Mid Kent received a similar rate of safeguarding concerns to North and West Kent, less are commenced relative to those 2 councils.

<u>Opportunities for Adult Social Care delivery under Option 5A</u>

Alignment with health and care boundaries: setting local government boundaries that align with acute healthcare demand and with the Health and Care Partnerships (HCP). Swanley is under a HCP with Dartford and Gravesham which is mirrored by the North council. Faversham and the west of the Swale district is covered by the East Kent HCP aligning that population with the East council. The South council is also fully covered by the East Kent HCP. The West council largely reflects the West Kent HCP. Coherent service delivery is critical for our communities as it ensures good reliability and service quality for our residents. This enables health and care providers to work more closely together, focus on prevention and sets the right foundation for public service reform.

We recognise the direct relationship between housing and social outcomes, and Option 5A will enable us to integrate housing and social care. Individuals with LDA or Mental Health needs will have more equitable housing outcomes as their social requirements are factored into their housing

requirements. This coherence will alleviate current challenges associated with higher cost supported living placements.

Logical boundary changes facilitates better pooling of resources leading to better governance and more targeted and considered use of funding including the Disabled Facilities Grant. The pooling of resources will provide opportunities to work in partnership particularly with regard to commissioning posts and boroughs leading on discharge of people from the adult social service.

## Children's Social Care

Overview of Children's Social Care current delivery

Kent County Council and Medway Council currently deliver children's social care services with positive Ofsted recognition.

The current delivery of services is an excellent foundation for LGR and provides the opportunity to learn from each other.

Kent County Council, covering a large and diverse region, achieved an Outstanding rating from Ofsted in November 2021.

This reflects consistently high-quality social work, strong leadership and significant positive impacts on children and families, particularly in early help, child protection and support for looked-after children.

Medway Council, serving a more concentrated urban area, was rated Good by Ofsted in July 2023.

This rating acknowledges effective leadership, sound social work practice and positive outcomes for children.

Medway's success is attributed to robust multi-agency partnerships and a commitment to early intervention, demonstrating a stable and responsive service model.

The rating demonstrates the transformation journey that Medway has been on.

Delivering effective and impactful children's services cannot be done in isolation and partnership working are critical.

Whatever tools, enablers or metrics you use, there is an undeniable and fundamental need for excellent leadership, clarity of vision and values, a culture of high support and high challenge, adequate resourcing and a resilient workforce to deliver day-in, day-out.

There are multiple examples which demonstrate how services are already being delivered innovatively across organisations.

- KCC has operated Out Of Hours (OOH) services for Medway since 2014, with the current contractual arrangements being in place since April 2023. The service covers between 5pm and 7am, Monday to Friday and weekend and bank holidays and results in effective delivery and value for money. This arrangement works well, with good levels of open communication between managers. Inspection feedback regarding OOH work for Medway has always

identified effective service delivery and good to outstanding practice. There is no reason why this approach could not be replicated across the Kent and Medway footprint going forward.

- The Attendance Alliance for Kent and Medway is a regional initiative, working in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE), to share good practice and develop new strategies for improving school attendance.

***Case study - Adoption Agency South East***

Adoption Partnership South East (APSE) is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) delivering adoption services for three local authorities - the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council. It was launched on 1 November 2020. Kent County Council remains the host local authority.

RAA's 2023 Three-Year Plan focuses on building a supportive adoption community.

Its mission prioritises securing permanent homes for children and providing comprehensive support to all affected by adoption.

Since its inception, RAA has encouraged innovation and collaboration across several key areas.

These include innovative projects funded by the Department for Education, development of the adoption community, training and practice enhancement, and comprehensive adoption support services.

RAA has also focused on adopter recruitment to achieve permanency for children and has implemented mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement.

The RAA has allowed a localised service to operate across a regional footprint to the best advantage of providing permanence to children.

**The principles of this approach with a host authority can be explored further across the future unitary authorities.**

Key Children's Services delivery challenges

- **Workforce instability:** a national shortage of qualified social workers, leading to recruitment and retention difficulties, reliance on agency staff and higher caseloads that impact continuity and quality of care.
- **Rising and complex demand:** services are under pressure from a growing number of referrals, often involving highly complex issues.
- **Placement shortages:** securing enough suitable and stable placements for looked-after children is a critical challenge, particularly for older children, sibling groups and those with complex needs, often resulting in out-of-area placements and increased costs.
- **Limited specialist support:** access to timely and appropriate specialist services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), is difficult, leaving social care teams to manage complex emotional and behavioural needs.
- **Socio-economic impact:** areas of deprivation in both Kent and Medway contribute to child welfare concerns, with poverty, poor housing and family stressors increasing the demand for social care intervention.
- **Inconsistent thresholds:** differing thresholds for intervention across services and partner organisations can create confusion and make navigation difficult for families and professionals alike.

- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities:** The SEND system including funding through the high needs block continues to face significant national and local challenges. This includes rising demand, increasing complexity, sufficiency of provision, capacity and capability gaps in relation to SEND specialists and educational psychologists and scale and complexity of the partnership landscape.
- **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) pressure**: the presence of UASC, particularly in Dover and the wider area, places significant strain on multiple services, including housing, with varying policies for their support.
- **Out-of-Area Placements (OOAP)**: both councils, especially Medway with its high per capita rate, face a major challenge from children placed by other local authorities, impacting housing, children's homes and foster care capacity.
- **Improving prevention:** while good social care practice exists, there is a shared need to enhance preventative services to intervene earlier and reduce the escalation of needs to statutory services.

***Case study - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children***

Kent faces a unique and profound challenge as a primary entry point for unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UAS) children, a direct consequence of its proximity to mainland Europe.

The county's UAS Children's Service holds comprehensive responsibility for the care and accommodation of these newly-arrived children, providing support until they are transferred to another local authority under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) or integrated into Kent's mainstream Child in Care Services, where support continues until they reach eligibility limits or are advised to return to their country of birth.

Since January 2016, more than 10,000 UAS children have arrived in Kent, necessitating a substantial expansion of services.

This now includes 10 reception centres and increased social work teams dedicated to assessment and placement.

Crucially, the timely transfer of these children is vital for maintaining sufficient accommodation capacity within Kent.

**This ongoing demand on the system and associated services is significant and will continue beyond LGR, representing a unique and disproportionate pressure not experienced by other areas across the UK.**

Future Children's Social Care delivery and opportunities through LGR

We are committed to continuing to transform children's services through LGR. Taking learning from across the area and delivering across the new councils.

- **Evolving best practice:** developing and putting into practice new ways of delivering care rooted in the best approaches for children and families.
- **Streamlined service delivery:** reducing complexity in delivery, for example, by consolidating current community service partnerships from 14 to enhance efficiency.
- **Leveraging convening power:** utilising our unique position to foster stronger partnerships and collaborations across the system.

- **Holistic place-based prevention:** adopting a comprehensive approach to prevention through multi-agency teams and neighbourhood working.
- **Community-centric approach:** ensuring local needs and cultures are deeply understood to influence and tailor delivery approaches.
- **Child and young person-led system:** placing the voice of our children and young people at the heart of our whole system approach, with stronger ownership and engagement from families and schools.
- **Strategic financial redesign:** designing new service budgets to optimise resource allocation, rather than relying on existing financial structures.
- **Building workforce resilience:** exploring shared service models and innovative approaches to strengthen the social care workforce and ensure its sustainability.
- **Unified housing provision:** implementing a simplified and unified approach to housing and planning to build market capacity at a local level.
- **Integrated early help pathways:** reducing duplication and improving visibility of risk across agencies.

***Case study - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities SEND***

In recent years, Medway Council has transformed its delivery of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services, driven by a commitment to accountability and collaborative commissioning.

By engaging with partners across the system, fostering a culture of shared responsibility, and holding providers to account, Medway has moved from a £24 million deficit to a balanced budget.

This strategic financial management, coupled with a high-trust-high-challenge mantra for providers, has enabled the development of more local provision and a transparent funding model, ensuring resources are effectively directed to where they are most needed.

Core to this success lies in an embedded cultural change, uniting stakeholders and particularly bringing schools around the table to address issues and problem-solve together. This approach has fostered a powerful sense of collective responsibility, resulting in a system where schools actively challenge each other, develop new initiatives and have significantly increased the proportion of EHCPs managed within mainstream settings from 26.4% to 35%.

This cultural shift is further reinforced by robust quality assurance, ensuring all provision meets high standards and is responsive to children's needs.

The size of Medway has proven to be a distinct advantage, enabling rapid change and full oversight of the entire SEND system.

This agility allows for the co-production of teams, personalised responses for complex cases and a deep understanding of families and social workers within the community.

With strong parent/carer involvement, locality-focused initiatives and a commitment to embedding accessibility policies, Medway has not only achieved significant financial stability but has also cultivated a happier, more integrated team and a highly responsive, accountable and inclusive SEND service that truly knows and supports its children.

**The proposed options are in relation to smaller scale, multiple councils where this approach and learning could be applied.**

Children's social care delivery under Option 5A

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the five proposed councils making up Option 5A.

***Table 23: Children's social care***

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent | South Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Active Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) by School District, rate per 10,000) (Oct 2025) | 312 | 341 | 508 | 441 | 362 |
| Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Y12&13, rate per 10,000 (2024) | 329 | 285 | 415 | 422 | 337 |
| Child in Need (CiN) Plans, rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025) | 82 | 65 | 100 | 100 | 105 |
| Child Protection Plans (CPP) Rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025) | 31 | 26 | 38 | 40 | 38 |
| Looked After Children (LAC) by placement address, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 46 | 22 | 97 | 81 | 67 |
| Other Local Authority (OLA) Looked After Children placed in Kent & Medway, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 49 | 21 | 65 | 72 | 46 |
| Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Looked After, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025) | 8 | 2 | 15 | 6 | 11 |

Key points in relation to the data:

The data seeks to identify at a high level the indicative demand on the system. This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

The data above highlights that demand across Children's Services is typically lower in North and West Kent, with demand in all metrics being lowest in West Kent. South Kent faces at middling level of demand, with East and Mid Kent typically facing higher levels of demand.

**High needs (SEND):** The EHCP rate is highest in East Kent, followed by Mid Kent. North, West and South face relatively similar levels of demand compared to the other two proposed authorities.

**NEET:** The profile of NEET rate is similar to the EHCP profile, although Mid Kent faces a higher rate than East for NEET. Again - relative to East and Mid - North, West, and South Kent have a fairly similar level of demand, with West Kent being the lowest.

**Children's services:** The relative proportion of total demand in both CiN and CPP for each proposed authority is broadly similar. South Kent has the highest CiN rate but a slightly lower CPP rate compared to mid Kent. North Kent has a higher OLA rate compared to its LAC rate, which doesn't reflect the data for the other proposed authorities.
The bulk of UASC demand sits in East and South Kent which is expected. North and Mid Kent face similar demand, with significantly less than in West Kent.

Opportunities for children's social care delivery under Option 5A

The boundary changes to be implemented through the five-council arrangement will re-align children's services in Kent to reflect current children services operations with a key focus on the CSWT areas in the Kent region and retention of existing shared Health Child Programmes. This is critical in ensuring our children receive bespoke, localised children services that continue to address current key challenges in this space. This alignment also sets the platform for delivery of community wide initiatives and enables better shared working relationships to ensure all children are accounted for adequately.

Option 5A proposes to separate Dover and Thanet which will divide USAC issues from Thanet which is the district with the most deprivation and highest activity. The Dover and Thanet split also relieves financial pressures in existence in those areas and creates good unitary alignment with Swanley looking to Dartford (North) and Faversham residents looking to Canterbury (East).

Current Education commissioning aligns with the boundary changes proposed in Option 5A whereby Swanley is commissioned with Dartford and Gravesham (North) and Faversham is commissioned with Canterbury and Thanet (East). The South council aligns with the South Education Commissioning Authority Area. This provides consistency of service delivery, reduces the disaggregation challenge for staff and gives a strong foundation for service improvement.

## Housing and homelessness

Overview of current housing and homelessness delivery

Operating within the structures of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and national housing targets, councils are pivotal in delivering housing and homelessness services.

The provision and key responsibilities vary across the type of local authority.

- **Medway Unitary Council:** full housing authority covering strategic spatial planning, homelessness services, social housing allocation, private sector housing regulation and affordable housing delivery.
- **Kent County Council:** indirect housing impact including securing supply for needs arising from social care, public health, education and strategic infrastructure planning influencing housing needs and support for vulnerable people.
- **12 district councils:** local housing authority covering homelessness prevention and relief, social housing allocation, private sector housing enforcement, local housing strategy and strategic spatial planning to enable supply of housing through land allocations including for small sites and garden communities and determination of planning applications. In addition, some districts are housing providers which includes building and managing housing stock and in some cases managing a Housing Revenue Account.

Delivering successful outcomes is a complex challenge, whether it's managing vast infrastructure projects or tackling homelessness in our communities.

While large-scale programmes demand intricate planning, addressing homelessness requires understanding a deeply personal and varied set of needs.

Homelessness itself stems from a difficult mix of financial struggles like poverty, unaffordable housing and low wages; societal problems such as domestic violence, discrimination and a lack of support; and individual battles with mental health, addiction, physical disabilities, or past trauma.

This intricate web of challenges extends beyond homelessness, frequently impacting other vital services like adult and children's social care.

Initiatives are already in place and there is the opportunity to build on these through LGR.

***Case study – Homelessness Employment Pathway - Gravesham Brough Council***

Gravesham Borough Council (GBC), using its role as the area's largest employer, has successfully tackled a critical barrier to employment for homeless individuals.

Recognising traditional employment services often fail vulnerable individuals, the council identified an opportunity to use its influence to support disadvantaged people back into the workforce and to stabilise its own frontline services, such as waste and refuse collection, which experienced high staff turnover and agency spend.

This led to the introduction of a dedicated Employment Pathway in September 2023, specifically targeting former rough sleepers residing in GBC's supported housing scheme.

The Employment Pathway is designed for holistic support, moving beyond just job placement.

Once clients are ready for employment, they receive help with CV creation and employment risk assessments.

The programme includes an induction day, two weeks of work experience and entry into casual contracts, providing a crucial first step back into the workforce.

The initiative integrates ongoing mentorship, mental health and wellbeing support through weekly sessions and flexibility during hardship, all aimed at helping individuals establish a routine, build confidence and develop essential skills for long-term stability and independence.

This innovative approach has proven highly successful, not only providing participants with vital employment history and a route to unsupported accommodation but also significantly reducing the council's in-year agency spend.

Due to its positive impact, GBC is now expanding this initiative, rolling it out to private companies to maximise job opportunities for more vulnerable individuals.

**Innovation on a local scale which can be applied across an area of multiple unitary authorities.**

The need for working together and sharing of information to deliver outcomes cannot be underestimated.

The Kent Housing Group (KHG) is a forum for housing organisations in Kent and Medway.

KHG has representation from all 12 district councils across Kent, Medway Council, 13 housing associations, four support providers, Kent County Council and Kent Public Health.

KHG also has affiliated membership with a number of organisations who have a vested interest in the housing sector across Kent and Medway.

This strong strategic approach will provide stability through LGR and beyond.

***Case study – Kent Forum Housing Strategy***

The Kent Forum Housing Strategy provides clarity on the major strategic housing challenges facing Kent and Medway, acknowledges that past ways of working may not be fit for the future and identifies where a Kent and Medway perspective can add value, stimulate innovation and contribute to the delivery of local aims.

The strategy is unique in that it looks across a whole county area and brings district, borough, unitary and county council ambitions together through a bottom-up approach.

This is not about centrally-imposed targets. This is about lower tier and unitary authorities identifying their own local housing needs and requirements, while recognising the added value that can be gained by adopting a common approach to meeting these where appropriate.

**An adaptable model which can be shaped for future delivery while minimising the risks associated with change to the current model.**

Key housing and homelessness delivery challenges

**Overarching challenges:**

- **Complex delivery landscape:** the involvement of 14 councils delivering diverse services and initiatives across the area results in significant complexity and different approaches to policy formulation through to actual delivery.
- **Data fragmentation:** Kent and Medway use the same software for homelessness and operation of housing registers. There are multiple systems for housing management activities meaning that it is difficult to gather comprehensive data and insights impeding effective decision-making.
- **Staffing and capacity gaps:** a notable shortage of skills and capacity including challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced staff, impacts the effective delivery of both large infrastructure projects and critical public services.
- **Funding constraints:** investment in housing delivery varies across Kent. Notwithstanding this, the level of investment, grant and subsidy needed to address social housing need is not available. Limited and often short-term funding restricts long-term planning and investment in housing and homelessness services, making proactive solutions difficult.

**Housing supply and delivery challenges**

- **Housing delivery shortfalls:** each district has its own challenges in delivering housing requirements both in terms of the overall amount of housing needed and housing that people can afford including social rented homes and supported accommodation. Housing cost to earning affordability ratios differ across Kent and Medway resulting in varying housing

requirements. Market conditions which significantly impact the ability of housing developers to deliver housing also vary markedly. This produces a complex picture. Consequently, delivery performance varies markedly both spatially and over time in line with economic cycles. Reflecting the national picture, meeting housing delivery plans is challenging, leading to a scarcity of housing and in particular affordable housing options.

- **Rising demand:** rising demand for housing is further exacerbated by Kent's location. Our coastal position results in a situation where asylum seekers disproportionately put strain the housing system, leading to increased demand for temporary accommodation, pressure on the private rental market, significant unreimbursed financial burdens and operational challenges.
- **Proximity to London**: where housing costs and demand produce a more acute set of challenges also impacts on demand in Kent through out-of-area placements, gradients in costs for housing being generally higher in the west of the county results in out-of-area placement within Kent and the spatial pattern of this is complex. For example, currently Maidstone currently hosts 222 out-of-area placements by other Kent authorities while Thanet hosts five. Unitary authorities covering larger geographies and populations offer the opportunity for many of these pressures to be managed within their own boundaries.
- **Private rental sector issues:** concerns exist regarding the quality of homes in the private rental sector and frequent breakdowns in relationships between tenants and landlords, contributing to housing instability. The distribution of challenges and resources are not uniform.
- **Social housing stock:** the availability of local authority social housing stock, coupled with varying quality and high maintenance costs for existing properties. Not all current authorities are stock holding. This needs to be recognised in both the transition to new unitary authorities e.g. arising from the need to appropriately engage with tenants and the time needed for successor authorities to design a structured approach to future arrangements in the larger geographies where social housing will have a more diverse landscape in terms of providers.
- **Temporary accommodation (TA) shortage:** a lack of suitable and affordable temporary accommodation options further strains services and resources. There is a mixed picture across Kent with variation in investment in TA or capacity arising within HRAs in some places. Notwithstanding this all councils use expensive nightly-paid accommodation to bridge the gap between their own accommodation levels and need.

**Homelessness services**

- **Homelessness visibility and policy fragmentation:** the propensity for rough sleeping and homelessness varies across Kent and Medway reflecting differences in the factors that cause homelessness. This impacts on the consequent demands, the distribution of cost and the solutions that have been developed. Maintaining visibility of individuals experiencing homelessness is difficult as they often move across districts. This is compounded by differing strategies and policies between councils, hindering a unified approach.
- **Disconnected services and complex needs:** homelessness is often linked to a wider range of complex individual needs, yet services are not always joined up effectively for proactive prevention and holistic support.

Future housing and homelessness delivery and opportunities through LGR

We are committed to:

- **Building on successful initiatives**: identify, scale and celebrate proven best practices and successful initiatives across Kent, fostering shared learning and replicating positive outcomes.
- **Communities**: listen to and collaborate with our diverse communities, ensuring their voices shape housing and homelessness strategies and solutions.

- **Partner collaboration:** continue to foster robust and effective partnerships with all stakeholders including statutory bodies, third-sector organisations and private providers to deliver comprehensive and coordinated support.
- **Simplified Strategic Planning**: simplified strategic plan for housing and homelessness, maximising available opportunities and resources through coordinated effort across smaller unitary and place focus.
- **Holistic service integration and prevention:** adopt a truly holistic approach to service delivery, ensuring seamless integration across all relevant services and the wider system to proactively support, prevent and reduce homelessness through early intervention.
- **Data insights:** simplified and streamlined systems will enable data and insights to be more readily available to inform strategies, measure impact and drive continuous improvement in service design and delivery.
- **Policy alignment for impact:** drive greater alignment of policies and ways of working, where practical, to achieve more consistent and effective outcomes and address systemic drivers of housing instability.
- **Sustainable**: focus on developing and implementing sustainable, long-term solutions that address the root causes of homelessness and ensure lasting housing stability for individuals and families.

***Case study – innovative use of Housing Revenue Account***

Ashford Borough Council is making innovative use of its Housing Revenue Account to deliver an ambitious programme of more than 1,000 new council-owned homes within the next six to seven years.

The council has an identified pipeline of 33 sites which will deliver a mix of affordable and social rent homes, including independent living homes for older people and accessible homes for people with disabilities, as well as properties for shared ownership.

A diverse range of delivery models are being used to achieve the pipeline of new homes.

These include:

- building on council-owned land
- regeneration schemes
- largescale acquisitions from developers of already-built homes
- purchasing affordable homes that have been secured under a s106 agreement which Registered Providers are unable or unwilling to deliver and package deals where land is purchased and the properties paid for during the construction process.

The HRA is also used buy properties on the open market and taking them into council ownership and use.

A majority of these properties are former council homes that were sold via the Right to Buy.

The strategic focus is on larger homes that can be adapted for people with physical disabilities to help them live independently.

This ambitious programme aims to significantly address housing needs and improve the quality of life for residents across the borough.

**A scalable best practice approach which can replicate positive outcomes.**

***Case study: Canterbury City Council – resettlement support***

Canterbury City Council took the decision to deliver resettlement support in house rather than using the KCC provision, supporting those arriving on resettlement schemes since 2015.

The work expanded rapidly in 2021 when the council supported the opening of two hotels to accommodate Afghan nationals within the district.

The wraparound support work includes successful integration into communities, access to services, one-to-one and group support, money management, entering into employment/skills/training and longer-term housing solutions.

The experienced team consistently deliver excellent integration outcomes for families.

A key strength of the Canterbury approach is partnership working with voluntary and statutory sector partners to deliver joined up and innovative services such as the Welcome Hub – a jobs, English language and drop-in advice service.

**This initiative was praised by the Ministry of Defence as a model of good practice and work is already underway to replicate this approach in other areas of Kent.**

Housing and homelessness under Option 5A

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the five proposed councils making up Option 5A.

***Table 24: Housing and homelessness***

| Metrics | North Kent | West Kent | East Kent | Mid Kent | South Kent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rates of homelessness | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 2.4 | 4.4 |

Key points in relation to the data: The homelessness rate is relatively steady across the region with Mid-Kent performing better than the other four councils. The even rate allows for easier region wide planning to deliver holistic solutions to tackle homelessness in Kent.

Opportunities for Housing and homelessness under Option 5A

The proposed boundary changes in Option 5A will create local areas that are large enough to have a voice, have a stronger ability to merge, and better considerations of potential growth within each area making it easier to agree on policies/procedures. This will generate a stronger sense of place and will enable communities to tackle homelessness challenges. The better alignment will also ease with implementation of the Disability Fund Grants as each area can focus on their own DFG, for example the Canterbury DFG can be rolled out more easily and this can be done with CCTV/Lifeline and other services.

The boundary change will allow the councils to capitalise on the efficiencies of a better geographical area by making better use of accommodation options and improving planning housing pathways with providers. This targeted approach allows for a more coordinated perspective on dealing with community safety arising from homelessness and inefficient accommodation distribution for the homeless.

## Transport and highways system function

Overview of current transport and highways delivery

The transport and highways system function encompasses a broad range of activities from strategic transport planning and policy development to the delivery of highways programmes, planned and reactive maintenance and network management including coordination with utility works.

Highways services in Kent and Medway are managed by three primary authorities: National Highways, Kent County Council, and Medway Council.

Each holds distinct responsibilities for different parts of the road network, ensuring comprehensive coverage across the region.

While these three are the designated highway authorities, district councils also play a vital supporting role, acting as key intermediaries and advisors in local highway-related matters and securing developer financial contributions.

- **Department for Transport:** defines national policy for transport planning and systems including public transport and highways. This includes its vision for the future of the English strategic road network and a Roads Investment Strategy.
- **National Highways:** manages and improves the strategic road network including motorways and major A-roads (trunk roads) within Kent and Medway.
- **Kent County Council (KCC):** is the transport planning authority for Kent and the highway authority for the majority of Kent, overseeing the production of transport and infrastructure strategy and the management, maintenance and improvement of local roads, pavements, cycleways and associated infrastructure.
- **Medway Council:** as a unitary authority, it is the transport planning and highway authority for all local roads and highways within its specific Medway unitary boundary.
- **District councils:** provide crucial local input and advice on planning applications impacting transport and highways. While Kent County Council (KCC) acts as a statutory consultee on planning applications, providing advice, identifying conditions, and managing Section 278 agreements, district councils also act as public liaisons for community concerns and manage local amenities.

Examples of collaboration include district council engagement with KCC and National Highways to bring forward local improvements on the strategic network.

***Case study - Ebbsfleet Garden City***

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation EDC was announced in 2015 to facilitate the delivery of up to 15,000 homes and create a 21st-century Garden City in Ebbsfleet, north Kent.

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation is the planning authority for development management.

However, Dartford Brough Council (Dartford BC) is the local planning authority.

Dartford has worked closely with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation and KCC highways in the successful preparation of the Dartford borough local plan and implementation of development schemes and the associated infrastructure requirements.

This is facilitated through regular meetings and collaboration on sustainable travel projects between the EDC, Dartford BC, Gravesham Borough Council and KCC.

This builds on a longstanding history of collaboration on the Ebbsfleet area, prior to the establishment of the EDC, in relation to junction and road improvements required to facilitate the significant growth in the area.

***Case study: Bringing back international rail services to Kent***

Strong and sustained collaboration has taken place between KCC and district and borough councils to bring back international rail services like Eurostar to Kent.

This involved a concerted effort to build a strong case for resuming operations, addressing technical challenges with operators and infrastructure managers and demonstrating the economic benefits of serving the Kent passenger market.

The aim was to convince key stakeholders both Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International stations should have services restored, similar to the pre-pandemic situation in 2020.

This objective was achieved through collaboration between Kent County Council (KCC) and the district/borough councils, particularly Ashford and Dartford.

While KCC led on the transport aspects and coordinated economic arguments between the boroughs, the individual councils were crucial in championing their respective stations and highlighting local economic growth opportunities.

This combined effort allowed for a comprehensive and unified argument to the government for the reopening of both stations.

Key transport and highways delivery challenges

- **Active Travel and pedestrian infrastructure:** both authorities face challenges in maintaining and improving pedestrian environments. Ageing footways, limited accessibility in some urban centres and gaps in safe walking routes, particularly around schools and town centres, hinder efforts to promote walking. Funding constraints have slowed progress on upgrading crossings, improving public realm quality and ensuring compliance with accessibility standards, especially for vulnerable users.
- **Sustainable and public transport connectivity:** bus services continue to face declining patronage and reliability issues due to congestion, rising operating costs and driver shortages. Limited funding for service subsidies restricts route coverage and frequency, particularly in rural areas. Opportunities to enhance integration between bus, rail and active travel modes are often constrained by infrastructure limitations and inconsistent investment across the region. The ambition to grow sustainable travel is also challenged by public perceptions of reliability and affordability.
- **Private vehicles and freight movement:** high volumes of commuter, tourist and freight traffic, driven by Kent's strategic location, cross-Channel gateways and proximity to London, place sustained pressure on the road network. This contributes to congestion, accelerated asset deterioration and difficulties in meeting air quality and carbon reduction targets. The

maintenance backlog, exacerbated by rising material costs and climate impacts, continues to challenge network resilience.

- **Operational, workforce and coordination challenges:** persistent workforce shortages and skills gaps across engineering, planning and operational roles affect both authorities. Coordination with utility companies and developers for roadworks and infrastructure upgrades remains complex and disruptive, often prolonging project delivery times and reducing public satisfaction.
- **Governance, geography and strategic balance:** Medway Council, as a unitary authority, has direct responsibility for all local transport functions within a dense urban area, requiring a fine balance between supporting growth and improving sustainable transport options. Kent County Council, overseeing a much larger and more rural network, faces distinct challenges in ensuring equitable access and consistent service standards across varied geographies.

Future transport and highways delivery and opportunities through LGR

Future delivery of transport and highways services relies on ongoing collaboration and a strategic approach to deliver for the people of Kent.

In the future we are committed to:

- **Integrated strategic planning:** significantly streamlining the current 12 Local Plans, this approach fosters a more cohesive and joined-up strategic planning framework across the area, particularly for transport and highways infrastructure, with improved integration of land planning and transport planning.
- **Equitable influence:** the creation of evenly-sized unitary authorities ensures each entity possesses a balanced voice, enabling effective influence over strategic decision-making for the entire transport network.
- **Service harmonisation:** standardising service provision and associated fees and charges across the entire area will simplify processes and enhance consistency for residents across all transport-related services.
- **Balanced local governance:** this model establishes unitary authorities that are sufficiently large for strategic decision-making yet remain agile enough to deeply understand and respond to local impacts and needs across the transport system.
- **Enabling devolution:** this option directly supports the ambition for establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority, facilitating greater local control and accountability over transport and highways.
- **Innovative service delivery:** exploring and implementing shared service models and pioneering approaches to enhance organisational resilience and service effectiveness which can support future devolution plans.
- **Optimised commissioning:** implementing a strategic, integrated commissioning approach where appropriate, to effectively shape and influence the market, driving better outcomes and value.
- **Resilience:** if there is poor delivery in one unitary authority, the delivery in the remaining unitary authorities is unaffected.

Opportunities for highways delivery under Option 5A

Connectivity is critical to keeping communities well connected in the Kent area. Option 5A establishes good road connectivity within our Kent area and develops a framework to consolidate

and deliver on key highway initiatives for the region. The North Kent area is well connected via the A2 and M20 junction at the M25 and this aligns with the good travel to work patterns available in that area.

Option 5A builds on the principle of harnessing local knowledge to boost connectivity, and the logical localisation through the boundary change builds better accountability for delivery of highway initiatives. Communities will be empowered to voice opinions, and there would be a better spotlight on delivery quality and time.

Option 5A simplifies the number of highway initiatives from around 12 with districts to 5 more local plans through the councils. Five councils generates a bigger footprint for planning and allows for more larger and generational planning which puts a focus on long term efficient connectivity of the area.

### Waste services

Overview of current waste delivery

As a unitary authority, Medway Council is the Waste Collection Authority (WCA) and Waste Disposal Authority (WDA). Contracts are in place with Medway Norse, Countrystyle and Veolia with lengthy terms up to 2040.

Waste arises in Medway of 117kt per annum of which 38% is recycled, reused or composted

Kent County Council acts as the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), contracting with third parties like FCC and CSKL until 2030 to manage waste disposal infrastructure.

This includes Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), Waste Transfer Stations (WTS), Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) and Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities at Allington.

The 12 district councils serve as Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs), collecting household waste and delivering it to KCC-managed disposal outlets.

Waste arises in Kent of 650kt per annum of which 42.1% recycled, reused or composted

Kent and the districts work closely through partnerships including Mid Kent Partnership, South West Kent partnerships and the Kent Waste Partnership.

***Case study – Kent Waste Partnership***

The Kent Resource Partnership brings together staff from Kent County Council and the 12 district councils.

Together, they manage waste collection and disposal, street cleaning and enforcement services across the region.

A dedicated strategic lead guides all partnership activities including how they are run, how they communicate, and what projects they work on.

The lead also builds relationships with other groups and looks for new opportunities and funding.

The Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, developed through the partnership provides the framework for collaborative delivery with a strong focus on developing and delivering

services to be efficient, effective and sustainable while navigating significant change in waste policy.

All partners contribute money each year to cover staff costs, for the lead and an analyst, and to pay for agreed projects.

A recent campaign to recycle food waste increased the average amount collected and recycled across seven areas by 20%.

**This collaborative approach and shared strategy have been crucial in driving alignment, maintaining a shared focus and ultimately achieving positive outcomes.**

Key waste delivery challenges

- **Aging infrastructure:** maintaining and upgrading existing waste management infrastructure to ensure continued operational efficiency and reliability.
- **Infrastructure capacity:** strategic planning and investment are required to meet future infrastructure demands, particularly in response to significant housing growth.
- **Divergent delivery approaches and policies:** inconsistencies in collection methodologies and varying resident expectations across different areas hinder the establishment of a unified and efficient waste management system.
- **Waste and collection strategy misalignment:** the two-tier delivery structure often leads to a disconnect between waste strategies and budgetary allocations, potentially resulting in isolated decision-making and collection approaches that do not adequately consider disposal costs.
- **Limited funding transparency:** a lack of clear information regarding the flow of funding from central government to local waste services.
- **Complex contractual landscape:** the presence of multiple long-term contracts across Kent, including one currently under dispute, complicates operational management and strategic planning.
- **Public engagement and behaviour change:** challenges in encouraging effective resident participation in recycling schemes, waste reduction and sustainable waste practices including addressing contamination issues.
- **Regulatory compliance and evolving legislation:** the ongoing demand to adapt to and comply with changes in national and international waste management regulations, environmental standards and targets.
- **Workforce recruitment and retention:** difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled personnel across all levels of waste management operations.
- **Technological adoption and innovation:** the complexities and costs associated with integrating new technologies for waste sorting, treatment, energy recovery and data management.
- **Illegal dumping and fly tipping:** addressing the persistent issue of illegal waste disposal and its associated costs and environmental consequences.

Future waste delivery and opportunities through LGR

In the future we are committed to:

- **Learning from success:** we will take what has worked well across Kent, like our Waste Liaison Officers, and build on those successes to make things even better.
- **Working together:** we will strengthen our relationships across Kent, adapting our partnerships as needed to deliver on our regional waste plans.

- **Smarter way to deliver:** we will look into creating a single, strategic waste body for the whole region, potentially linking it with how we plan for new developments.
- **Connecting the dots:** we will bring together collection and disposal budgets so we can make smarter decisions that consider the whole picture, not just parts of it.
- **Better use of information:** we will get our data and systems talking to each other so we can gain clearer insights and make better plans.
- **Planning ahead:** planning for the infrastructure we need, making sure it fits with local areas and future building projects.
- **Making decisions easier:** working together across future councils will enable us to reach consensus and move forward more quickly.

***Case study – Waste Liaison Officers***

Kent County Council (KCC) has established two Waste Liaison Officer roles to enhance the operational relationship between the Waste Disposal Authority (KCC) and the 12 district and borough councils, which act as Waste Collection Authorities.

These officers serve as a crucial link, fostering communication, promoting shared understanding, and supporting performance improvement across both tiers of local government.

Their responsibilities include facilitating quarterly liaison meetings, sharing monthly performance data for transparency and resolving operational issues arising between the collection and disposal authorities.

By acting as a bridge, they ensure service challenges are addressed collaboratively and efficiently, ultimately improving outcomes for residents.

The Waste Liaison Officers monitor performance data - tonnage, recycling and contamination - for statutory reporting and improvement, collaborating with district teams and KCC Waste Data and Insight to interpret trends.

They ensure two-way communication on policy and operational changes for consistency, translate complex data into actionable insights for districts and coordinate abandoned vehicle disposal.

In addition to strengthening relationships, the Waste Liaison Officers have significantly improved operational efficiency by resolving service issues faster and with fewer escalations.

They have also been crucial during disruptions like extreme weather or contractor problems, coordinating responses and maintaining service resilience through rapid communication and joint problem-solving.

**This has minimised impact on residents and upheld service standards.**

***Case study – creation of a waste Local Authority Trading Company***

Canterbury Council established a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) called Canterbury Environment Company (Canenco) to take over household waste collection services from a commercial contractor.

This decision was made after an options appraisal due to dissatisfaction with the previous service.

Canenco's board consists of three council officers and a managing director with extensive waste management experience was recruited.

Staff from the former contractor were transferred to Canenco and the council bought the necessary vehicles.

The council maintains oversight of the client function and waste collection strategy.

This change has resulted in a more responsive company for waste collection and street cleansing.

The council and Canenco teams work closely, leading to efforts to reduce contamination in dry recycling bins.

**Following the successful transfer of waste collection and street cleansing in February 2021, grounds maintenance services were transferred in December 2021 and public toilet cleansing and maintenance in June 2024.**

Opportunities for waste delivery under Option 5A

Continual delivery of important services to our communities builds trust and makes Kent a desirable locality to live in. Option 5A, through its boundary changes promotes this philosophy by bringing communities closer to our waste service providers generating quicker response times, and more accountability on waste service providers to deliver adequate and efficient services.

**Education Services**

Opportunities for education services under Option 5A

We recognise the importance of robust and accessible education services for our communities. The proposed boundary changes in Option 5A reflect the strong alignment of education commissioning authority areas in Dartford and Faversham, and Canterbury and Thanet. Alignment to existing commissioning partnerships and areas creates an opportunity to use a strong education service as a tool to address existing social community issues and complement children's services in the region. This combination of community services will bolster trust in the community and will empower our children to be involved in a robust system that provides good opportunities for our children.

**Police Services**

Opportunities for Police services under Option 5A

Option 5A retains and bolsters existing police boundaries in the Kent area. Avoiding disruption to existing policing services will retain trust in our communities, and resilience in our police force. The LGR process must not disrupt safety provisions for our communities, and Option 5A through the proposed boundary change will avoid any risk of disruption. We want our local identities to be retained, our communities to be safe and our police force given the platform to deliver their critical services.

# Public service reform

**Criteria 3b.** Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money

**At the core of any successful public service organisation is the desire to do the best for those who need those services most. Kent, as an area, starts from a high base but there is an obvious desire to push further and faster for the citizens of Kent. LGR provides the platform to meet the moment and drive for fundamental change. There is a clear desire to be ambitious and to change public services. There is an underpinning set of shared principles focused around shifting the system to a preventative model. Public services cannot just keep meeting demand. They must move from being responsive to being proactive. LGR can be a catalyst to this change. Kent will drive the reform of public services, ensuring they are rooted in their communities with outcomes at the centre of decision making.**

## What is public service reform (PSR) and why is it needed?

Public service reform will be the core to the transformation of any new configuration of local government in Kent.

LGR offers an opportunity to rethink how people and communities are supported, moving from a fragmented, reactive system to one that is proactive, integrated and designed around the needs and strengths of Kent's residents.

There will be the opportunity to root this in reform of public services in the community and people of Kent.

Public service reform will seek to change the way public service professionals work together and ensure residents feel the positive benefits of that work, fundamentally changing the way services are configured and delivered.

Too often services are organised around institutional and professional boundaries rather than people.

In the latest Spending Review, the government outlined three principles to its approach to PSR:

- to integrate services so they are organised around people's lives;
- to improve long-term outcomes for people through a focus on prevention, relying less on expensive crisis management; and
- to devolve power to local areas that understand the needs of their communities best, with services that are designed with and for people, in partnership with civil society and the impact economy.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring together services and improve outcomes.

A move from a demand-led model to a preventative model will allow for greater focus on outcomes and using precious resources in a more effective way.

## Demand and prevention

Nationally and across Kent, public services face growing pressures.

The system is struggling to meet the demand for key services that are vital to the health and wellbeing of the community.

Services, such as adult social care and children's social care, are being stretched to breaking point. The system is broken for those who need it most.

**Cuts to non-statutory services**

Failure to see the connection between prevention and demand, and to join the dots across the silos between service providers, means statutory services are protected from deep root-and-branch transformation.

This leads to cuts in non-statutory services which are often preventative services.

Cutting preventative services only increases demand in the more expensive acute part of the system, resulting in increased costs and increased pressure on statutory services.

**The 'front door' and thresholds**

At the 'front door' of these statutory services, more and more expensive specialist staff are being deployed to triage and assess.

This means that these specialist staff are using their time on assessment rather than treatment.

Furthermore, given the cuts to services, and their lower capacity to deal with demand, eligibility thresholds for support are rising further, leading to gatekeeping and meaning help is only available at the point of crisis.

As a result, the most pressing demand - those in crisis - continues to grow, creating a cycle where services intervene too late and at greater cost.

**Assessments and siloes**

Given this increase in pressure, services often refer cases on to one another in attempt to control in-service demand and residents are frequently required to repeat their stories to multiple agencies, undergoing assessment after assessment.

Services have slipped into an 'assessment mindset' where practitioners and leaders have been siloed into their respective organisations.

This not only causes frustration but also erodes public trust and confidence in local services.

**Outcomes**

These mounting pressures are leading to poorer outcomes for residents.

The danger is this provides a negative loop where demand keeps growing and preventative services cannot be prioritised as resources are used to address the immediate challenge.

**Fiscal control**

At the same time as outcomes are declining and there is less preventative focus, public service leaders, trying to counteract growing financial risks, are increasingly reliant on salami slicing - incremental cuts to service budgets.

These cuts are a way to demonstrate better financial control but ultimately mean that services fail to address underlying demand and associated costs.

**The urgency of now**

The continued cutting of services will not resolve these challenges.

As crisis response consumes a larger share of resources, the underlying problems persist and intensify.

The system becomes reactive rather than proactive, focusing on managing emergencies rather than preventing them.

This approach is unsustainable, both financially and in terms of outcomes for residents.

A focus on prevention and early intervention needs to be prioritised before services hit breaking point. Now is the time to act.

Public services in Kent need to be fit for purpose and fit for the future.

Public service sustainability cannot be addressed without PSR.

Without reform, councils will be forced to make ever deeper cuts, further reducing the quality and accessibility of services and undermining the support available in communities.

LGR offers an opportunity to embrace change and deliver a different form of support that will serve communities in a way that works for them.

**PSR: a new approach**

Kent leaders are fully aware of the need to act and are ambitious to embrace PSR.

On 17th September 2025, leaders and chief executives from county, unitary, and district councils came together to outline and agree the opportunities presented by the LGR process. PSR was a central theme of the day, with stakeholders discussing and agreeing a vision for the region.

To achieve these ambitions for Kent and to break this cycle of growing costs and poor resident outcomes, the focus must shift to public services being more community based and preventative. This means focussing on outcomes, managing demand more effectively, and supporting people before their needs escalate.

Through the discussions between Leaders and Chief Executive, five PSR principles have been defined.

1 Community first
2 Outcomes focussed
3 Prevention and early intervention
4 Collaborative partnership working

## 5 Digital mindset

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| **Community first** | • Service delivery must be led by the needs and aspirations of communities, with openness and transparency in the governance and the delivery of public services.<br>• By working closely with residents and local groups, services can better understand what matters most and tailor their offer accordingly.<br>• Residents should feel that their voice is being listened to, and the subsequent service design reflects their input.<br>• Services should be reshaped to reflect the needs of local people in flexible, community-focused provision.<br>• By designing support around the lived experience of residents, Kent can deliver more effective, efficient, and equitable outcomes.<br>• Leadership at all levels should mirror the diversity of Kent's communities, ensuring that a broad range of voices and experiences shape decision-making. |
| **Outcomes focussed** | • An outcomes focussed approach should drive the reform of public services.<br>• Leaders must focus on providing joined-up support that is accessible and tailored to the presenting need of a person and designed around meeting that need.<br>• A relational approach should be applied, where public servants focus a person, rather than just dispensing the services of their organisation. |
| **Prevention and early intervention** | • Prevention and early intervention are fundamental principles underpinning effective PSR that are essential to deliver better outcomes for residents, achieve financial sustainability, and build public services that are fit for the needs of the people of Kent.<br>• By intervening before issues escalate, services can help people maintain control over their lives, access support at the right time, and avoid the distress and disruption that comes with crisis intervention.<br>• Evidence demonstrates that pre-crisis intervention delivers financial benefits through a more effective and better targeted use of public services. Early help can reduce demand on high-cost crisis services and enable resources to be targeted where they have the greatest impact. For example, investment in family support, community health, and neighbourhood-based services has been shown to reduce the need for statutory intervention in both children's and adults' services. |
| **Collaborative partnership working** | • LGR presents a unique opportunity to reset and strengthen relationships across the public sector in Kent.<br>• The benefits have been seen from a number of successful partnerships across the geography, involving statutory and non-statutory services, the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, and a wide range of public bodies.<br>• While there are excellent examples of joint working, these are often isolated and not yet embedded as the norm across the system.<br>• Key partners that collaborate together include the police, health services, the Department for Work and Pensions, fire and rescue, housing providers, waste management, social services, education, and asylum support, among others. |

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| **Digital mindset** | • To set up services for success, Kent needs to embrace the benefits of adopting a digital first mindset, seeking to leverage opportunities in LGR to transform services with a digital approach.<br>• Integrated digital systems and improved data sharing between services will enable a single, holistic view of residents' needs, leading to a more joined up service. This will support more timely interventions, reduce duplication, and ensure that every professional involved has access to the right information at the right time. There is an opportunity to strengthen evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.<br>• AI can be used to better understand large data and identify resident need or risk earlier. This can be used by services to more quickly and better understand the residents they serve, so more time can be spent on treating need rather than identifying it. |

***Case study – development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams***

In eastern Kent, the health and care partnership is working with four Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) as Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) early adopter sites.

They are looking at tools to identify those most at risk of needing social care or who are likely to experience worsening health outcomes.

This is known as risk stratification and will help identify those people who will benefit from remote monitoring and early identification of deterioration to provide additional support.

This is a formal programme working alongside John Hopkins University and will be invaluable in informing how INTs develop across the county of Kent.

This integrated approach is emerging across western Kent too as they prepare for INTs. This includes examples such as, but is not limited to:
- the core frailty team with shared case management and shared system use working well in Tonbridge PCN area.
- a mental health multi-disciplinary team dealing with complex mental health needs working well in Weald.
- Maidstone PCNs have worked together on a joint service provided by the VCS for people with complex mental health-related needs across all their PCNs.
- the Sevenoaks area has established a health and wellbeing huddle approach to link in with the core primary care networks/Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.

The development in INTs with health, social care, the VCS and other key organisations working together are a foundation of good practice to build off when adopting the PSR principle of partnership working.

## Enablers of PSR

To realise the full potential of PSR, partners must work together to embrace its core tenets.

This means moving beyond organisational boundaries and focusing collectively on the needs of the person.

It requires a cultural shift. One where engagement is purposeful, open and rooted in a shared ambition for Kent as a whole.

Several enablers are critical to making this collaborative approach a reality:

1 **More permeable boundaries between partners and services:** services must become more open and flexible, allowing for the free flow of information, resources and expertise. When one partner's actions benefit another's budget or outcomes, this should be recognised and the benefit shared.
2 **Shared benefits and budgets:** a move towards shared benefits naturally lends itself to the possibility of shared budgets. By pooling resources, partners can take a joined-up approach to tackling key issues, ensuring investment is targeted where it will have the greatest impact.
3 **Co-location of services:** Bringing services and organisations together physically - whether in community hubs, shared offices, or integrated teams - can drive a more joined-up way of working, break down silos and make it easier for residents to access the support they need.
4 **Inclusive partnership:** No partner should be left out of this process. Every organisation, whether statutory, voluntary or community-based, must feel a sense of purpose and importance in helping the people of Kent. Organisations should embody a shared learning culture, recognising that they have something to learn from someone else round the table.

Achieving this vision will require organisations to work together differently.

It means moving away from transactional relationships and towards a model where partners are engaged as equals, united by a common purpose.

It means recognising the challenges facing communities cannot be solved by any one organisation alone.

**The next steps for PSR:**

There is broad agreement among Kent Leaders they want to:

- **Refresh working arrangements between organisations**: updating governance structures and shared forums between Chief Executives to enable more effective joint working. This will result in better alignment and a collective approach to PSR.
- **Establish shared learning culture**: councils and partners actively sharing key learning, where best practice is actively sought and embedded.
- **Purposeful and reassuring staff communication**: ambition for reform must be communicated clearly and confidently to staff, providing reassurance about their future and a sense of shared purpose.
- **Prepare for a seamless transition**: LGR should a seamless handover between services with support that feels joined up and easy to navigate. Residents should feel well informed about the changes from LGR, what to expect and the positive impacts that will be driven.
- **More voices are required and welcomed**. There is also an ambition to engage with voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to understand excellent practice that drives resident outcomes currently. To achieve more community-centred, outcome focused service delivery, collaborating with the VCSE, who are at the heart of communities and places, will be pivotal.

***Case Study – Dover SmART project***

Dover SmART Project is a charity founded in 2013 to support disadvantaged children, especially young carers, through creative activities to improve their wellbeing and boost their confidence.

It runs creative groups to boost children's aspirations and as a safe space away from other responsibilities.

The charity has evolved to support other age groups now, such as supporting older people who may be isolated in the community or have conditions like dementia.

Dover SmART project is funded by a variety of fundraising efforts including the private sector and the district council.

In 2025, the Dover SmART Project was named a winner at the Kent Mental Health Wellbeing Awards.

The SmART project demonstrates the impact the VCS can have on the community.

**There is an opportunity for voluntary and community sector projects to use their expertise and knowledge to support statutory services in supporting vulnerable people, acting as partners where there are opportunities for a holistic approach.**

**Five councils aligned with health boundaries**

Public service reform requires a foundation of strong relationships between organisations and with the people they work with. Many Kent partners operate across Kent, which is a strong position to start from, but the operational boundaries need to align to make this real for staff who will make partnering and reform a success.

These five councils align with Health and Care Partnership boundaries which have been built around how places like Swanley and Faversham live and work. Local government boundaries, when set, are harder to flex and adapt so this reorganisation represents an opportunity to align local government with health and communities which will last into the future.

# **Criteria 4:** Working together to understand and meet local needs

This section includes:

**Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design** — **Criteria 4a and 4c**

**Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance** — **Criteria 4b**

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# Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design

**Criteria 4a.** It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.

**Criteria 4c.** Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

**Overview of the approach taken to engage the community and stakeholders:**

Kent's approach to LGR has been firmly rooted in the principles of transparency, inclusion and shared ownership.

Kent's 14 councils have worked together to formulate a set of joint proposals and have a coordinated, county-wide programme of public and stakeholder engagement.

We ran a resident survey in September and October 2025, have met with key partners and have engaged with communities through our usual engagement routes to ensure the voices of local people and organisations are central to business case development.

Reflecting local identity and fostering a shared vision across the county requires meaningful engagement with residents, businesses and key stakeholder groups at every stage of the process.

This engagement activity aligns with the political commitment across Kent to meaningfully involve communities in shaping their future governance while exceeding what is required under MHCLG guidance.

While MHCLG has not prescribed the extent of engagement, Kent's Leaders chose to pursue a proactive and inclusive approach.

The process has been informed by best practice from previous LGR areas, advice from the cross-Kent communications group and feedback from council Chiefs Executives and Leaders.

We gathered the views of more than 2,000 stakeholders to understand reflections, including:

- Kent residents
- businesses
- community groups
- councillors and officers
- Members of Parliament
- strategic partners across housing, health, emergency services, social care and safeguarding, education and skills, economic development, government, public sector and volunteering

**Overview of engagement activities:**

A) Standardised resident survey
B) Stakeholder engagement programme

The feedback from the public survey and stakeholder engagement has been analysed by the Canterbury City Council Policy and Communications team, which led the communications and engagement workstream. The findings are reflected below and throughout this proposal.

A) Standardised resident survey

A standardised resident survey, agreed across all Kent councils, was launched during the engagement period.

This consistency ensures data comparability across districts and enables the creation of both Kent-wide and locally-specific insights.

The survey aimed to capture residents' views on their local identity, service expectations and priorities for the future shape of local government.

These insights have informed the business cases and local decision-making processes within each council.

The survey received 2,107 responses, which includes written responses and survey responses.

B) Stakeholder engagement programme

In addition, a joint stakeholder engagement programme has been developed, via a coordinated letter sent on behalf of all Kent councils to a wide-ranging list of county-level stakeholders.

Each council has also engaged with its own networks including parish and town councils, voluntary and community organisations, businesses and sector-specific partnerships.

Councils were encouraged to host meetings and discussions to ensure stakeholders could explore the implications of different governance models and offer their perspectives on how local identity and service delivery can be best preserved and enhanced.

Across all Kent councils, priority strategic partners* have been engaged in dedicated workshops to understand key reflections, including:

- challenges that can be addressed through reorganisation
- opportunities to be realised through reorganisation
- issues that may arise through reorganisation that need to be mitigated

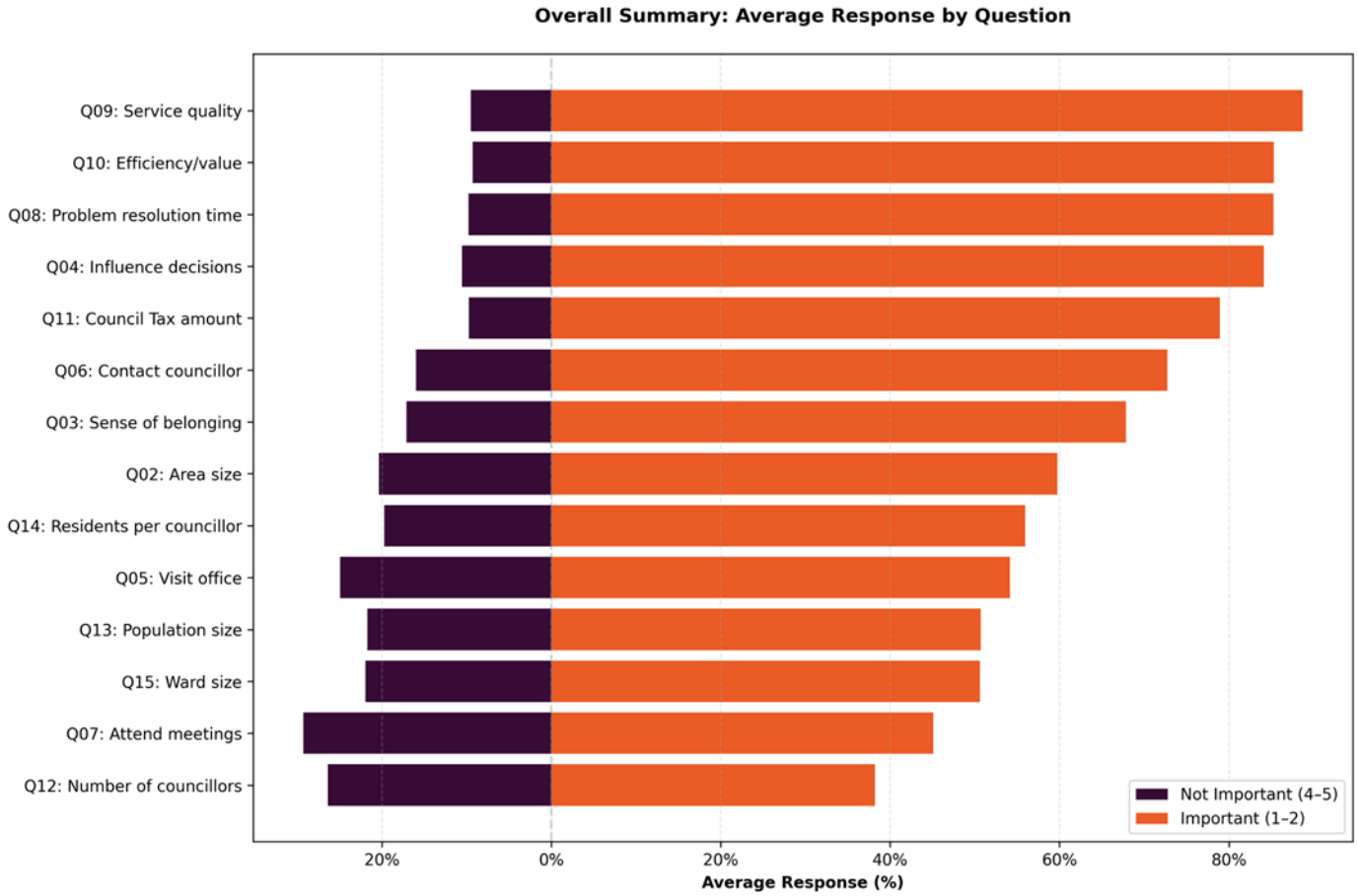
***Table 25: *Priority key strategic partners***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Health** | • NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB)<br>• Kent Integrated Care Alliance<br>• NHS Provider Trusts<br>  ○ East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust<br>  ○ Medway NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust<br>  ○ Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust |
| **Emergency services** | • Kent Police<br>• Kent Police and Crime Commissioner<br>• South East Coast Ambulance Service |
| **Social care and safeguarding** | • Chairs of Safeguarding Boards – Adults and Children's<br>• Chairs of any Partnership Board<br>• Chair of Kent and Medway Resilience Forum |
| **Education and skills** | • University of Kent<br>• Canterbury Christ Church University |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • University of Greenwich<br>• University for the Creative Arts<br>• FE colleges |
| **Economic development** | • Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce<br>• Federation of Small Businesses |
| **Government and Public Sector Partners** | • Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)<br>• National Highways<br>• Port health authorities<br>• Housing associations |
| **Volunteering** | • VCSE sector representation |

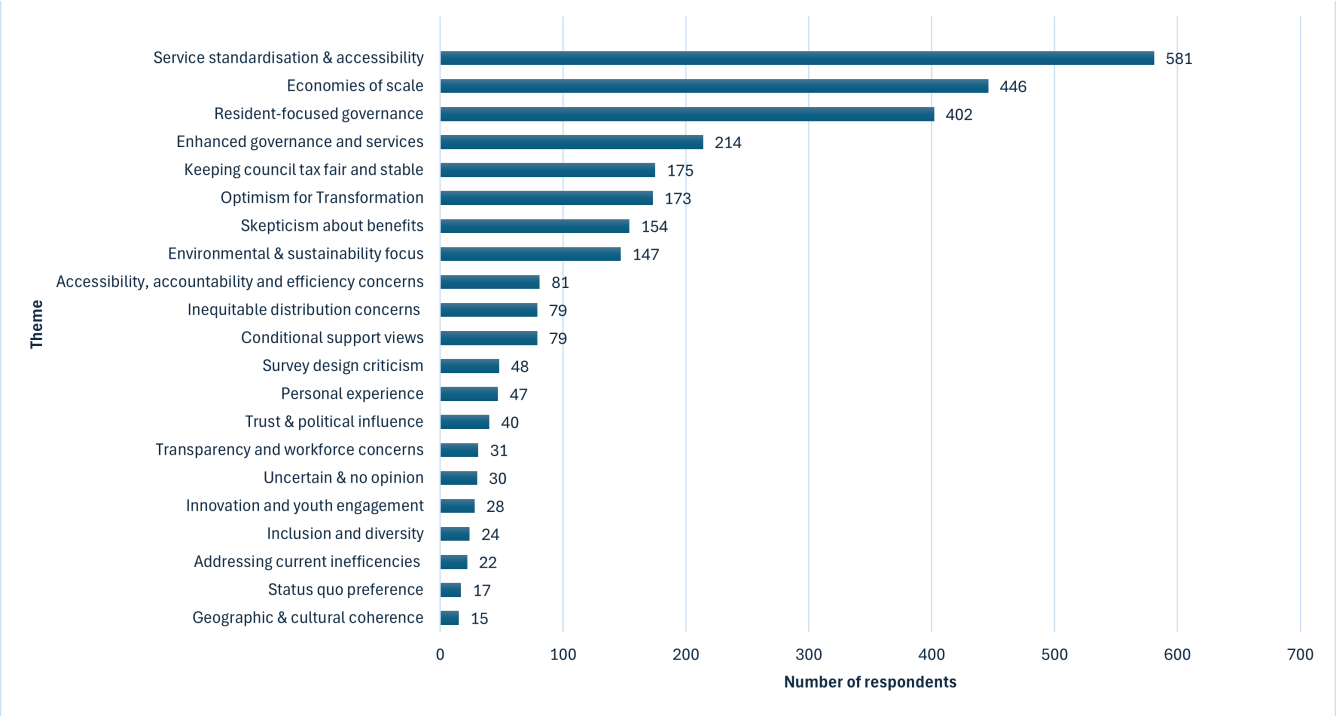
### The perspective of Kent residents

***Figure 14: What Kent residents value most about their local council***




Overall, the highest-rated aspects were service quality, efficiency and value, problem resolution time, decision-making influence and council tax amount.

***Figure 15:*** *Opportunities identified by Kent residents from local government reorganisation*

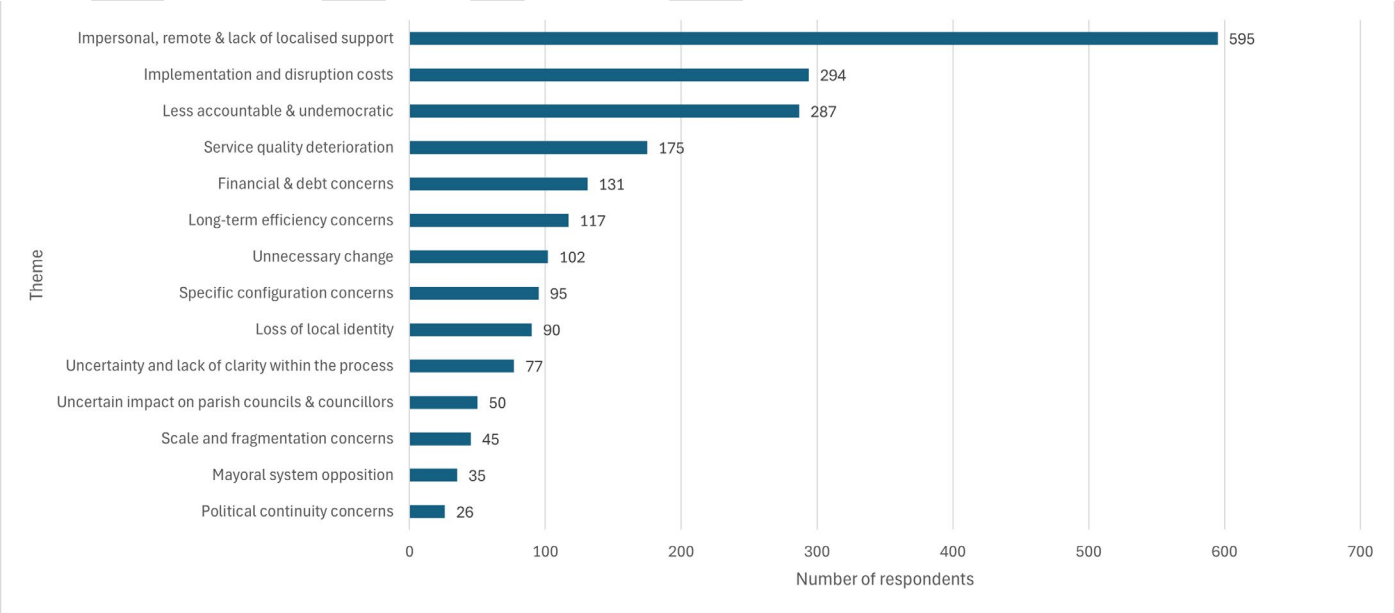



Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Participants identified economies of scale as another key opportunity of reorganisation, seeing it as a means to streamline operations, reduce bureaucracy and deliver better value and a fairer balance of power across areas.

*"This is a generational opportunity, use it wisely or it will slip away like the last one… this is a chance to make a council work in new and innovative ways delivering services fit for 2025 not 1980." – Kent resident*

***Figure 16:*** *Kent residents' concerns about local government reorganisation*



Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote with fears that larger councils could become disconnected from communities, particularly in rural and coastal areas.

Participants questioned whether the promised efficiencies would outweigh the significant costs of restructuring and expressed concern about potential service disruption.

There was some concern that reorganisation will undermine local democracy and some fears that larger councils could weaken local accountability, reduce democratic representation and limit residents' ability to influence decisions that affect their communities.

*"[I am concerned by] loss of local connection, information and knowledge… Impersonal services due to number of residents, vulnerable residents suffering and likely to be left behind. Reduced opportunities for employment locally with risk of redundancies and increasing levels of unemployment. Potential increase in levels of vulnerabilities and failings of individuals, households and families mental health, safeguarding and domestic abuse." – Kent resident*

**Overview of key themes that emerged from the resident research:**

1. Service quality is a top priority for residents, yet many are concerned that services will deteriorate throughout the reorganisation process

Service quality ranked as residents' top priority with 81.4% rating it very important and a further 7.5% as important, underlining the need to maintain reliable everyday services through LGR.

Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Overall, there is an expectation for high quality, reliable and effective council services.

Residents want services to be responsible to community needs and to support local economies.

There was a strong desire to see improvements in coordination of local services, particularly those that impact daily life such as waste collection, highways, social care and community safety.

*"My main priority is to have big enough bins that are emptied on a weekly basis. This is very important to me and my family due to the amount of medical waste we have as a result of chronic illness." – Kent resident*

Some residents expressed concern LGR will result in a decline in service quality across the board, driven primarily by cost cutting measures rather than genuine efficiency improvements.

There is some anxiety essential services including social care, special educational, needs, waste collection and community facilities will suffer as budgets are spread thinner across large populations and competing priorities.

Many respondents noted any short-term financial savings from reorganisation will be offset by transition costs and the loss of established relationships and local expertise, ultimately leaving residents paying more through increased council tax while receiving demonstrated demonstrably worse services.

*"I work in education in Medway, we also have pupils who reside in Kent. From my experience, current services for education (especially SEND) and social care provision are poor and do not meet need" - Kent resident*

2. Service quality and input into decision-making is of particular importance for residents with disabilities

Residents with disabilities and those with long-term health conditions prioritised both service quality and having meaningful influence over decisions, reflecting a desire for responsive, inclusive services and concerns about accessibility, loss of voice and potential disruption to existing support.

While service quality remains priority for people who consider themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition, they also put a strong emphasis on influencing decisions.

This may suggest disabled residents value both swift service resolution and meaningful say in decisions affecting them, possibly reflecting experiences of services sometimes being designed without adequate input from people with disabilities.

When asked to outline their concerns about local government reorganisation, one of the respondents who considered themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition said:

*"Ability to be heard and to influence decision making in a much larger council area; The loss of a local Council making decisions for local people; The possibility of the Council offices being located somewhere that I can't get to (I don't drive); The possibility of losing services currently provided." - Kent resident*

Residents with disabilities want to ensure their voices are included in the redesign process to ensure their perspectives can shape services and meaningfully influence decision-making.

*"As a disabled resident who is passionate about shaping policy, I believe local government reorganisation presents a vital opportunity to build a more inclusive and accessible system… I hope any new council structure prioritises digital accessibility, transparent decision-making, and proactive outreach to underrepresented voices. It's essential that disabled people can contact councillors easily, attend meetings remotely, and have their concerns heard without barriers. Efficiency and value for money are important, but so is ensuring that no one is left behind. I urge decision-makers to design councils that reflect the diversity of their residents—not just in services, but in how they engage and empower us. This reorganisation is also a chance to improve accountability."- Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 3 for further detail on the option-specific support high quality and sustainable service delivery.

3. Residents want to protect local identity, connection to community and democratic representation

Kent residents feel connected to their respective towns, villages and districts and want this to be reflected in new council arrangements.

67% of residents said a sense of belonging to their council area was important.

However, participants had concerns LGR will erode the distinct identities and characters of individual areas, towns and communities across Kent.

Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote.

Residents were worried councillors representing significantly larger populations will lack local knowledge and understanding of area-specific issues, making it harder for residents to reach their representatives and have their voices heard.

Some comments highlight fears that some areas, particularly rural and coastal communities, will be forgotten and abandoned in favour of larger urban areas.

*"Living in a rural area I consider that at larger authority including larger populated areas will mean our needs and wants are ignored." - Kent resident*

There is a desire for strong local representation.

Residents want to feel connected to their councillors and have confidence their voices will be heard and can shape their neighbourhoods.

68% of residents rated the ability to influence local decisions as very important.

Clear access to decision-makers and accountability in council actions was also highly valued by residents.

Residents emphasised the importance of maintaining a clear local voice in decision making and expressed concerns that larger councils may become distant and disconnected from the communities they serve.

*"If authorities are too large then councillors will have insufficient knowledge about the people they are representing and not be seen as part of their local community." - Kent resident*

Many expressed anxiety about the ability of a remote council to address everyday local concerns, with some noting that they already struggle to contact their current MPs due to large electorates and fear this problem will worsen.

There was concern amongst some residents that council offices may become physically inaccessible and that service quality may decline as decision-making becomes centralised among people unfamiliar with local needs and contexts.

*"Residents will have less representation and therefore local concerns or issues will not be sufficiently represented or addressed." - Kent Resident*

Notably, the ability to visit a council office, population size, ward size, attendance at council meetings and number of councillors were considered least important to residents when compared to other factors like service quality.

See Section 4: Criteria 1 for further detail on the model defines functional and coherent geographies and Section 4: Criteria 4 for further detail on how the model maintains local identity.

4. <u>Residents view local government reorganisation as an opportunity to deliver better economies of scale value for money, but many are concerned with the cost to transition</u>

Efficiency and value for money was the second highest priority among residents, with 74.3% rating it very important and 12.3% as important and residents expressing anxiety about costs and desire that promised savings materialise in practice.

*"The chance to simplify structures, reduce duplication, and make better use of resources across Kent and Medway. Clearer accountability for residents, with one council responsible for all services rather than multiple tiers… [as well as] efficiency and savings." - Kent resident*

Many participants viewed the reorganisation process as an opportunity to deliver more efficient, streamlined local government services that ultimately deliver better value for money for residents.

There was an expectation that reorganisation should bring economies of scale, reduce bureaucracy and ensure fairer balance of power across areas.

*"A single, unified authority could make it easier for people to understand who to turn to, and ensure that concerns are addressed without being passed between layers of bureaucracy." - Kent resident*

While many residents are hopeful about the potential benefits of reorganisation, some are concerned about the financial and operational cost of reorganisation, with many questioning whether the promised savings will ever materialise.

Participants were sceptical about transition costs, redundancies and systemic integration outweighing any efficiency gains, ultimately resulting in higher council tax for residents without any service improvements.

Comments highlight substantial anticipated expenses including restructuring, retaining and redundancy packages, IT system migrations, rebranding, new office infrastructure and external consultant fees.

*"My concerns relate to time and cost and how and the cost to Council Tax payers. With any reorganisation the short-term risk is always upheaval, delays in each council dealing with Business as unusual." - Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 2 for further detail on how the model supports resilient and efficient finances.

**The perspective of Kent partners and organisations**

There were shared perspectives across partner organisations and businesses:

1. <u>There is genuine recognition among many stakeholders that reorganisation could unlock efficiencies.</u>

Pooling resources, efficiency savings, reduced duplication, improved integration, stronger local voice, improved collaboration, joined-up policy making and clearer accountability were all highly referenced by stakeholders as potential benefits of reorganisation.

In particular, participants saw potential for improved mechanisms for communities to be heard, through co-production, forums or strengthened parish/town councils.

Economies of scale were also highly referenced. Participants acknowledged larger councils could enable efficiencies in back-office services, contracts and procurement, as well as recruitment and retention of specialist staff.

*"What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why? Duplication of services and confusion about which tier of local government is responsible for certain functions could be reduced. Larger councils may be able to pool resources to tackle county-wide issues such as major infrastructure or environmental challenges." - Kent partner*

2. <u>Many stakeholders were concerned that reorganisation could exacerbate inequalities</u>

Many stakeholders warned of risks relating to reduced local representation, loss of community identity, widening inequality, unresolved financial pressures and disruption to housing and estate management during transition.

Canterbury Foodbank raised concerns that reorganisation could worsen east/west inequality by separating poorer coastal areas from wealthier western districts.

They highlight new unitary authorities need strong, well-funded regional support to address inequalities.

*"There is a strong risk that unitary reorganisation will divide richer and poorer areas, so that the potential to cross-subsidise between areas of high social need (located mainly in the existing Thanet, Dovel, Folkestone and Hythe and Swale districts) and richer areas (Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells) is lost. At the same time opportunities to create high value-added employment in the poorer areas, whose economies currently rest on low-paid services (tourism, hospitality, social care) and primary sector agriculture will not exist." - Kent partner*

A concern of equality was also raised by a councillor who questions financial sustainability for the East Kent council, which concentrates the poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income.

There are concerns about resource allocation precision avoiding overlooked small, deprived areas and emphasis that local access points are essential for digitally-excluded residents.

3. There were concerns about loss of in-house heritage expertise and local heritage services.

Multiple stakeholders worried that community assets like parks, libraries or historic buildings could be sold off or transferred without adequate funding or consideration of their community.

Many also highlighted that geography should not be the sole driver of reorganisation.

Cultural identity, history, and existing community synergies were seen as equally important drivers e.g. coastal towns sharing challenges.

One stakeholder noted Canterbury's historic significance and other unique identities should be preserved:

*"That resources that people hold dear, such as the heritage in Canterbury or the coastal strip from Reculver to Seasalter, are not cherished in the same way in the unitary as they are in the district council." - Kent partner*

***Table 26: Nuanced feedback from stakeholders***

| Grouping | Key reflections from LGR | Verbatims |
|---|---|---|
| **Health** | • Stakeholders from the health sector emphasised opportunities for better integration if local government boundaries align with health and care partnership areas. The NHS trusts see potential for more seamless join working in social care, public health and prevention. | *"...we would value geographical alignment with NHS boundaries wherever possible and reasonable. Given that poor health is so strongly influenced by social factors, alignment facilitates coordination of approach."* |
| **Parish Councils** | • Parish councils highlighted community identity and local knowledge are essential to resident wellbeing, concerns that extend to fears about lost heritage expertise, potential sale of community assets and diluted local oversight over planning and service decisions. | *"Parish Councils occupy a unique and invaluable position within their communities. As elected representatives who live and work within the areas they serve, Parish Councillors have a direct connection with local residents and a deep* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Some stakeholders from parish councils emphasised parishes provide valued highly local, responsive community services and argue community identity is vital to resident wellbeing.<br>• Some acknowledged reorganisation could bring efficiency and clarity benefits, but stress local democracy or community identity should not be sacrificed in pursuit of these.<br>• They also emphasised parishes need proper recognition, empowerment and funding. | *understanding of their needs and concerns."* |
| **Councillors** | • Councillors were concerned that reduced councillor numbers and increased responsibilities may deter candidates and reduce local representation and loss of local knowledge among councillors. Residents<br>• Some respondents opposed abolishing district councils and list risks such as service disruption, higher costs and weaker democracy.<br>• A concern around equality was raised by a councillor who questioned the financial sustainability for an East Kent council concentrating poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income. | *"I am very concerned about using strategic planning and transport links on a wider scale to connect people to more places of value, build sustainable homes and vital infrastructure and bolster local growth. It is also important to me that we maintain local representation and community cohesion."* |
| **Housing** | • Stakeholders from the housing sector were concerned about service disruption during transition, delays to housebuilding, confusion over social housing priorities and potential disaggregation of county-wide social care services.<br>• An estate manager argued property management requires local knowledge and RICS regulations require surveyors to practice in known area and questions whether someone unfamiliar with an area can manage valuations accurately, maintain estates or prevent loss of land through statutory rights. | *"Potential problems which could be created… Delays to housebuilding if newly-created unitary authorities opt to abandon adopted or emerging local plans in favour of developing their own; Confusion amongst residents on the housing waiting list over how local government reorganisation might affect their priority for social housing…"* |
| **Education and skills** | • Further education leaders highlighted possibilities for coherent county-wide skills strategies and apprenticeship coordination that could better serve small-sized medium enterprises across Kent. | *"Ensuring consistency, equity, and adequate provision will require any new local authorities to have the capacity and expertise to properly co-ordinate* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • However, among other things, they also highlighted that the reorganisation may have implications for learners with high needs. | *and oversee High Needs responsibilities."* |

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# Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance

**Criteria 4b.** Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance

## Maintaining local identity across Kent

Kent is a large and diverse region with a rich history, strong civic traditions and distinct local identities.

From coastal towns and rural villages to historic market centres and modern urban hubs, the geography and culture of Kent have shaped how communities live, work and relate to their local institutions.

We know from engagement with our residents they associate their identify with their local town and not their local council.

They do not live their lives according to administrative boundaries.

Their daily experience is shaped by functional geographies – commuting patterns, access to hospitals, schools, and community services – that often extend beyond council borders.

The lived reality is that every road, bus route, and service network crosses boundaries.

New councils must recognise this and work together to create coherent, strategic plans that reflect how people move and access services.

This includes transport, health and preventative care, which are most effective when delivered through local, community-based interventions.

New councils must support both strategic coordination and planning across council boundaries and local responsiveness.




The proposed five-council model reflects the diversity of the place. It avoids arbitrary boundaries driven by administrative considerations and instead builds on established relationships between places, services and communities. Each council has been designed to support the integrity of towns and align them to coherent and recognisable geographies, supporting effective governance and strengthening civic pride.

We have avoided clusters which span long and unwieldy distances from one end of the county to the other. Instead, there is a natural separation between the five clusters, shaped by geographic

features. transport corridors, settlement patterns and cultural heritage. These divisions reflect how people identify with their local area and how services are accessed.

**Five new councils built on distinct and meaningful local identity**

**North Kent**

- North Kent accounts for an existing population of 330,536. This places the area inside the top-20 populated council sizes in England. North Kent's population is also one of the most culturally diverse in the region, with the most recent Census presenting 30% identifying as of non-white British ethnicity. Moreover, this level of diversity is increasing – 52% of school age children in Dartford for example are now classified as non-white British.
- Concentrated largely in the main urban settlements, North Kent is home to one of Europe's largest Sikh Gurdwara, an Afro-Caribbean community with direct descendants of the Windrush generation who landed just across the river at Tilbury, an active and engaged Muslim community, and a range of eastern European cultures.
- With a mean average age of less than 40, North Kent is also the youngest population in the county of Kent. Equally, it provides for the highest general fertility rate, well in excess of national and regional averages – a young, growing and increasingly diverse population.
- North Kent's demographic identity and characteristics including a diverse and young population generates very strong potential for good population growth into the future which will only boost and harness the diverse local identity of the area. This population growth is expected to be faster than West Kent opening potential for North Kent to establish a stronger foothold in the region.

**West Kent**

- West Kent covers the current districts of Maidstone, Sevenoaks (other than Swanley), Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells and covers a current population of 544,814.
- It offers a mix of rural and urban economies, a thriving visitor and tourism sector, with increasing focus on innovation and service industries.
- Defined by strategic connectivity and a highly skilled workforce, supporting professional services, life sciences and creative sectors.
- The area has a high proportion of knowledge-based employment and is well-positioned to attract inward investment from London and beyond.

**East Kent**

- East Kent covers the geographical areas of Faversham, Canterbury and Thanet and accounts for an existing population of 342,934, placing it inside the top-20 populated council sizes in England. Across the areas, the Census 2021 data identified East Kent as having a largely white population, although Canterbury has the highest number of residents from Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups across Kent as a whole.
- Between the 2011 and 2021 Census, the population in East Kent grew from 303,959 to 318,936, representing a 4.9% increase over the period. This is below the equivalent South East (7.5%) and England averages (6.6%). The population

density across the area varies, with the far east of the area among the top 40% most densely populated English local authority areas at the last census, whereas the further west you go the population density decreases, with some areas being amongst the lowest 45% densely populated areas.

- Across the area, there is an ageing population with the number of people aged 65 to 74 years increasing by an estimated 24% between the 2011 and 2021 census.

- East Kent's population projected population growth will continue to grow the diversity of the region particularly in Canterbury and in the far east region. This growth will benefit the region economically and cement the regions sense of local identity boosting community engagement and productivity.

**Mid Kent**

- Mid Kent accounts for an existing population of 340,286. This places the area inside the top-20 populated council sizes in England. As with other areas within the Thames Estuary, Mid-Kent's population is culturally diverse, particularly in the urban centres of Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham. Across the area, Census 2021 identified Mid Kent as having significant Asian, black and eastern European communities.

- Mid Kent's population also presents significant diversity in demographic outcomes. Between the 2011 and 2021 Census, the population in the west of the area increased at approximately 6.0%, below the equivalent South East (7.5%) and England averages (6.6%). Despite this, the west presents among the top 40% most densely populated English local authority areas.

- Conversely, over the same period, the east of the area increased at approximately 11%, well ahead of comparable positions, yet is identified as within the lowest 40% of most densely populated areas nationally.

- Collectively, a diverse and evolving population, with real potential for further growth.

**South Kent**

- South Kent accounts for an existing population of 373,115. This places the area inside the top-15 populated council sizes in England.

- The area presents as the least ethnically diverse within Kent, with outturns considerably below local, regional and national averages. Of those residents with a minority ethnicity, the largest representation in South Kent is of Asian and eastern European communities.

- South Kent presents a balanced demographic position, but with significant variance within its borders. The area surrounding Ashford is a comparatively much younger and rapidly growing population. With an average age of 41, population increased by 12.5% between the 2011 and 2021 Census, well in excess of comparative regional and national positions. Conversely, the coastal areas surrounding Dover and Folkestone and Hythe increased by only 3% over the period, and present average ages of 46 and 47 respectively.

- Despite these nuances, South Kent does present a shared characteristic in regard to population density, registering as within the top-30% least dense

populations in the country – collectively, a balanced demographic with significant scope for population growth.

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# Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

This section includes:


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|---|---|
| Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent | Criteria 5a, 5b |
| Population sizes that support devolution | Criteria 5c |


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# Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent

**Criteria 5a.** Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.

**Criteria 5b.** Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.

**All of Kent's councils recognise the critical need to devolve powers to a strategic authority to unlock public sector reform and empower decisions about Kent to be made in Kent. The vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport, and the benefits it would bring across Kent in terms of accelerating public service reform, cannot be underestimated. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve life chances for the residents and businesses of Kent and Medway.**

## A devolution deal for Kent

We were disappointed to not be accepted onto the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and have been pressing the case with ministers and MHCLG to understand the path towards devolution in Kent.

This is particularly important in light of the critical role Kent plays in national infrastructure and border management, and the opportunities that arise from a strategic county-wide approach being taken on economic growth, education and skills.

## Partner support

Key local public sector partners - the Chief Executives and Chairs of the ICB, health and care partnerships and acute trusts, the Chancellors/Vice Chancellors of the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and Greenwich University which has a campus within Kent, the Chairs of the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, Business Advisory Board and Kent Invicta Chamber, the Chief Executives of Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover and the Chairs of the Kent Housing Group and Kent Developers Group - all share our concerns that reorganisation in Kent without devolution would result in a piecemeal approach and sub-optimal transformation.

## Timelines that work for both priorities

Aligning the timeline for the creation of a strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services through localised arrangements only to reaggregate services into a strategic authority shortly after.

This two-stage piecemeal approach would generate additional cost, complexity and create further disruption to staff and services as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government in delivering national objectives and policies.

Kent's district and borough councils and Medway strongly support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority at the first available opportunity in April 2028 to operate alongside the new unitary authorities.

Government support and agreement for devolution to be aligned with local government reorganisation in Kent will enable effective transition planning of key services resulting in a seamless transition, enabling synergies in programme management and leadership capacity while providing clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government and devolution opportunities will be embraced in Kent.

Clarity for partners is critical given our deep ambitions regarding public service reform at the earliest opportunity.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving outcomes.

Kent is a natural fit for devolution as critical partners already work coterminously with the footprint of the strategic authority including Kent Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the integrated care board and many voluntary and community service organisations.

A failure to bring forward devolution simultaneously alongside reorganisation in Kent represents a significant additional cost pressure through missed opportunities, delay, disruption and duplication of effort.

The proposals for LGR in Kent and Medway directly address the rationale given by MHCLG for excluding Kent and Medway from the DPP, namely addressing population disparity imbalance between the area of Kent and the unitary authority of Medway.

We urge ministers to accelerate devolution in Kent to meet the timescale we have proposed as this will deliver the greatest opportunity for successful public sector reform.

**Enabling strategic leadership through a regional governance model**

A strategic authority across Kent and Medway provides a real opportunity to strengthen Kent as a whole and to focus the role of unitary authorities on their delivery role.

The strategic authority will take a strategic role across Kent including:

- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

A Mayor for Kent will provide a clear single voice for the region, support inward investment and ensure the county punches its weight on the national and international stages.

Kent requires a voice on the Council of the Nations and Regions, not only for its size but also for the critical role it plays in national infrastructure, travel and borders.

This high-profile leadership role with government will support growth in Kent and, through the national role, address a gap that would otherwise be apparent in addressing national priorities.

The future councils will be balanced and powerful constituent authorities on the strategic authority, alongside the mayor, and will provide the voice for their distinct economic areas.

We know from existing combined authorities that a single strategic approach does not mean that one size fits all.

A Kent strategic authority will also enable the councils to focus on effective local delivery and deep public service reform on an appropriate footprint.

The councils will have different strengths and needs, local partnerships and communities they represent.

A strategic authority will provide clear overall direction and coherence, enabling councils to focus delivery in their local area which will mean they can become more agile through a place-based approach within a larger strategic framework.

**Progress towards devolution**

Despite not being on the DPP, we have continued to develop our approach to devolution in Kent to enable us to rapidly take advantage of the opportunity when provided.

We have started work to agree our vision and strategic intent regarding devolution and the role and purpose of the strategic authority in delivering it, and the most effective relationship required with the constituent councils.

We are refreshing our shared priorities by identifying critical strategic challenges and opportunities requiring a strategic and Kent-wide approach.

Following MHCLG support for our devolution approach, we will finalise the preferred structure and identify the processes and resources required to integrate into the combined LGR and devolution implementation programme.

This will enable us to prepare the ground for the Mayoral Strategic Authority, develop the early investment programme and begin development of the statutory policy framework.

This will set robust foundations for the mayoral election and strategic authority to vest in April 2028.

# Population sizes that support devolution

**Criteria 5c**. Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

**Truly local authorities**

Building five councils across Kent and Medway will ensure Kent councils can be truly localised and connected to resident needs. The framework of a strategic authority allows the five authorities to be truly local and to best reflect the communities that they represent. These five councils are based on the real communities and places of Kent, not aiming for data-driven balance or to meet a certain population threshold.

**Strong governance and healthy decision-making**

Five councils as constituent members to the Strategic Authority provides strong decision-making. More constituent authorities provide stronger governance, debate and decision-making whilst smaller member combined authorities have struggled with making decisions due to operating more like a partnership. Greater Manchester, as the trailblazer for devolution in the UK, has 10 constituent authorities for a population which is only a third larger than Kent. Five councils in Kent provides the right footprint for a strong devolved authority.

**Future-proof**

Five councils in Kent reflects the growth patterns that we are forecasting in the next 50 years. While the west Kent authority is larger by population, future growth is constrained as it has been well developed. There is significant growth expected across the other councils so councils with an average size of 386k people are the right footprint to enable future growth without putting undue pressure on services.  This is significantly larger than the average population of a unitary council so has sufficient scale to succeed but without limiting the growth that we expect across Kent.

# **Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

This section includes:


| | |
|---|---|
| **Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent** | **Criteria 6a, 6b** |
| **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)** | **Criteria 6a, 6b** |


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# Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent

**Criteria 6a:** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

**Criteria 6b:** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment are central to achieving our LGR objectives in Kent. Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) represent a powerful opportunity to transform how communities take part in local decision-making.**

**Through LGR in Kent, communities will have a stronger voice within their new councils and with partners. We will ensure local insights shape discussions between unitary authorities and service providers, while building on and strengthening existing approaches that are already working well.**

Effective local government is a function of the relationships between elected members, service provision, residents and communities.

Empowered, engaged communities know who they are and what they need.

They know what services are available in their area and they expect to co-design and shape those services.

They see and know their councillors and local service providers.

And they are not afraid to share their perspectives and they are confident they will be heard.

Councils at all levels across Kent and Medway have longstanding commitments to community engagement via county-wide initiatives such as Crowdfund Kent, district and borough forums like the Thanet Youth Council and direct grants for local organisations from parish and town councils like Faversham.

At the heart of this commitment lies a requirement to use LGR as an opportunity to work differently by tempering the tension between the economies and resilience that come with delivering at scale and the granular responsiveness and relevance that thrives on close working with each community.

Having fewer, single-tier councils offers greater opportunities for scaled models, consistent investment of resources and potentially smoother co-operation with statutory partners.

Conversely, a larger number of smaller councils provides a stronger basis to co-design locally-specific services that adapt to communities' distinct needs and priorities.

Regardless of the model selected by government, councils will deliver stronger community engagement and enable genuine neighbourhood empowerment, bringing decisions closer to communities and ensuring services are relevant, joined-up and efficient.

To do this, Kent recognises it requires a new vehicle for community engagement that is at once locally rooted and strategically impactful.

This is the Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC), a neighbourhood hub for partnership working and co-production that unites communities, elected unitary and town and parish councillors and service partners. NACs, working alongside service providers as well as unitary and town and parish councillors, will enable LGR to realise the generational opportunity to improve community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

Alongside the major changes to our council structures, this vehicle will support communities to be closer, more informed and more empowered in the decisions affecting them.

The participation of services will ensure NACs convert local perspectives into meaningful influence, while representation from town and parish councillors will allow close coordination and alignment with local governance and priorities.

Therefore, we have assessed our plans to enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment using three key criteria:

- will the reforms enable communities to make their voice heard by their unitary authority and by partners delivering services?
- will they enable unitary authorities to work effectively with service providers in response to insights from community engagement?
- will they allow unitary authorities to build effectively on community engagement approaches that are already working?

**Five councils closer to communities**

Five councils across Kent that are built around existing community structures and travel patterns, Option 5A presents the best opportunity to properly empower cohesive communities. Moreover, in operating with community partners in neighbourhoods and the most local levels, compared to the other proposals for Kent Option 5A helps localise service delivery and deliver better opportunities for place-based public service reform.

Councils aligned with Health and Care Partnership boundaries provides the right basis for neighbourhood working in line with the future of the NHS. Being able to align health and social care teams focused on communities and individuals enables more focused and targeted prevention and early intervention and place-based support. This will enable councils to pay less for better outcomes by designing services that are both reflective of the needs of local people and equally fully informed of the strengths in the local community they serve.

**These five councils retain and will foster strong partnerships to connect communities.**

There are many established partnerships that work well across Kent including shared services between councils, partnerships with the voluntary and community sector and work with health and care partners. By building upon the natural boundaries of the area Option 5A retains many of those partnerships while providing a single authority with which they can work. This is a clear footprint for strengthening those partnerships and embarking on more ambitious public service reform to improve outcomes for our residents.

**Five councils supported by historic and community links**

The five-council arrangement will restore historical and present local identities particularly in the North Kent region. Option 5A will reflect the historic split of Medway by the River Medway whilst also bring Swanley closer to Dartford. Swale will also be split in accordance with historic arrangements with West Swale facing Medway and East Swale facing the Faversham area. Re-alignment to historic ties is important as it respects long held generational identities in the North Kent area. The boundary changes also open up opportunities for districts to establish partnerships that were proven to be logical prior to the previous LGR in 1974.

The five-council arrangement reflects our peoples close connections to their Deaneries. The proposed boundary changes in Option 5A reflect the deanery groupings shown in Figure 18. Retaining our people's connections to their deaneries is critical in retaining a sense of local identity, fostering stronger communities and boosting community engagement.

***Figure 17: Map of deaneries in Kent***

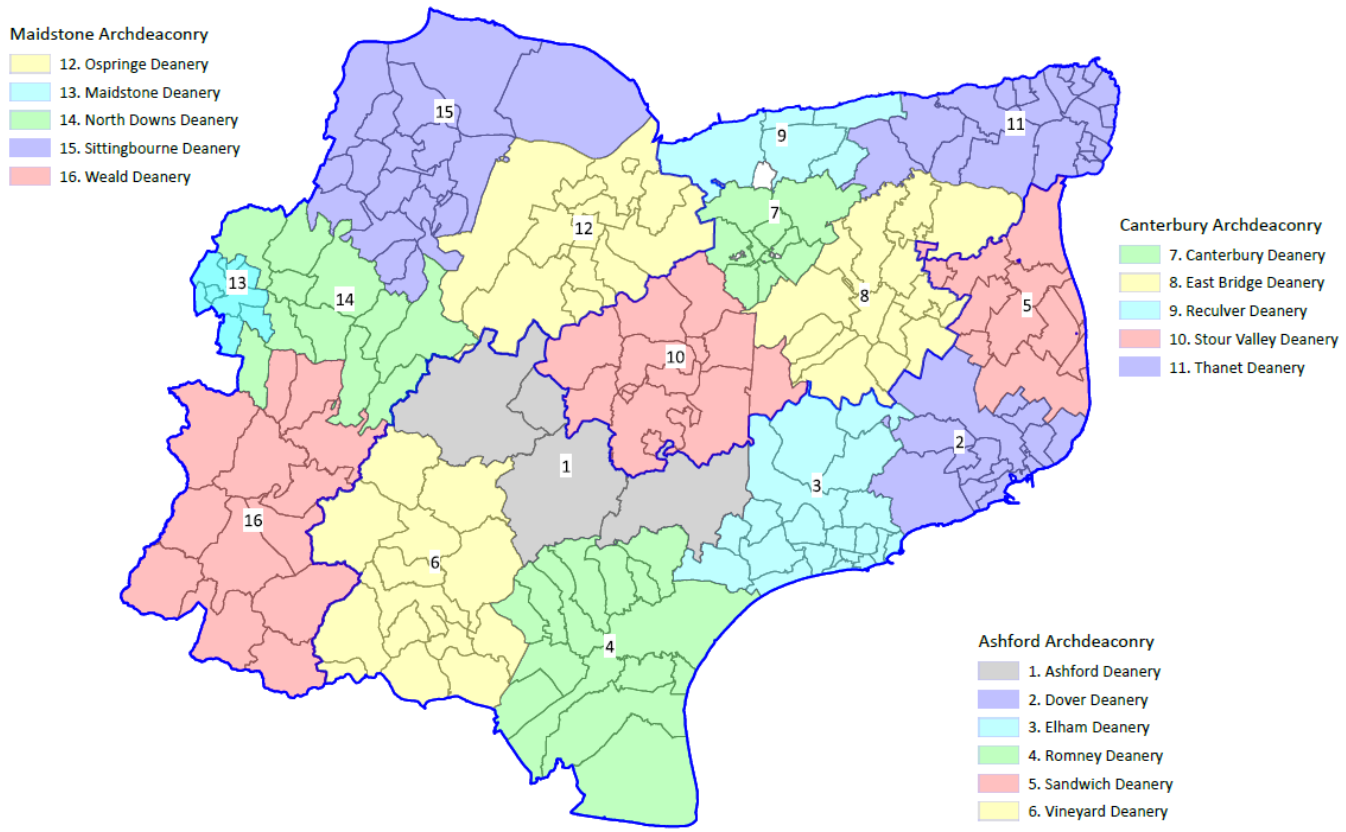



***Table 27: Existing partnerships strengthened by Option 5A***

| | **Existing partnerships** |
|---|---|
| **North Kent** | • Aligns with the Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley Health and Care Partnership.<br>• Largely aligns with the Kent Thameside Enhanced Partnership.<br>• Citizens Advice in North & West Kent (CANWK) is an independent charity that supports people to understand services relating to benefits, debt & money, housing/homelessness, employment, immigration, energy and consumer rights.<br>• North West Kent Countryside Partnership (NWKCP) conserves and the natural and cultural heritage and biodiversity of the area. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Kent Housing Group acts as a collective voice on housing strategy in the region. |
| **West Kent** | • Aligns with the West Kent Health and Care Partnership.<br>• Largely aligns with the West Kent Enhanced Partnership.<br>• Aligns with the South West Kent Waste Partnership.<br>• Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Councils formed a Procurement Partnership in February 2024.<br>• Aligns with Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, a non-profit organisation dedicated to environmental conservation in the boroughs of Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling.<br>• Aligns with West Kent Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Service (DAVSS) who provide invaluable advice and support to anyone in the West Kent area.<br>• Invest West Kent has been set up by the three West Kent local authorities (Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells) to facilitate both inward investment and growth of existing businesses in the region.<br>• The Licensing Partnership is enjoying its sixth year of running a successful partnership carrying out the management of three Licensing Teams and the administration of all processes and issuing of licences, permits and notices for Maidstone Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. |
| **East Kent** | • Reflects the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay Special Protection Area. |
| **Mid Kent** | • Partly aligns with the Medway and Swale Health and Care Partnership – though the Partnership spans the River Medway while the proposed council uses the river as a natural boundary.<br>• Reflects the operations of the Medway Swale Estuary Partnership a not-for-profit organisation currently hosted by Medway Council but funded through project delivery. |
| **South Kent** | • Reflects the East Kent Waste Partnership incorporating Joint Working Agreement.<br>• Reflects the operations of the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to preserving and enhancing the distinctive countryside and coastline of the local area for the benefit of both wildlife and people.<br>• Reflects the White Cliffs Community Rail Partnership is a partnership collaborating with Dover District Council along with Folkestone & Hythe District Council, White Cliffs Countryside Partnership, Dover Town Council, Sandwich Town Council, Folkestone Town Council, Deal Town Council, Southeastern, Network Rail and Community Rail Network.<br>• Reflects the Strategic Investment Plan for Transport for the South East across Ashford and Folkestone and Hythe. This plan determines the investment needed to grow the South East's economy and deliver a high-quality, safe, sustainable and integrated transport system that makes the South East more productive and competitive, improves the quality of life for all residents, and protects and enhances its natural and built environment. |

# Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)

**Criteria 6a:** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

**Criteria 6b:** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are Kent's preferred model for strengthening local engagement through LGR. Led by ward councillors, NACs connect communities with services and decision-making, adapting to local needs and ambitions. They integrate town and parish councils, statutory services, and community groups. Their success will depend on inclusive engagement, strong local partnerships and responsiveness to community priorities.**

## Role of NACs

Central government has made clear that Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) are the preferred way for Local Authorities to 'hardwire community engagement into their own structures'[45] through LGR.

Led by ward councillors, NACs are seen as maximising the structural efficiencies brought about by LGR and strengthening localism and community participation across all areas.

Our approach takes advantage of this opportunity to realise these benefits in ways that meet our distinctive Kent context.

This approach has been the prevailing view amongst Kent Leaders and officers during recent engagement with stakeholders

Kent's NACs will be a central hub for local partnership working, connecting residents and communities with services and their council.

Each NAC will identify its initial priorities, which may be specific local issues with significant opportunity to flex new powers and responsibilities around new solutions.

Over time, we anticipate NACs will gravitate towards more strategic arrangements between partners across their areas of responsibility.

NACs will be able to take on different levels of responsibility and decision-making in response to the size and ambition of their area.

Some may begin as largely advisory and consultative, acting as an effective platform to communicate local perspectives to strategic forums in the new unitary authority and other statutory partners.

[45] MHCLG, 'Local government reorganisation: summary of feedback on interim plans', available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-summary-of-feedback-on-interim-plans/local-government-reorganisation-summary-of-feedback-on-interim-plans

Others may request and receive devolved responsibility and budget from their unitary authority.

We want to see NACs tending towards taking on more devolved responsibilities as they develop more mature local ways of working.

**Membership of NACs**

Elected unitary authority councillors will be the anchors of their NAC, ensuring that democratic accountability is central to local collaboration and delivery, and while making listening, understanding, and advocacy integral to their role.

As well as unitary councillors, NACs will include representation from town and parish councils where applicable and statutory services such as police, health, children's and family services.

Residents' associations and business groups will be encouraged to attend, as will Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, to ensure local perspectives and needs are well represented.

Precise membership of each NAC will vary depending on the needs and context of that community but all should enable participation by individual members of the public.

**Scale and local adaptations**

Kent's NACs need to be effective neighbourhood structures.

As such, they need to cover a small enough population for a clear local identity to apply.

NACs in cities are likely to cover a larger population than those in villages, for example.

We will work with stakeholders to identify NAC boundaries and these will be informed by other neighbourhood-level footprints such as primary care networks which cover 30,000 to 50,000 residents.

These areas will cover substantially smaller geographies than those of statutory services and the unitary authorities and NACs will need to work with statutory partners to develop and iterate effective models of engagement.

On the other hand, NACs will cover a substantially larger population than most town and parish councils.

It is recommended these work in clusters to engage with this model.

Across Kent, different community engagement models are in use.

These need to shape NAC formation so that the new NACs work 'with the grain' of local energy and trust.

**Integrating NACs and town and parish councils**

Town and parish councillors will be core members of well-functioning NACs.

The pivotal and established role that Kent's 317 town and parish councils play in community engagement in Kent will remain critical for any new council model.

These hyper-local councils, covering an average population of just over 5,000, are the closest tier of government to residents.

They provide an irreplaceable platform for direct interaction and feedback, and they will allow this representation to be sustained through the disruption and change of LGR.

Town and parish councils in Kent convene and facilitate face-to-face and online discussions and allow residents to ask questions, make suggestions and raise concerns in a setting that ensures their local context is respected and understood.

These forums empower communities and clearly position their unique needs and priorities within broader governmental decisions.

No other level of civic engagement can match their capacity to help smaller towns and villages retain their distinct identity.

Kent's local councils have widely varying numbers of town and parish councils (see below), due to population size and historical context.

Approximately six to 10 town or parish councils might expect to cluster into each NAC, though this will vary in accordance with local need and context.

| Council area | Town and parish councils[46] |
|---|---|
| Ashford | 42 |
| Canterbury | 26 |
| Dartford | 8 |
| Dover | 35 |
| Folkestone and Hythe | 29 |
| Gravesham | 5 |
| Maidstone | 40 |
| Medway | 11 |
| Sevenoaks | 31 |
| Swale | 37 |
| Thanet | 10 |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 27 |
| Tunbridge Wells | 16 |
| **Total** | **317** |

**Creating the conditions for community empowerment**

NACs can be a powerful structure to drive community and neighbourhood empowerment in Kent, but success depends on three key conditions for success:

1) inclusive community engagement
2) being rooted in communities and existing structures
3) the ability to drive strategic impact

[46] Borough, District, and Unitary Authority websites

| Conditions for success | How this can be achieved in Kent |
|---|---|
| **1. Inclusive community engagement** | • **Embed openness, inclusion, and co-production** as foundational operational principles. Where communities feel 'done to' they vote with their feet, causing meaningful initiatives to wither on the vine. NACs' membership structures and role provide a context for genuine inclusion and co-production. NAC chairs and councillors must visibly and consistently model these values or participation from day one or participation risks quickly reverting to previous levels. This includes allowing NACs to form on different timelines depending on local appetite and capacity.<br>• **Resource communities to shape their NAC's scope and priorities**: Having the authority and resources to make a difference is at the heart of localism. Clear, permissive frameworks will support NACs to use their knowledge to define and tackle the subjects that matter to them.. NACs will be encouraged and supported, with the potential for seed funding and officer support where appropriate, to explore co-production and participatory models in the design and commissioning of services.<br>• **Poor transport links and digital isolation may hamper participation in rural or deprived communities**. And some places will have less past experience of collective action and deliberation. NACs will need support to work through these questions.<br>• **Confusion or cynicism borne of past restructures may demotivate communities** and prevent engagement. NACs and councils must be transparent about the rationale and roadmap for change and demonstrate with actions that NACs represent a real opportunity to make a difference. |
| **2. Drive strategic impact** | • Unitary authorities will need a **sustained commitment to gather and listen to NAC feedback** when developing strategies. The new councils will need structures and practices that embed listening and learning from NACs which should become advisory partners in policy formation.<br>• NACs will need to be supported and empowered in ways that acknowledge historic inequalities.<br>  ○ Given Kent's diversity, some NACs will need participation and resourcing mechanisms that take account of differences in civic capacity and social infrastructure, including additional capacity-building support.<br>  ○ Unitary authorities will need to be willing to listen closely to quieter voices from less well-resourced communities. |
| **3. Rooted in communities and existing groups** | • Accessible, skilled, and informed unitary and town/parish councillors<br>  ○ NACs will need **councillors who are skilled at local convening, mediating, and building coalitions for action**, sometimes in new ways. To support this, future councils will invest in updated councillor development programmes that include community leadership and co-production methods. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | ○ **Councillors will need access to local intelligence and data**, ensuring they can respond with insight and evidence to residents' concerns.<br>○ **Councillor remuneration and practical support** will need to be reviewed where new expectations on councillors' time exceed current commitments.<br>• A sustainable ecosystem of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations<br>○ **Strong and resilient VCSE partners are essential** for translating local priorities into tangible outcomes. Kent's small and medium size VCSEs, which will be vital delivery partners, sources of local insight and anchors of community trust within thriving NACs, are collectively experiencing significant financial strain with more closing than opening in recent years[47].<br>○ Unitary authorities will **build on existing work to strengthen local VCSEs**, and NACs will have an important role to play in amplifying VCSE insights and supporting the commissioning of smaller organisations.<br>• Boundaries that promote local engagement and strategic influence<br>• Unitary authorities will need to **develop boundaries that balance competing requirements** in order to unite meaningful communities with shared concerns, and to be coterminous with statutory and other partner geographies (for example, GPs and primary care networks) to support partner participation and dialogue. Community Governance Reviews going on across the region should also be considered in this process. |

[47] KCC, Headline analysis of the voluntary and community sector in Kent, available online at: https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/61718/Kent-voluntary-sector.pdf

# Section 6: Implementation plan

This section includes:

## Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)

## Programme governance and workstreams

## Summary risks and mitigations

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# Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)

## Joint implementation planning across Kent

We are operating a shared programme across all Kent authorities including a Steering Group, Programme Board and have a mature programme team with shared funding operating across all councils.

We have a long history of working across councils which is a very strong foundation to start our LGR journey from.

We bring significant momentum, shared understanding and common purpose that we will maintain into the future phases of the work.

We have worked extensively with colleagues from previous LGR programmes to discuss their approach and lessons that we can take into our implementation approach for Kent.

Our approach is guided by prudence regarding the scale and complexity of Kent but also ambition regarding public service reform and the role that an effective and efficient reorganisation can play in it.

Our approach is designed to implement reorganisation alongside devolution and the establishment of a Strategic Authority across Kent (see Criteria 5 for more detail).

There are significant synergies from operating a combined devolution and LGR programme where they can be done in parallel.

## Implementation principles for LGR in Kent

We have established principles to guide our approach to implementation and to ensure it is aligned with our wider public service reform ambitions. We will:

1) maintain and enhance our collaborative approach
2) ensure LGR decisions enable the bigger picture of devolution and public service reform
3) plan ahead and communicate
4) engage and co-create with partners and residents
5) support staff and partners on the journey
6) minimise disruption to staff and residents
7) establish governance to ensure delivery
8) transparent decision-making
9) be ambitious in what we can achieve beyond safe and legal
10) Keep provision of services to residents at the forefront of decision-making

## The phases of LGR

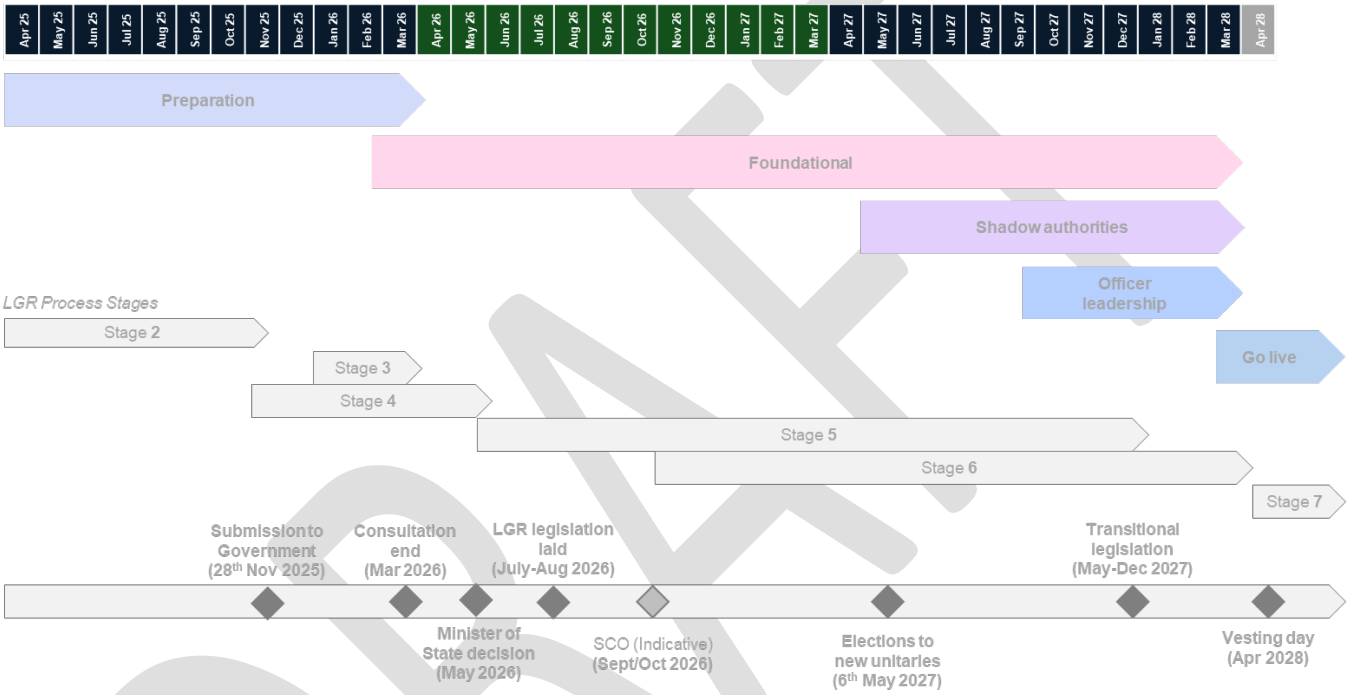
We understand the distinct phases that an LGR programme requires, the relative governance, priorities and resourcing required to make them a success.

Through working with colleagues who have delivered LGR and MHCLG officials we have developed a timeline for reorganisation which maps our phases onto the stages outlined by MHCLG.

We have transitioned our programme approach from development of this proposal into establishing the programme management that we will require through the preparation phase.

The plan and our advance preparation will enable us to deliver efficiently and continue engagement and consistent communication with partners and staff.

This will maintain the resilience of local government and maximise the benefits of reorganisation in Kent throughout the process.




1. **Preparation** Before a decision on the shape of the new councils. We have started work on implementation early to set it up for success. We have a plan for Day One and are ambitious to deliver strong, cohesive councils to deliver transformation and public service reform beyond safe and legal transition. We will appreciate a timely ministerial decision to enable us to move beyond this phase.

2. **Foundational** When a decision on the shape of the new councils has been made, initially before the election of shadow members or appointment of officer leadership.

3. **Shadow authorities** With members elected but only with programme or unofficial groupings of officers for capacity.

4. **Officer leadership** When statutory and senior officers have been appointed and can prepare the new councils working with the appointed councillors.

5. **Go-live** After vesting day when the councils deliver services.

There are fundamentals that will remain in place throughout the reorganisation process:

- staff support and communication
- communication with partners and residents
- access to the right skills and capacity
- clarity on Day 1 requirements and target state
- management of programme creep and over-optimism
- change management
- collaboration and ownership

In addition, these are the summary priorities by phase:

| Phase | Summary priorities |
|---|---|
| **Preparation** | • Collaborative service working – identifying opportunities, risks and shared understanding<br>• Set up the programme (governance, workstreams and finance)<br>• Recruit Strategic Partner(s)<br>• Agree target position for Day One and scenario planning<br>• Set up the plan, timeline and critical path including provisional Day One requirements and milestones<br>• Set up a data hub - gather and maintain consistent programme data<br>• Define and agree scope of LGR-related decisions with sovereign councils |
| **Foundational** | • Adapting programme to specific milestones<br>• Commencing Day One programme plan (what is in appropriate scope of the programme e.g. ICT infrastructure, treatment of systems and contracts)<br>• Service alignment and transformation including reconfiguring existing area based working arrangements to match boundaries of new councils<br>• Options appraisals and preparing for key decisions<br>• Elections<br>• Compliance with Structural Changes Order and legal checks and assurance<br>• Project plan for safely winding down sovereign authorities |
| **Shadow authorities** | • Continuing delivery of Day One programme plan<br>• Appointing Chief Executives and statutory and leadership roles<br>• Member inductions and service briefings<br>• Key decision timetable<br>• TUPE transfer arrangements |
| **Officer leadership** | • Tier 2 and Tier 3 Leadership Recruitment<br>• Service planning<br>• Development of council plan, budget MTFP<br>• Key policies and strategies (strategic priorities and corporate plans, unitary strategic risk register, constitution)<br>• Operating model and staffing allocations |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Preparing for Day One and alignment with Day One vision and change (particularly for vulnerable people and those reliant on services for health and wellbeing). |
| **Go-live** | • Stability and seamless experience<br>• Improvement and post-LGR transformation planning |

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# Programme governance and workstreams

We will operate an LGR Programme Board across Kent and Medway which will report to the existing Leaders group, though acknowledging it does not have decision-making powers, and in due course into Joint Committees.

This Board will include the Chief Executives and Programme Director and will oversee the programme and address strategic issues and risks.

We will establish a Day One Board to focus on managing delivery of the programme plan following the ministerial decision.

This will include tracking progress against milestones and completion of Day One requirements.

We have set up workstreams with Chief Executive sponsors and agreed engagement principles regarding representation from authorities as service leads and on workstreams.

We will set up unitary delivery groups to focus on issues specific to each new council including elections, council plan, member induction, policies and culture.

These groups will increase in importance when working to shadow authorities and when interim heads of paid service are appointed but by starting early, we are setting the councils up for success.

## Our workstreams

We know the importance of operating a single programme across Kent to drive consistency, efficiency and to address challenges where possible.

Our workstreams will cover services and the following key themes:




We will establish Unitary Delivery Groups to focus on preparations for the new councils.

These are collaborative by definition and will be agile to take advantage of opportunities that may arise but relate to one of the new councils individually.

These workstreams will evolve and governance structures will develop to support the Shadow Authorities and establish the new authorities when permanent officers are appointed.

## Stakeholder engagement

We know we need to work closely with partners, staff and residents to avoid LGR having negative impacts on the quality or resilience of services in Kent.

We know we need to communicate early, clearly and transparently with partners and provide opportunities for co-creation and innovation to improve how we work and set the right foundations for public service reform.

We are liaising with stakeholders and are developing an engagement plan to ensure proactive, timely and constructive conversation with stakeholders.

**Our ambition for Day One**

To deliver a seamless transition from the perspective of our residents where those who rely on public services for their health or wellbeing continue to be protected.

We will lay the foundations for improved collaboration across the public sector and harnessing the benefits of transformation.

**Our progress on implementation**

From our experience of reorganisation, we know the value of starting early.

We have a head start as we already work closely together and have a number of shared services, roles and contracts aligned with the new unitary structures.

To build upon this we are working collaboratively to:

- map our ICT infrastructure and enterprise architecture
- set up unitary delivery groups to identify and take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities such as shared roles or where contracts or licenses are expiring
- map our contracts to inform integration opportunities
- bring our service leads together to compare policies and processes and to identify opportunities
- clean up and standardise data across Kent
- establish a Project Management Office
- identify skills and capacity requirements to deliver the programme
- consider further shared roles and skills sharing across councils
- develop a datahub to drive forward the LGR process
- agree how sovereign councils in Kent will operate prior to vesting day
- maintain and transition our LGR programme Board and tools to power the programme
- stakeholder and resident engagement and a significant communications programme

# Summary risks and mitigations

We understand the risks LGR presents and are already working to mitigate them through our programme structure and approach:

- **Disaggregation** – we understand the challenge and risk of disaggregating key services and that this will take up significant programme capacity. We are planning early regarding Day One requirements and supporting services with significant capacity from workstreams to enable them to focus on their specific requirements.
- **Aggregation** – aggregating services requires alignment of policies, processes and systems in addition to fundamentals like organisational culture and ICT infrastructure. These can take time but are critical to achieving the benefits of local government reorganisation.
- **ICT capacity** – ICT is a key service, workstream and enabler of all services and elements of the programme and is a risk to the safe and legal function of the new councils.
- **Collaboration** – LGR requires collaboration across councils, tiers of local government, across political parties and with partners. We are mitigating this through:
    - Building on existing close working arrangements;
    - Developing 'no regrets activities' – a set of actions and decisions that we can deliver across Kent that will benefit the programme regardless of future decision;
    - Discussing protocols for how we will approach LGR.

We know the value of 'good endings and safe beginnings' and will setup the programme efficiently to maintain focus on service delivery in sovereign councils while setting up the future councils for success.

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# Appendix 1: Options appraisal

This section includes:

Options appraisal approach

Options appraisal results

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# Options appraisal process

**This appendix outlines the approach taken to appraise potential unitary options for Kent by the 14 local authorities. The appraisal was designed to ensure a robust, consistent and evidence-based assessment to support local decision-making on which options should progress to full business case development.**

**The options appraisal approach was rooted in government guidance, with alignment to the six local government reorganisation (LGR) criteria set out in the Secretary of State's letter dated 6th February 2025 and further clarified in June 2025.**

**The appraisal did not produce a ranked list of options or identify a preferred option.**

**Councils drew on the shared evidence base, alongside resident and stakeholder views, to inform their conclusions.**

## Overview of the approach

The appraisal process followed five key stages:

### Step 1: Selection of options for appraisal

The process began with the development of a longlist of 10 potential unitary options.

This longlist was informed by previous work carried out by local authorities, submissions to central government and extensive input from stakeholders, including council officers and Leaders.

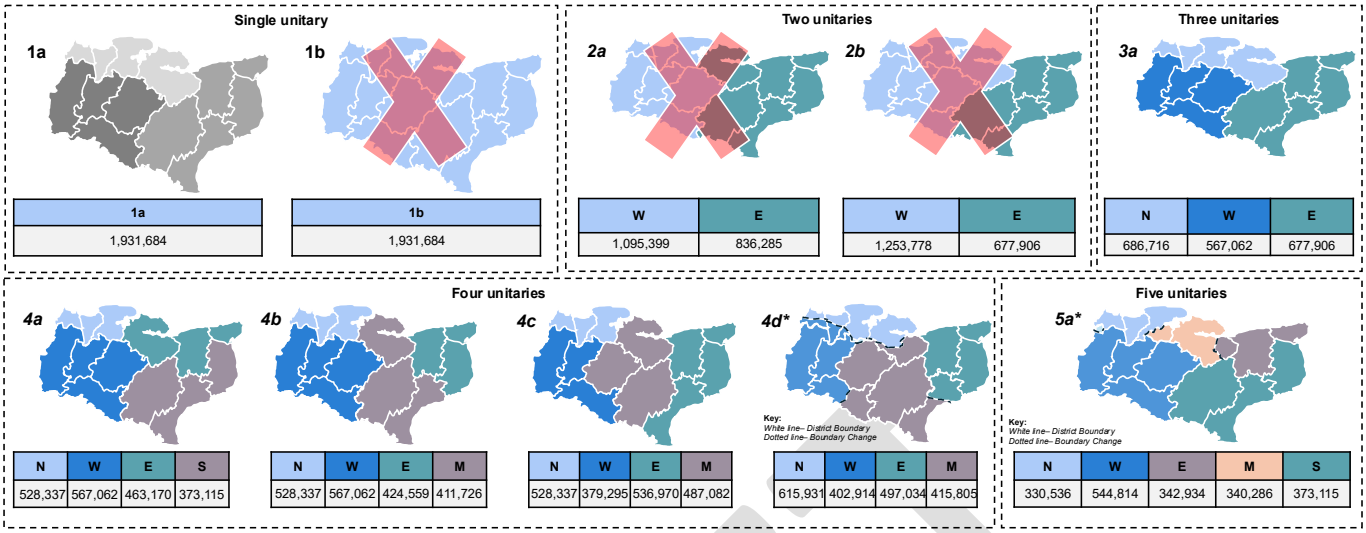
These options encompassed all permutations raised in prior discussions, including suggestions made during initial interviews and strategic workshops.

Following this initial development, a series of engagement sessions were held with Leaders from all 14 authorities.

Through these discussions, three options were jointly agreed to be out of scope for full appraisal, resulting in a refined shortlist of seven options to be taken forward for comprehensive evaluation.

This agreement marked a critical stage in the process, reinforcing the joint ownership of the appraisal exercise.

***Figure 18: Potential options that were raised at the start of the options appraisal***




**To match the current total population of 1,931,684, we applied a proportional multiplier to the original figures for options with boundary changes. This preserves the relative population distribution across the four areas while ensuring the total aligns with up -to-date data.*

## Step 2: Data collection and modelling

To assess each option, a comprehensive dataset was compiled using both publicly-available data sources and specific submissions from individual councils.

This ensured that the appraisal drew from a consistent and authoritative evidence base. Data was initially collected for each existing local authority and then aggregated or modelled to create a coherent picture of each potential new unitary configuration.

For options that involved redrawing boundaries, most notably options 4D and 5A, additional modelling was required.

This included the use of Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)-level population estimates to produce reliable approximations of how existing data would translate to proposed future geographies.

Where appropriate, other datasets not available at LSOA level, were looked at on a pro-rata basis and were based on population estimates to align with the proposed unitary boundaries.

The methodology applied population-weighted approaches and, where possible, consistent assumptions across datasets.

This modelling ensured the integrity and comparability of data across all options.

## *Figure 19: Example metrics*

*Example metrics gathered across all current authorities*

| Metric | Medway (unitary) | District councils | | | | | | | | | | | Kent County Council | Total / Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Ashford | Canterbury | Dartford | Dover | Folkestone and Hythe | Gravesham | Maidstone | Sevenoaks | Swale | Thanet | Tonbridge and Malling | Tunbridge Wells | |
| Population (mid-2024) | 292,655 | 140,936 | 162,100 | 125,011 | 119,768 | 112,411 | 110,671 | 187,767 | 122,748 | 158,379 | 142,691 | 136,853 | 119,694 | 1,639,029 | 1,931,684 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 194 | 581 | 309 | 73 | 315 | 357 | 99 | 393 | 370 | 373 | 104 | 240 | 331 | 3,545 | 3,739 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 1,509 | 243 | 525 | 1,712 | 380 | 315 | 1,118 | 478 | 332 | 425 | 1,372 | 570 | 362 | 462 | 517 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023) | 7,657 | 3,939 | 4,352 | 4,343 | 3,277 | 2,802 | 2,206 | 5,550 | 5,098 | 3,633 | 2,588 | 5,406 | 4,114 | 47,308 | 54,965 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 26,164 | 27,949 | 26,848 | 34,741 | 27,361 | 24,926 | 19,933 | 29,558 | 41,532 | 22,939 | 18,137 | 39,502 | 34,371 | 28,863 | 28,454 |

*Metrics consolidated by potential future unitary authority for options in scope*

| Metric | Option 1A | Option 3A (example) | | | Option 4A (example) | | | | Option 5A (example) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | N | W | E | N | W | E | S | N | W | E | M | S |
| Population (mid-2024) | 1,931,684 | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 | 528,337 | 567,062 | 463,170 | 373,115 | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024) | 3,739 | 739 | 1,334 | 1,666 | 366 | 1,334 | 786 | 1,253 | 287 | 1,267 | 503 | 429 | 1,253 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 517 | 929 | 425 | 407 | 1,444 | 425 | 589 | 298 | 1,151 | 430 | 682 | 793 | 298 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023) | 54,965 | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 | 14,206 | 20,168 | 10,573 | 10,018 | 9,373 | 19,244 | 7,815 | 8,515 | 10,018 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023) | 28,454 | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 | 26,888 | 35,566 | 22,827 | 26,850 | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |

## Step 3: Development of evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'

The appraisal was structured around fourteen evaluation criteria, developed directly in reference to the government's six tests for LGR, as outlined in its correspondence dated 6 February 2025 and subsequent guidance issued in June 2025.

These criteria reflect key considerations such as efficiency, local identity, capacity to deliver sustainable services and readiness for devolution.

For each of the 14 evaluation criteria, a set of specific metrics was identified to enable detailed assessment.

Alongside each metric, a definition of 'what good looks like' was agreed to provide a consistent standard against which all options were evaluated.

While some elements of government guidance were treated as threshold requirements, e.g. minimum standards for all options, others were differentiating factors and thus formed part of the comparative framework.

## *Figure 20:* Evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'

***Evaluation criteria defined to structure options analysis***

| Headline Government Criteria | Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance |
|---|---|
| 1. Establishing a single tier of local government | 1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base |
| | 1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs |
| | 1.3 Single tier governance structures |
| 2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks | 2.1 Appropriate population size |
| | 2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money |
| | 2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities |
| | 2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing |
| 3. High quality and sustainable public services | 3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation |
| | 3.2 Public service reform and better value for money |
| | 3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness |
| 4. Working together to understand and meet local needs | 4.1 Local identity, culture and historical importance |
| | 4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns |
| 5. Supporting devolution arrangements | 5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority |
| 6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment | 6.1 Enabling strong community engagement |

***Example of metrics to be assessed***

| 1.1: Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base | |
|---|---|
| **Metrics/factors** | **What does good look like?** |
| **Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita (2023) (£)** | Balanced GVA per capita between unitaries, suggesting balanced levels of productivity and positive implications for the distribution of economic prosperity among residents |
| **Total Gross Value Added (GVA) (2023) (£m)** | Each unitary has a sufficient GVA to generate tax and there is balance between unitaries, meaning good long-term prospects for all future authorities |
| **Council tax base (number of properties at Band D equivalent)** | All authorities with a sufficient number and profile of properties to provide a council tax base which can sustainably support services, with a reasonable balance between authorities |
| **Council Tax harmonisation / difference in Band D rates** | District areas within a unitary have low to no difference between council tax rates. The least difference between councils within a unitary would provide minimal administrative and resident disruption in harmonising rates |
| **Alignment to major Kent industries** | Unitaries demonstrate alignment to one or more of the key industries |

## Step 4: Assessment parameters and scoring methodology

Each metric was assessed using a standard three-point scale: high, medium or low.

For most metrics, this scoring was determined through statistical balance analysis i.e. evaluating the degree of variation in outcomes across the proposed unitary authorities under each option.

The underlying principle was that a more balanced distribution of characteristics-, e.g. population size, financial resilience, service demand- across new authorities would indicate greater equity and resilience.

The scoring process followed a clear sequence:

1. Identify the range of values between councils under each option for each metric.
2. Determine percentile thresholds for categorising those ranges:
    - High = below 33rd percentile (most balanced)
    - Medium = 33rd to 66th percentile
    - Low = above 66th percentile (least balanced)
3. Assign scores for each option accordingly.

In cases where balance was not a relevant concept, i.e. for county-wide service considerations or unique single-unitary configurations such as Option 1A, bespoke scoring definitions were applied.

Additionally, to allow for further nuance in interpretation, intermediate scores such as Medium/High or Medium/Low were used where appropriate.

No weighting was applied to either the criteria or the metrics. Each was treated as equally important for the purposes of the appraisal.

The model is explicitly comparative: the scores for each option reflect how they perform relative to others in the shortlist, rather than against an absolute benchmark.

## Step 5: Assessment and presentation of results

Each option was scored against every metric, producing an average score for each of the 14 evaluation criteria.

The results were presented via a visual dashboards, supplemented with detailed narrative and commentary to contextualise the findings and highlight key trade-offs or assumptions.

In some cases, particularly for Option 1A, which envisages a single county-wide unitary authority, additional analysis was undertaken to ensure comparability, given that balance metrics were not applicable in the same way as for multi-unitary options.

# Options appraisal results

**All 14 councils worked together to complete an options appraisal prior to business case development. Following joint analysis, review and discussion, the options being put forward are those that Leaders believe are both workable and offer the best value for Kent.**

Following the completion of the appraisal, Council Leaders convened to review the evidence presented.

During this meeting, they collectively identified preferred options to proceed to business case development.

This decision was informed both by the technical appraisal and by the views of their individual councils and local residents.

While the options appraisal itself did not rank or recommend a preferred outcome, it provided the objective foundation upon which political judgements and democratic input could be made.

***Figure 21: Summary assessment by evaluation criteria***

| Headline Government Criteria | Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance | Summary assessment by option | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1A* | 3A | 4A | 4B | 4C | 4D | 5A |
| 1. Establishing a single tier of local government | 1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base | M | H | M/L | M | M/H | M | M/L |
| | 1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs | M | H | M | M | L | M | M |
| | 1.3 Single tier local government structures | L | L | M | M | M | H | M |
| 2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks | 2.1 Appropriate population size | M | H | M | H | M | L | L |
| | 2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money | H | H | M/L | M/L | M/L | M/L | L |
| | 2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities | H | H | M | M | M | M/L | L |
| | 2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing | H | M | M/L | M/H | M/H | M/L | M |
| 3. High quality and sustainable public services | 3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation | M | H | M | M/H | M/L | M/L | M/L |
| | 3.2 Public service reform and better value for money | M | M | M | M | M/L | M/L | M |
| | 3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness | M | M | M/H | M | L | L | M |
| 4. Working together to understand and meet local needs | 4.1 Issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance | M/L | M | M | M | M | M | M |
| | 4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 5. Supporting devolution arrangements | 5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority | L | H | H | H | H | M | M |
| 6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment | 6.1 Enabling strong community engagement | L | M | L | H | M | H | L |

**Option 1a appraised separately due to it proposing a single unitary and an innovative model of local government which is not suited to the appraisal methodology.*

Notes:

- Each evaluation criterion was scored as High, Medium, or Low, based on an average score derived from multiple metrics.
- For most metrics assessed, the process evaluated how well each option achieves balance across all proposed unitary authorities.
- The model is comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed, rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad.
- Minor differences between options still resulted in at least one option scoring High and one Low, due to the comparative nature of the model.

Although on a rounded thematic basis Option 5A did not score as highly as alternative proposals, the options appraisal exercise did identify a wide range of core strengths from the 5A model which are fundamental to the LGR agenda:

***Figure 22: Summary scoring from options appraisal***

| Metric | What does good look like? | 1A | 3A | 4A | 4B | 4C | 4D | 5A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Council Tax harmonisation / difference in Band D rates**** | District areas within a unitary have low to no difference between council tax rates. The least difference between councils within a unitary would provide minimal administrative and resident disruption in harmonising rates. | L | M | M | M | H | L | H |
| **Gross budget gap (£m)**** | An equitable split of budget deficit will provide the best starting point for all unitaries within a configuration to build on through efficiencies | | M | L | M | H | L | H |
| **Manageable geography for service delivery*** | Travel within all future unitary geographies is manageable for service delivery teams that allows service delivery to be conducted effectively. | L | M | M | M | M | H | H |
| **Enabling localism and place-based public service reform*** | Appropriate geography for service delivery and place based public service reform in each unitary.<br>Place based public service reform will require the ability to operate in neighbourhoods and localities with community partners at a more local level than any proposed unitary geographies. | L | L | M | M | M | M | H |
| **Children's services total spend (£m)** | Balanced caseload or demand between unitaries. | | L | M | M | M | L | H |
| **Number of constituent members in strategic authority** | Higher numbers of constituent authorities provides stronger decision -making within the strategic authority. | L | M | H | H | H | H | H |

These high scoring metrics tease out just some of the opportunities Option 5A presents and are at the heart of this business case:

***Financial sustainability***

- Maintains areas with aligned council tax rates within unitaries so the total increase in council tax is lower, providing minimal administrative and resident disruption.
- As the only option to divide Medway into two unitaries, Option 5A delivers a more equitable split of budget deficits and in turn provides the right foundations for future efficient unitary authorities.

- Children's services is acknowledged as a core driver for future unitary service demand. Option 5A presents balanced caseload and crucially the smallest spend variation between the models.

***Efficient public services***

- In presenting authorities with more compact areas of responsibility, underpinned by well-connected infrastructure and comparatively lower travel times, Option 5A presents manageable geographies for efficient and responsive frontline services.

***Locally driven place-based service reform***

- With comparatively smaller average population sizes than Kent's other LGR proposals, Option 5A supports the drive for localism; localised service delivery and better opportunities for place-based public service reform through integrated alignment with local community partners and service providers.

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# Appendix 2: Financial modelling

This section includes:

## Financial context

## Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling

## Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model

## Financial modelling summary outputs

## Implementation costs

## Reorganisation savings

## Disaggregation costs

## Phasing and payback period

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# Financial context

**Councils across Kent are under pressure from rising costs and demand. LGR can help to address these challenges, but in itself will not address the scale of the financial challenge.**

## National financial context

The local government sector faces a major financial challenge with an estimated £4 billion funding gap over the next two years.

Demand for critical services is increasing because of population growth and ageing populations.

Councils are also facing rising costs, with adult social care costs estimated to have increased by 9% and children's social care costs by 18% in real terms over the past five years.

There continues to be uncertainty over long term funding arrangements, which have placed many councils in increasingly fragile financial positions. The growing number of Section 114 notices in recent years highlights the systemic strain across the sector, with pressures in Social Care, Housing and Temporary Accommodation, and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits now common drivers of instability.

At the same time, the absence of clarity on the Fair Funding Review, ongoing uncertainty over business rates reform and reset, and the limited scope of multi-year settlements have constrained council's ability to plan sustainably. Against this backdrop, LGR offers an opportunity to strengthen financial resilience through streamlined structures, integrated service delivery, and more sustainable use of resources over the long term.

## The Kent financial context

Combined net revenue expenditure across the 14 Kent councils is £2,337m, with 73% in Kent County Council and 15% within Medway - the authorities delivering statutory adult social care and children's services.

Across Kent, councils are facing sustained financial pressures.

Rising demand in adult social care, children's services and SEND, alongside inflationary cost pressures and debt, are placing significant strain on budgets.

The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery.

## Reserves and funding the reorganisation

Across all Kent councils combined there are forecast Total Usable Reserves of **£959m by 2028/29.**

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the future councils post reorganisation.

It will be the decision of each new council to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

## Debt across Kent councils

Total external debt across Kent stands at £1,730m. Due to the provision of upper tier services, 26% of borrowing stands in Medway and 41% in the County Council. Three districts, (Dartford, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells) report no general fund borrowing.

### Gross budget gap of existing councils

The forecast total gross budget gap for all 14 councils by 2028/29 of **£138.3m**, has therefore not been included within the breakeven analysis.

However, there is recognition that if there were any budget gaps post vesting day, the recurring savings projected from our proposal could contribute to closing any future gross budget gaps across the new authorities.

The financial modelling does not take direct account of existing council budget gaps, which will need to be managed regardless of LGR.

### Impact of Fair Funding 2.0 on Gross Budget Gap

The Fair Funding Review is ongoing nationally. While considered by all councils across Kent, the complexity and uncertainty of the review mean it has not been modelled in detail.

There is recognition that Fair Funding 2.0 is likely to have an impact on councils' financial positions.

There are distinct additional needs in the county related to deprivation which are expected to benefit with the Fair Funding formula but no assumptions have been made within the gross budget gap assumptions above as it is not possible to quantify at this stage.

### Dedicated Schools Grants

The financial analysis assumes that all existing councils will manage their Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG) positions regardless of LGR, therefore DSG surplus or deficits (if any) have not been included within the breakeven analysis.

It will be the decision of each new authority to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation against any funding pressures observed from DSG.

The combined DSG deficit position as at 31 March 2025 was £150.1m (Medway Council had a £16.4m deficit and Kent County Council had a deficit balance of £133.7m).

Kent County Council entered the Department for Education's "Safety Valve" process in Summer 2022, which involves the local authority reforming its high needs systems and associated spending in return for additional funding to contribute to the historic deficit.

Deficits on the DSG is a national problem affecting county and unitary authorities.

At the present time these are being managed through a statutory override which enables a technical adjustment in the statutory statement of accounts to hold these deficits without recognising the impact against General Fund resources.

A consultation is expected by the government in 2026/27 on reforms to SEND, the root causes of deficits and to invite proposals for a resolution.

Members of the Shadow Authorities for the proposed unitary authorities will need to carefully consider proposed reforms in light of their local circumstances.

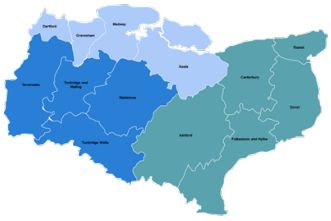
# Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling

**Financial modelling is a key component of the LGR proposal. Its purpose is to evaluate the financial implications of local government reorganisation across Kent in a consistent way across all LGR options.**

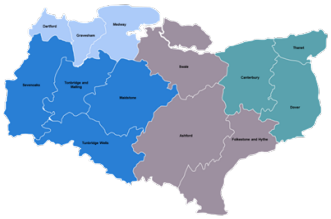
## The LGR options in scope for financial modelling

A single approach to estimating financial impact of LGR was taken across four options for LGR:

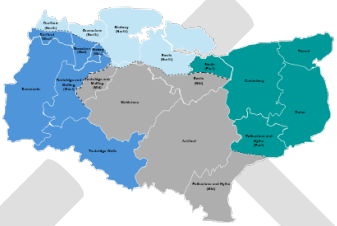
Three unitaries (3A)



Four unitaries (4B)



Four unitaries (4D)*



Five unitaries (5A)*



## Purpose of financial model

The financial modelling aims to:

- estimate the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options
- compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings costs, and payback

## Limitations of scope to date

Whilst being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all Kent finance officers agree that LGR does not in itself provide the solution to the scale of the financial challenge faced.

The model does not consider the impact of local government Fair Funding review and the Business Rate reset.

The Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG) have collectively agreed on the following position on the analysis carried out:

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.
- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be funded.

- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new authorities may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new authorities.

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# Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model

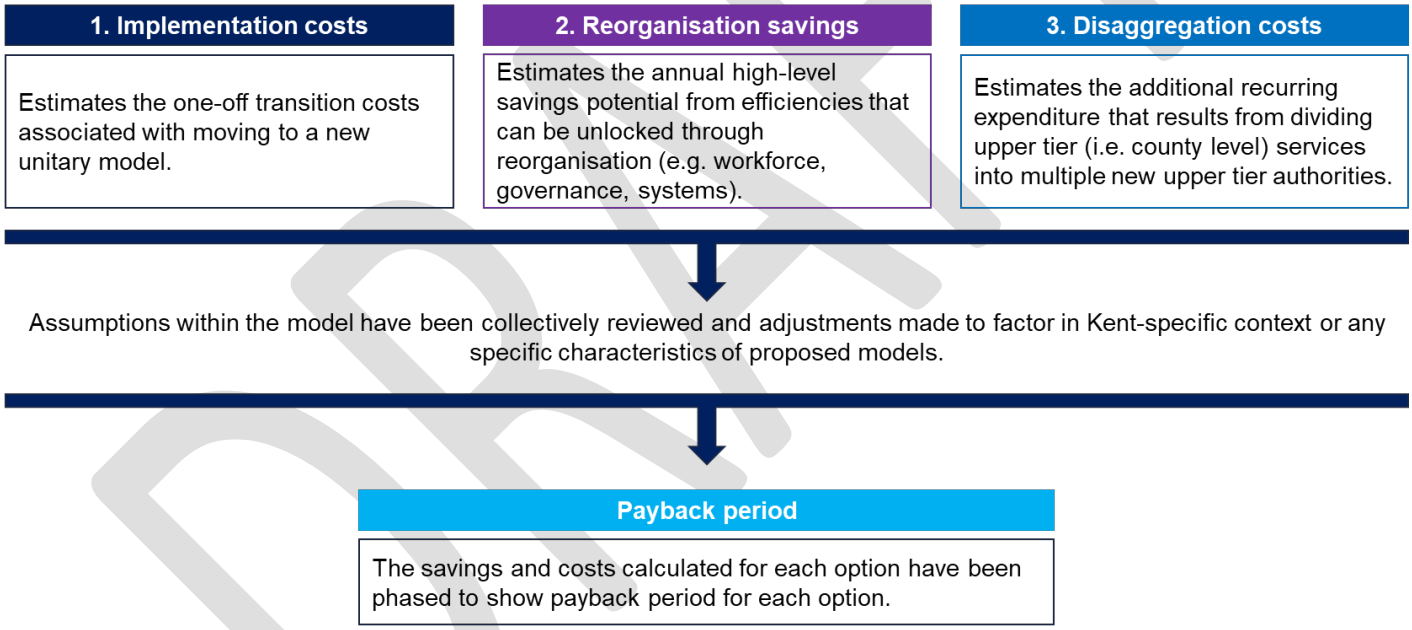
**All finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have reviewed and adjusted financial modelling in order to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to Government.**

## Baselining

1. **Standardised data requests** were completed by all 14 councils, covering revenue budgets, reserves, capital plans, balance sheets and key service metrics. Alongside numerical data, contextual narrative was gathered to support understanding of pressures, risks, and transformation plans.
2. **A consolidated financial baseline** was created, using data returns to combine district, unitary and county budgets into unified figures based on agreed assumptions.
3. Baseline information was then used to create a **financial view of all proposed councils** under each of the five options being submitted to government.

## Three elements of the financial modelling

The financial model is made up of three calculators, which have been applied to all options:




Financial calculations are underpinned by benchmarking of previous LGR proposals and the estimated costs and benefits modelled in those reports, adjusted for the budgets, populations and current local government structures within Kent.

Adjustments have been made to reflect experience of local government reorganisation implementation and through discussion with all Section 151 Officers across Kent.

## Further detail of methodology

The calculation of each element of the model applied is explained separately within this section of the report.

# Financial modelling summary outputs

**The key driver of difference between options are the number of councils being proposed. Due to the assumptions applied within the modelling, implementation costs and recurring costs of disaggregation increase as the number of councils proposed increases.**

Our financial modelling shows **Option 5A, a five-unitary model with boundary changes**, has the highest disaggregation costs and marginally higher one-off implementation costs than a four unitary model, resulting in an estimated payback period of at least 14 years, with the possibility that LGR may not deliver a financial saving.

***Table 28: Summary of financial modelling***

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m)* | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)** | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5A** | (139.1) | 65.7 | (46.0) - (68.1) | 19.7 – (2.4) | 14.0 years - no payback |

**A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.*

***Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs*

### Further analysis

The calculation of each element of the financial model is explained in the following pages.

# Implementation costs

**Implementation costs definition:** The estimated one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model.

**Method of calculation**:

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of implementation costs per capita.
- Multiplied the benchmarked costs per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total implementation cost per unitary model.
- Applied an uplift of costs per additional unitary authority being created, due to additional costs through establishing governance structures, IT systems, administrative frameworks, etc.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. A specific uplift of £5m was added to reflect the additional complexity and implementation effort to deliver boundary changes.

**Implementation costs**

***Table 29: Implementation cost summary***

| Option | Implementation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **5A** | (139.1) | Highest level of implementation costs due to the higher number of authorities proposed.<br>Additional £5m added to implementation costs due to additional complexity associated with boundary changes. Three boundary changes are being proposed, which includes a significant change to the current Medway boundary (the only existing unitary authority), which introduces particular complexity. |

## Categories of implementation cost

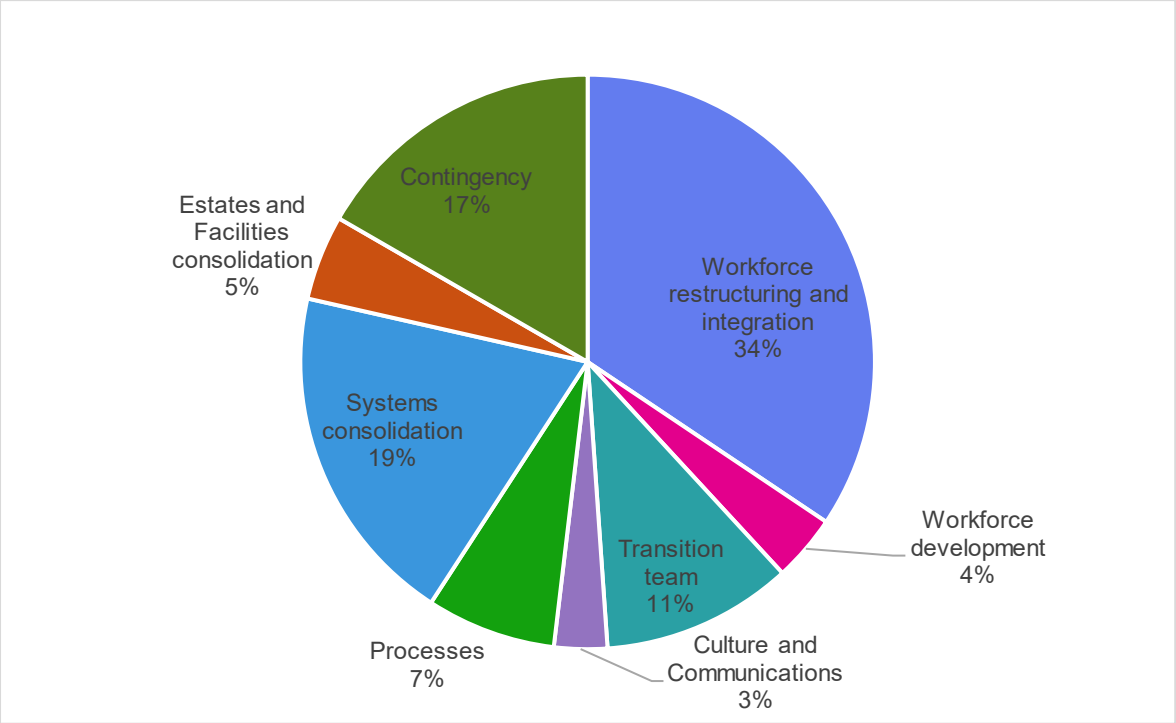
As part of implementation cost benchmarking, categories of implementation costs have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of costs, for any of the LGR options.

***Table 30: Implementation cost categories***

| Implementation cost category | Description |
|---|---|
| **Workforce restructuring and integration** | Costs associated with delivering TUPE and salary harmonisation processes. Compensation paid to employees as a result of any redundancies and pension strain.<br>***Note: no decisions have been made regarding the size of the future workforce and the potential need for redundancies. A significant proportion of staff reductions could be delivered through staff naturally leaving the organisations.*** |
| **Workforce development** | Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Transition team** | Transition and implementation programme teams including programme management, legal, finance, contract management, finance and other specialist support. |
| **Culture and Communications** | Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. |
| **Processes** | Harmonising processes and facilitating effective service transition, including specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition and new policies and procedures. |
| **Systems consolidation** | Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration and cyber security. |
| **Estates and Facilities consolidation** | Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases. |
| **Contingency** | Additional 20% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates. |

***Figure 23:*** *Implementation cost distribution*




## Phasing of implementation costs

One-off implementation costs have been assumed to start ramping-up from the shadow year and build up by Year 4. The majority of costs are incurred in year 2 and year 3, where the most staff exit costs are expected to be incurred. The phasing of the contingency reflected the overall phasing of costs.

***Table 31: Implementation Cost Summary***

| Implementation cost category | Shadow Year (FY27/28) | Year 1 (FY28/29) | Year 2 (FY29/30) | Year 3 (FY30/31) | Year 4 (FY31/32) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Workforce restructuring and integration** | 5% | 15% | 20% | 60% | - |
| **Workforce development** | 10% | 50% | 40% | - | - |
| **Transition team** | 25% | 30% | 30% | 15% | - |
| **Culture and Communications** | 20% | 50% | 30% | - | - |
| **Processes** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 30% | 20% |
| **Systems consolidation** | 5% | 15% | 30% | 30% | 20% |
| **Estates and Facilities consolidation** | - | 5% | 25% | 30% | 40% |
| **Contingency** | 10% | 25% | 30% | 25% | 10% |

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# Reorganisation savings

**Reorganisation savings (gross) definition:** The estimated annual savings from efficiencies achieved through reorganisation, moving from two tiers to one tier of local government, by removing duplication, consolidating services and operating at greater scale.

### Method of calculation:

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of savings per capita achievable through LGR.
- Multiplied the benchmarked savings per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total saving for per unitary model.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. This included a reduction in the total savings achievable and contingency being added to the model.
- Applied a dilution of savings for the number of unitary authorities being created, due to reduced ability to operate at scale.

**Reorganisation savings**

***Table 32: Reorganisation Savings Summary***

| Option | Gross reorganisation savings (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **5A** | 65.7 | Savings marginally lower than for three and four unitary models due to reduced economies of scale. |

### Categories of reorganisation saving

As part of benchmarking LGR revenue savings, categories of savings have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of savings.

***Table 33: Savings categories***

| Savings category | Description |
|---|---|
| **Optimising Leadership** | Reducing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication by merging similar responsibilities into fewer positions. |
| **Right Sizing the Organisation** | Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation. |
| **Consolidating Corporate Services** | Consolidating back-office functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT). |
| **Service Contract Consolidation** | Implementing new sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced, potentially leading to financial and operational efficiency. |
| **Procurement & 3rd Party Spend** | Centralising procurement, leading to an increase in relative purchasing power and renegotiating terms with suppliers. |
| **Democratic Services** | Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (eg committees, elections). |
| **Improved Digital & IT Systems** | Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes. |

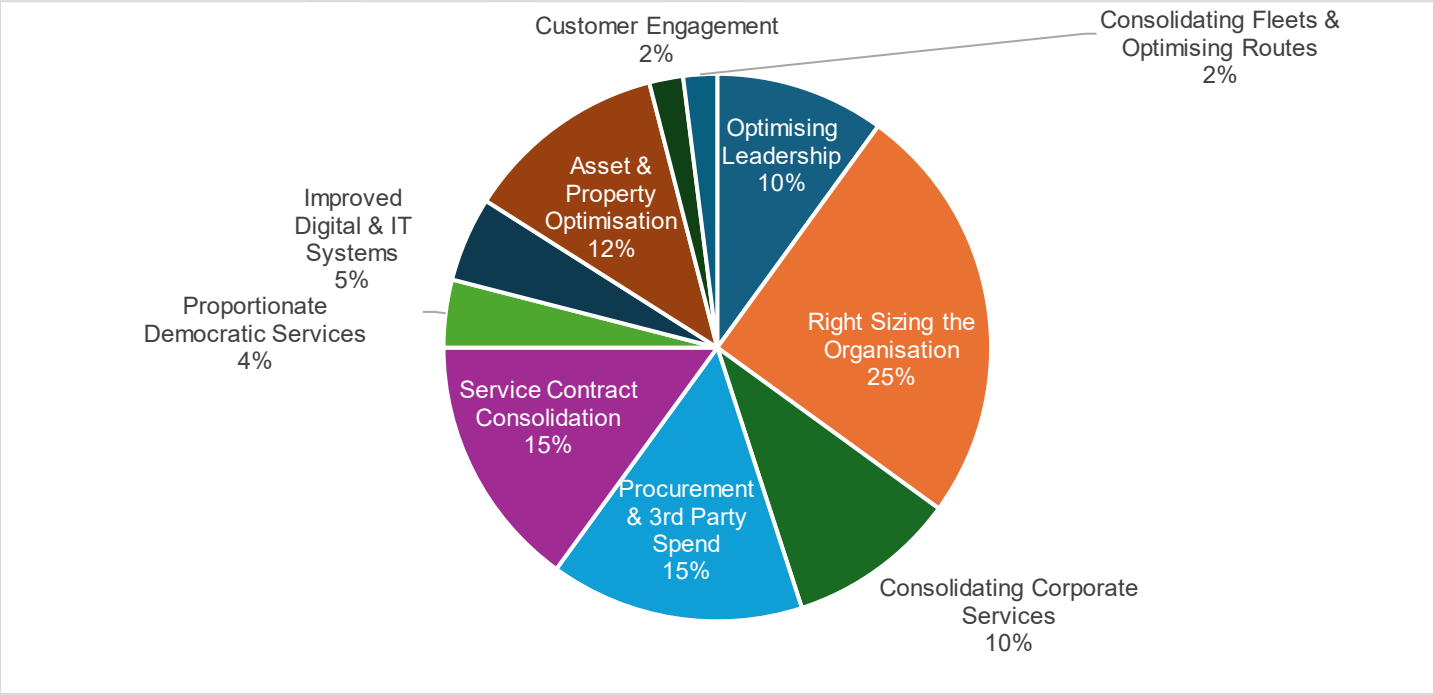
| | |
|---|---|
| **Asset & Property Optimisation** | Reducing asset and property portfolio to align with council needs. |
| **Customer Engagement** | Enhancing customer contact facilities and developing a combined approach to managing customer contact centre, where appropriate including digital self-service. |
| **Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes** | Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs. |
| **Contingency** | 10% contingency applied to reflect risks to savings being achieved. |

The exact proportion of savings may vary by option, and will be considered in greater detail in the next phase of LGR.

Due to the collaborative nature of the business case development and the use of the same set of financial assumptions no savings are shown in the proposal for social care commissioning. However it is worth noting that work carried out by PeopleToo and Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) for the Greater Essex Five unitary Proposal has identified that a "Place-based and community focused ASC delivery model offers a strategic opportunity to improve access, increase personalisation and deliver more efficient services." Evidence from benchmarking, governance reports and national reform studies all reinforce the argument that integrated systems rooted in local communities deliver better outcomes, higher satisfaction and smarter use of public resources.

If a 1% financial gain from these arrangements was realisable in a five unitary model, the additional £24m of savings would reduce the payback period to 6.6 years increasing significantly, the financial desirability of the proposal.

***Figure 24: Reorganisation Savings Distribution***




*Note: a 10% contingency is also applied but has not been reflected in the graph above*

## Phasing of reorganisation savings

Savings are realised to their entirety by Year 6 and are then ongoing. Most savings are achieved in year 3. A 10% negative contingency has been applied to reflect risk and has been phased in line with when other savings are achieved.

*Table 34: Reorganisation savings*

| Reorganisation savings category | Year 1 (FY28/29) | Year 2 (FY29/30) | Year 3 (FY30/31) | Year 4 (FY31/32) | Year 5 (FY32/33) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Optimising Leadership | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| Right Sizing the Organisation | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| Consolidating Corporate Services | 10% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 10% |
| Procurement & 3rd Party Spend | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |
| Service Contract Consolidation | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 20% |
| Democratic Services | 80% | 20% | - | - | - |
| Improved Digital & IT Systems | 5% | 15% | 30% | 25% | 25% |
| Asset & Property Optimisation | 10% | 15% | 25% | 25% | 25% |
| Customer Engagement | 20% | 40% | 40% | - | - |
| Consolidating Fleets & Optimising Routes | - | 20% | 45% | 35% | - |
| Contingency | 15% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 15% |

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# Disaggregation costs

**Disaggregation costs definition:** The estimated additional recurring expenditure that results from dividing upper tier (i.e. county level) services into multiple new unitary authorities.

### Method of calculation:

- Identified core service categories where disaggregation will drive cost increases as: adult social care, children's services, housing, place services, and corporate and support services.
- Allocated Kent County Council net revenue spend against cost categories defined.
- Applied percentages of additional spend to each cost category to uplift total costs in line with benchmarking from previous LGR cases, to estimate the future level of spend of each cost category.
- Applied an additional uplift to the level of disaggregation costs for each additional unitary being proposed.

### Disaggregation costs

Disaggregation costs are the most significant differentiator between financial model outputs for each option. For each additional council proposed there are assumed to be additional costs, including those associated with management, commissioning and corporate services.

Whilst the costs are significant, it is important to view these within the context of the overall cost of delivering these services. The Kent County Council net revenue expenditure is budgeted to be£1,699m, including £722m for adult social care and £280m for children's services[48].

***Table 35: Disaggregation costs***

| Option | Disaggregation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **5A** | (46.0) - (68.1) | Three additional sets of 'upper tier' services means comparably higher disaggregation costs. |

### Categories of disaggregation costs

As part of calculating disaggregation costs, costs increase by category of spend have been calculated, as summarised below.

A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.

In the lower scenario no additional costs for commissioning have been shown.

Research carried out by PeopleToo and SCIE for the Greater Essex Five unitary Proposal has identified that a "Place-based and community focused ASC delivery model offers a strategic opportunity to improve access, increase personalisation and deliver more efficient services."[49] Evidence from benchmarking, governance reports and national reform studies all reinforce the argument that integrated systems rooted in local communities deliver better outcomes, higher

[48] 2025/26 RA return and Financial returns submitted by Kent County Council

[49] Five unitary council proposal_0.pdf

satisfaction and smarter use of public resources. This is a strong argument to take the lower range and indeed to consider savings.

*Table 36: Disaggregation cost categories and uplift percentages*

| Disaggregation cost category | Description | Disaggregation cost uplift (one additional upper tier authority) % |
|---|---|---|
| Adult social care | Duplication of some current adult social care management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend. | 0.7% - 1.8% |
| Children's services | Duplication of some current children's services management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend. | 2.5% - 3% |
| Place services | Duplication of some current place services including management and staffing costs, and additional costs of commissioned spend. | 3.5% |
| Corporate and support services | Duplication of corporate & support services management, staffing and systems. | 3.8% |

**Phasing of disaggregation costs**

All disaggregation costs are assumed to be incurred annually from Day 1 of the new authorities.

# Phasing and payback period

**Payback period definition:** the period taken to reach a net positive financial impact of LGR, once all one-off and recurring savings have been considered.

## Cumulative financial benefit and payback period

Set out below is the year-by-year breakdown of the financial impact of LGR, considering both one-off costs and recurring benefits / costs.

The payback period is driven by the outputs of the three calculators (reorganisation savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs), and the phasing assumptions explained earlier in this Appendix.

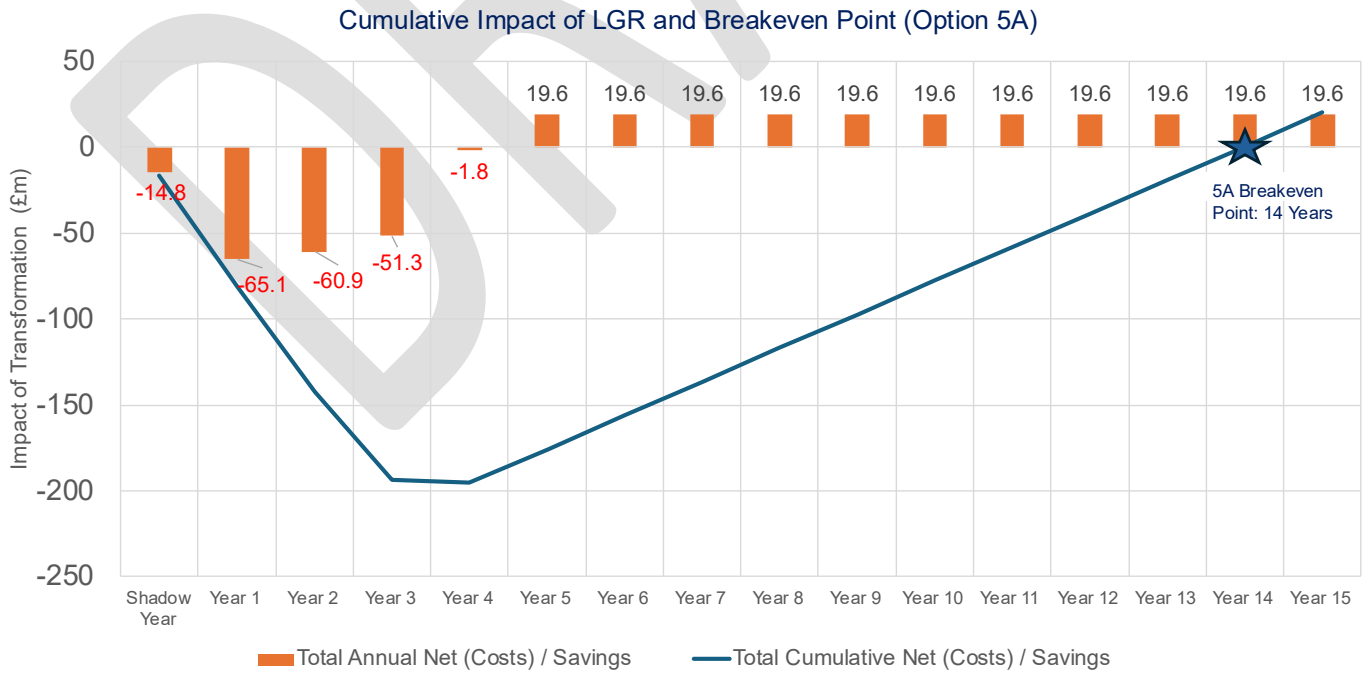
***Table 37: Summary of financial impact of LGR***

| Option | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Recurring annual revenue savings (£m) | Estimated payback period | Commentary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5A** | (139.1) | 19.7 – (2.4) | 14.0 years - no payback | Highest implementation complexity and costs of options modelled |

## Payback period over a 15-year period

Set out in the figure below is the estimated cumulative financial impact of LGR for Option 5A.

***Figure 25: Payback over a 15-year period***




*The chart shows payback period with dissagregation costs at the lowest point in the range.

# Appendix 3: Key data sources

Figure 8.1 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Economy and Demographics

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Population Size (mid-2024)[50] | 1,931,684 | 686,716 | 567,062 | 677,906 | 528,337 | 567,062 | 424,559 | 411,726 | 615,931 | 374,269 | 523,642 | 417,842 | 330,536 | 544,814 | 342,934 | 340,286 | 373,115 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2024)[51] | 3,739.2 | 738.9 | 1,335.1 | 1,665.3 | 365.4 | 1,335.1 | 727.7 | 1,311.0 | 648.6 | 881.7 | 1,020.6 | 1,188.4 | 286.9 | 1,268.0 | 502.3 | 429.2 | 1,252.9 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2024) | 516.6 | 929.4 | 424.7 | 407.1 | 1445.8 | 424.7 | 583.4 | 314.1 | 949.7 | 424.5 | 513.1 | 351.6 | 1152.1 | 429.7 | 682.7 | 792.9 | 297.8 |
| 65+ Population (mid-2024)[50] | 384,033 | 113,951 | 113,406 | 156,676 | 83,544 | 113,406 | 99,972 | 87,111 | 102,437 | 74,636 | 123,715 | 83,245 | 52,329 | 108,477 | 77,559 | 59,227 | 86,440 |
| Total GVA (£m) (2023)[52] | 54,965 | 17,839 | 20,168 | 16,958 | 14,206 | 20,168 | 10,217 | 10,374 | 16,011 | 13,924 | 12,634 | 12,396 | 9,373 | 19,244 | 7,815 | 8,515 | 10,018 |
| GVA per capita (£) (2023)[52] | 28,454 | 25,977 | 35,566 | 25,015 | 26,888 | 35,566 | 24,065 | 25,196 | 25,995 | 37,204 | 24,127 | 29,666 | 28,356 | 35,322 | 22,788 | 25,024 | 26,850 |
| Unemployment Rate (%) Apr 24-March 25[53] | 3.7% | 4.0% | 3.0% | 4.0% | 3.8% | 3.0% | 4.3% | 4.0% | 3.5% | 2.5% | 4.2% | 3.5% | 3.9% | 3.1% | 4.7% | 4.0% | 3.5% |

Figure 8.2 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Financials

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |

[50] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales
[51] Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
[52] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities
[53] LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (FY28/29)[54] | 703,525 | 225,749 | 231,972 | 245,804 | 173,700 | 231,972 | 151,628 | 146,225 | 202,762 | 156,102 | 187,882 | 156,779 | 111,995 | 222,260 | 120,136 | 110,931 | 138,203 |
| Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes)[54] | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,907 | 1,907 | 1,842 | 1,904 | 1,874 | 1,812 | 1,907 |
| General Fund Borrowing (FY26/27) (£m)[54] | 1,730.4 | 812.0 | 289.1 | 629.2 | 740.3 | 289.1 | 387.0 | 314.0 | 761.3 | 175.9 | 460.0 | 333.1 | 336.8 | 278.4 | 257.2 | 468.7 | 389.3 |
| Financing Costs (Q2 FY26/27) (£m)[54] | 123.6 | 56.1 | 29.2 | 38.3 | 46.7 | 29.2 | 24.8 | 22.9 | 51.8 | 18.0 | 31.0 | 22.8 | 22.4 | 28.1 | 20.6 | 32.5 | 19.9 |
| Net Revenue (Q2 FY26/27) (£m)[54] | 2,313.4 | 1,104.6 | 548.2 | 660.5 | 947.7 | 548.2 | 415.2 | 402.3 | 1,024.7 | 376.0 | 521.9 | 390.8 | 432.7 | 526.6 | 338.0 | 655.7 | 360.4 |
| Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream %[54] | 5.3% | 5.1% | 5.3% | 5.8% | 4.9% | 5.3% | 6.0% | 5.7% | 5.1% | 4.8% | 5.9% | 5.8% | 5.2% | 5.3% | 6.1% | 5.0% | 5.5% |
| Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£m)[54] | 138.2 | 84.9 | 25.8 | 27.5 | 76.6 | 25.8 | 18.6 | 17.2 | 79.4 | 23.3 | 23.1 | 12.5 | 30.6 | 25.0 | 13.3 | 53.1 | 16.2 |
| Total Usable Reserves (FY28/29) (£m)[54] | 959.7 | 394.2 | 258.9 | 306.6 | 338.4 | 258.9 | 175.2 | 187.2 | 359.1 | 178.2 | 215.0 | 207.5 | 189.0 | 247.8 | 137.3 | 202.8 | 182.8 |
| General fund balance (FY28/29) (£m)[54] | 186.4 | 68.7 | 59.8 | 58.0 | 58.3 | 59.8 | 33.5 | 34.8 | 63.1 | 31.7 | 43.0 | 48.6 | 30.6 | 58.0 | 26.6 | 37.4 | 33.8 |
| Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[55] | 364.6 | 137.7 | 113.2 | 113.7 | 108.1 | 113.2 | 70.1 | 73.3 | 121.3 | 79.4 | 85.4 | 78.5 | 74.3 | 109.5 | 51.7 | 60.0 | 69.1 |
| Net revenue expenditure (£m)[54] | 2,273.8 | 833.2 | 651.0 | 789.6 | 645.8 | 651.0 | 494.3 | 482.7 | 748.0 | 432.1 | 609.8 | 483.8 | 397.2 | 625.4 | 405.2 | 416.4 | 429.5 |

[54] Financial data return submitted by councils

[55] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK

Figure 8.3 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Housing and Homelessness

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| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Income deprivation rate (2019)[56] | 0.12 | 0.13 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.12 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.14 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.13 |
| Homelessness Rate per 1,000 Households (Jan-Mar 2025)[57] | 1.5 | 6.6 | 4.1 | 8.4 | 5.3 | 4.1 | 5.5 | 4.2 | 5.8 | 2.4 | 6.5 | 4.3 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 2.4 | 4.4 |
| Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement %[58] | 87.2% | 84.4% | 91.9% | 86.2% | 73.8% | 91.9% | 76.2% | 109.9% | 83.3% | 67.6% | 79.3% | 120.4% | 72.9% | 93.9% | 72.6% | 89.5% | 103.8% |
| Number of Households in TA per 1,000 (Jan-Mar 25)[59] | 3.9 | 22.6 | 9.2 | 18.0 | 18.0 | 9.2 | 11.9 | 10.8 | 29.0 | 23.0 | 18.0 | 17.1 | 19.3 | 9.2 | 10.9 | 9.6 | 11.7 |
| Area of land that is protected, including land designated as Green Belt (%)[60] | 47.9% | 41.0% | 67.0% | 35.7% | 46.3% | 67.0% | 27.0% | 40.5% | 40.8% | 82.7% | 32.8% | 38.9% | 68.0% | 65.5% | 29.1% | 32.3% | 38.3% |

Figure 8.4 – Children's Services and Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Number of children in children's social care as % total population (2023-2024)[61] | 0.40% | 0.50% | 0.18% | 0.47% | 0.49% | 0.18% | 0.50% | 0.48% | 0.44% | 0.18% | 0.52% | 0.28% | 0.37% | 0.18% | 0.52% | 0.61% | 0.44% |
| Children's services total spend (£m)[62] | 298.1 | 152.4 | 43.8 | 101.8 | 124.3 | 43.8 | 64.1 | 65.8 | 140.3 | 31.2 | 82.3 | 44.3 | 55.4 | 42.3 | 56.6 | 91.8 | 51.9 |
| Number of registered pupils with SEND as % total population (2023-2024)[63] | 5.0% | 5.0% | 4.3% | 5.7% | 4.3% | 4.3% | 6.0% | 6.2% | 4.9% | 4.2% | 6.0% | 4.8% | 4.4% | 4.3% | 6.1% | 5.3% | 5.5% |

[56] Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics
[57] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[58] Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK
[59] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[60] Local authority green belt statistics for England: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK
[61] KCC analysis (districts) & ONS data (Medway) - https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2024
[62] Data from individual councils
[63] KCC analysis (districts) & LG inform data (Medway) - https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/search/26797?text=Number+of+total+EHCP

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Proportion of children in relative low-income families (under 16s) (FYE24) (%)[64] | 17.8% | 18.7% | 13.2% | 21.1% | 18.4% | 13.2% | 22.3% | 19.4% | 18.7% | 12.6% | 22.2% | 16.4% | 17.3% | 13.3% | 21.7% | 19.5% | 20.5% |
| Proportion of children in absolute low-income families (under 16s) (FYE24) (%)[64] | 15.1% | 15.8% | 11.3% | 17.9% | 15.7% | 11.3% | 18.9% | 16.4% | 15.9% | 10.8% | 18.7% | 14.0% | 14.8% | 11.3% | 18.3% | 16.4% | 17.4% |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received (2024/2025)[62] | 24,750 | 7,619 | 6,353 | 10,778 | 5,886 | 6,353 | 7,275 | 5,236 | 6,833 | 3,830 | 8,918 | 5,169 | 3,680 | 6,102 | 5,374 | 3,772 | 5,821 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Received Per 100,000 Population (2024/2025)[62] | 261 | 1,452 | 1,444 | 1,985 | 1,467 | 1,444 | 2,129 | 1,613 | 1,452 | 1,326 | 2,117 | 1,581 | 1,471 | 1,443 | 1,953 | 1,440 | 1,957 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced (2024/2025)[62] | 8,470 | 2,505 | 2,254 | 3,711 | 1,849 | 2,254 | 2,516 | 1,851 | 2,210 | 1,423 | 3,189 | 1,648 | 1,304 | 2,160 | 1,789 | 1,136 | 2,080 |
| Safeguarding Concerns Commenced Per 100,000 Population (2024/25)[62] | 562 | 478 | 512 | 683 | 461 | 512 | 736 | 570 | 470 | 493 | 757 | 504 | 521 | 511 | 650 | 434 | 699 |
| Active Education, Health and Care plan (EHCPs) by Home District (As of Jan 2025)[62] | 20,687 | 5,951 | 6,005 | 8,731 | 2,949 | 6,005 | 5,715 | 6,018 | 4,938 | 3,847 | 7,054 | 4,849 | 3,199 | 5,755 | 4,871 | 2,279 | 4,583 |
| Active EHCPs by Home District rate per 10,000 (mid-2024)[62] | 360 | 277 | 361 | 451 | 176 | 361 | 464 | 511 | 257 | 347 | 470 | 399 | 303 | 360 | 474 | 219 | 448 |
| Active EHCPs by School District (as of Oct 2025)[62] | 22,247 | 8,169 | 5,641 | 8,437 | 6,155 | 5,641 | 6,021 | 4,430 | 7,404 | 3,396 | 6,967 | 4,480 | 3,293 | 5,446 | 5,222 | 4,586 | 3,700 |
| Active EHCPs by School District rate per 10,000 (as of Oct 2025)[62] | 387 | 381 | 339 | 436 | 368 | 339 | 488 | 376 | 385 | 306 | 465 | 369 | 312 | 341 | 508 | 441 | 362 |
| No. of Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) Y12&Y13 (2024)[62] | 1,689 | 658 | 420 | 611 | 476 | 420 | 447 | 346 | 590 | 245 | 521 | 333 | 279 | 405 | 357 | 350 | 298 |
| NEET Rate per 10,000[62] | 348 | 385 | 283 | 370 | 360 | 283 | 425 | 351 | 385 | 237 | 404 | 335 | 329 | 285 | 415 | 422 | 337 |
| Child in Need Plans (Mar 2025)[62] | 3,706 | 1,487 | 820 | 1,399 | 1,195 | 820 | 865 | 826 | 1,347 | 534 | 1,052 | 773 | 659 | 793 | 675 | 784 | 794 |

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[64] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2024

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child in Need Plans Rate per 10,000[62] | 87 | 92 | 65 | 104 | 94 | 65 | 104 | 95 | 93 | 62 | 103 | 85 | 82 | 65 | 100 | 100 | 105 |
| Child Protection Plans (Mar 2025)[62] | 1,428 | 582 | 324 | 522 | 465 | 324 | 333 | 306 | 531 | 190 | 427 | 280 | 247 | 317 | 259 | 314 | 291 |
| Child Protection Plans Rate per 10,000[62] | 34 | 36 | 25 | 39 | 37 | 25 | 40 | 35 | 37 | 22 | 42 | 31 | 31 | 26 | 38 | 40 | 38 |
| Looked After Children (LAC) by placement address (Mar 2025)[62] | 1,967 | 838 | 228 | 901 | 658 | 228 | 631 | 450 | 768 | 155 | 755 | 289 | 294 | 219 | 533 | 509 | 411 |
| LAC by placement address - Rate per 10,000[62] | 46 | 65 | 22 | 82 | 65 | 22 | 94 | 64 | 66 | 22 | 91 | 39 | 46 | 22 | 97 | 81 | 67 |
| Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) looked after (Mar 2025)[62] | 328 | 114 | 30 | 184 | 92 | 30 | 119 | 87 | 100 | 25 | 141 | 61 | 62 | 30 | 103 | 47 | 86 |
| UASC looked after - Rate per 10,000[62] | 8 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 14 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 15 | 6 | 11 |
| Kent LAC Starts (2024/25)[62] | 745 | 353 | 93 | 299 | 271 | 93 | 205 | 176 | 320 | 77 | 245 | 103 | 131 | 90 | 156 | 205 | 163 |
| Kent LAC Starts Rate per 10,000[62] | 22 | 27 | 9 | 27 | 27 | 9 | 30 | 25 | 28 | 11 | 29 | 14 | 21 | 9 | 28 | 33 | 27 |
| Other Local Authority Looked After Children (OLA LAC) placed in Kent (Mar 2025)[62] | 1,611 | 799 | 219 | 593 | 603 | 219 | 424 | 365 | 717 | 162 | 501 | 231 | 315 | 206 | 358 | 449 | 282 |
| OLA LAC placed in Kent Rate per 10,000[62] | 38 | 62 | 21 | 54 | 60 | 21 | 63 | 52 | 62 | 23 | 60 | 32 | 49 | 21 | 65 | 72 | 46 |

Figure 8.5 – Adult Services

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of older adults in adult social care as % total population (2023-2024)[65] | 0.90% | 0.68% | 0.73% | 1.17% | 0.64% | 0.73% | 1.14% | 1.06% | 0.73% | 0.65% | 1.21% | 0.91% | 0.63% | 0.74% | 1.12% | 0.70% | 1.18% |
| Number of adults in adult social care as % total population (2023-2024)[65] | 2.60% | 2.41% | 2.27% | 2.98% | 2.36% | 2.27% | 3.06% | 2.73% | 2.14% | 2.28% | 3.03% | 1.49% | 2.68% | 2.29% | 2.93% | 2.12% | 2.99% |
| Adult social care total spend (£m)[66] | 634 | 202.8 | 162.3 | 268.9 | 159.7 | 162.3 | 162.9 | 149.2 | 185.6 | 109.1 | 214.8 | 124.5 | 83.6 | 155.3 | 117.4 | 115.7 | 162 |
| No. of people aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year (2024-2025)[66] | 405 | 92 | 81 | 232 | 47 | 81 | 157 | 120 | 77 | 41 | 197 | 91 | 47 | 81 | 109 | 34 | 134 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year - rate per 100,000 population (2024-2025)[66] | 27 | 18 | 18 | 43 | 12 | 18 | 46 | 37 | 16 | 14 | 47 | 28 | 19 | 19 | 40 | 13 | 45 |
| No. of people aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year (2024-2025)[66] | 4,212 | 1,369 | 922 | 1,921 | 1,053 | 922 | 1,184 | 1,053 | 1,251 | 565 | 1,540 | 856 | 529 | 896 | 870 | 790 | 1,127 |
| People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year - rate per 100,000 population (2024-2025)[66] | 279 | 261 | 210 | 354 | 262 | 210 | 346 | 324 | 266 | 196 | 366 | 262 | 211 | 212 | 316 | 301 | 379 |
| Number of people accessing short term support during the year (18-64) (2024-2025)[66] | 4,363 | 1,111 | 993 | 2,259 | 674 | 993 | 1,490 | 1,206 | 947 | 663 | 1,827 | 926 | 605 | 958 | 1,114 | 436 | 1,250 |

[65] KCC analysis (districts) & LG inform data (Medway) - https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=23182&mod-area=E06000035&mod-group=AllUnitaryLaInCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup

[66] Data from individual councils

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| People accessing short term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-2025)[66] | 46 | 27 | 30 | 58 | 21 | 30 | 62 | 51 | 19 | 6 | 61 | 38 | 31 | 31 | 56 | 21 | 59 |
| Number of people accessing short term support during the year (65+) (2024/2025)[66] | 13,876 | 3,883 | 3,724 | 6,269 | 2,739 | 3,724 | 4,055 | 3,358 | 3,423 | 2,459 | 5,058 | 2,936 | 1,979 | 3,565 | 3,126 | 1,787 | 3,419 |
| People accessing short term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (65+) (2024/2025)[66] | 413 | 341 | 328 | 400 | 328 | 328 | 406 | 385 | 334 | 329 | 409 | 353 | 378 | 329 | 403 | 302 | 396 |
| Number of people accessing long term support during the year (18-64) (2024/2025)[66] | 8,750 | 2,947 | 1,955 | 3,848 | 2,298 | 1,955 | 2,375 | 2,122 | 2,683 | 1,196 | 3,060 | 1,810 | 1,210 | 1,901 | 1,863 | 1,635 | 2,141 |
| People accessing long term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-2025)[66] | 92 | 56 | 44 | 71 | 57 | 44 | 70 | 65 | 57 | 41 | 73 | 55 | 48 | 45 | 68 | 62 | 72 |
| Number of people accessing long term support during the year (65+) (2024/2025)[66] | 14,833 | 4,995 | 3,693 | 6,145 | 3,876 | 3,693 | 3,929 | 3,335 | 4,489 | 2,469 | 4,887 | 2,988 | 2,283 | 3,549 | 3,041 | 2,586 | 3,373 |
| People accessing long term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (65+) (2024-2025)[66] | 442 | 438 | 326 | 392 | 464 | 326 | 393 | 383 | 438 | 331 | 395 | 359 | 436 | 327 | 392 | 437 | 390 |

Figure 8.6 – Democratic

| Metric | 1A | 3A | | | 4B | | | | 4D | | | | 5A | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | North | West | East | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | North | West | East | Mid | South |
| Size of electorate[67] | 1,348,857 | 477,468 | 407,167 | 464,222 | 367,424 | 407,167 | 298,941 | 275,325 | 428,883 | 269,662 | 362,685 | 287,626 | 228,839 | 390,803 | 238,205 | 238,491 | 252,519 |

[67] Publicly available data

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Councillor numbers (including District and County)[67] | 658 | 205 | 214 | 239 | 151 | 214 | 149 | 144 | 180 | 154 | 181 | 143 | 118 | 203 | 123 | 85 | 129 |
| Councillor to electorate ratio (current)[67] | 2,043 | 2,329 | 1,903 | 1,942 | 2,433 | 1,903 | 2,006 | 1,912 | 2,385 | 1,755 | 2,001 | 2,008 | 1,947 | 1,924 | 1,937 | 2,794 | 1,958 |
| Level of civic participation (2023-2024) (%)[68] | 40.6% | 35.6% | 43.9% | 42.1% | 20.4% | 25.1% | 24.0% | 26.4% | 21.2% | 27.5% | 25.2% | 22.6% | 24.0% | 25.0% | 22.1% | 19.0% | 28.1% |

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[68] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202324-annual-publication

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