

## **Cabinet**

**11 March 2025**

### **Update on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Vince Maple, Leader of the Council  
Report from: Richard Hicks, Chief Executive  
Author: Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director Legal and Governance

#### **Summary**

This report provides an update on this matter and sets out the next steps on developing plans for local government reorganisation in Kent and Medway.

#### **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1. The Cabinet is asked to note the update on devolution and local government reorganisation in Kent and Medway.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is asked to agree to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to submit an interim plan setting out draft proposals for a single tier of local government in Kent and Medway to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 21 March 2025.
- 1.3. The Cabinet is asked to agree that recommendation 1.2 is considered urgent and therefore should not be subject to call in.

#### **2. Budget and policy framework**

- 2.1. This is a matter for Cabinet.
- 2.2. In line with rule 15.11 of Chapter 4, Part 5 of the Constitution, call-in can be waived where any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the Public's interests. In this case, the deadline for the Council to submit an interim plan setting out draft proposals for a single tier of local government in Kent and Medway to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is 21 March 2025. On this occasion it is proposed that the call-in period be waived to enable this deadline to be met. The Chairperson of the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the decisions proposed

are reasonable in all the circumstances and to them being treated as a matter of urgency and to waive call-in.

### 3. Background

3.1. Full Council received a detailed report on 23 January 2025 setting out the various steps taken by both Medway Council, Kent County Council and the District/Borough Councils between 16 December 2024 when the Government published the 'English Devolution White Paper - Power and partnerships: Foundations for growth' and the invitation issued on the same day, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon OBE MP, who wrote to Council Leaders setting out next steps to taking the proposals in the White Paper forward, which set 10 January 2025 as the deadline for a formal request for areas to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP). At the January full Council meeting, the following was agreed:

3.1.1 The Council noted that the Leader of the Council wrote to Minister McMahon on 10 January 2025, indicating the Council's preference to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme.

3.1.2 The Council agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to establish the appropriate support and resource to deliver this programme of change (inclusive of recruitment to new posts as deemed necessary).

3.1.3 The Council agreed to establish a Member Working Group which would work closely with officers and to agree its membership and terms of reference as set out in paragraphs 4.4 - 4.7 of the report).

3.2. Whilst Medway Council was subsequently informed by the Government that Kent and Medway would not be part of the DPP, Jim McMahon OBE MP, Minister of State for Local Government wrote to the Kent and Medway local authorities on 5 February 2025 formally inviting a proposal for local government reorganisation (Appendix A). This letter also includes the further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of the proposals and the timeline for this process.

3.3. Full proposals will need to be submitted to the Government by 28 November 2025. Subject to the Government's consideration, should the proposal for reorganisation be approved and the necessary legislation passed, the Minister has indicated that he will work with the Kent and Medway local authorities to move to elections to new "shadow" unitary councils as soon as possible.

### 4. Advice and analysis

4.1. Whilst Kent and Medway are not part of the DPP, the Government has indicated that it is keen that a proposal for local government reorganisation in the area is developed and submitted this year and that such a proposal should set out how it supports our future devolution ambitions.

- 4.2. The Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council will continue to work with colleagues in Kent to develop and finalise the interim plan to ensure it is submitted to the Government by the deadline of 21 March 2025.

## 5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Unbudgeted costs of undertaking all needed work in the short-term	Early efforts on local government reorganisation will divert senior staff away from other important council work.	The Council has agreed for a team to be set up to support this process, as set out in the financial implications in this report.	CII
Staff morale may be impacted given the uncertainty arising from Local Government Reorganisation	Some colleagues may be concerned about the impact of reorganisation how it may impact on their roles.	Communications programme already underway which focuses on the positive opportunities associated with devolution.	BII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

## 6. Consultation

- 6.1. The Government has provided information on its expectations regarding engagement and consultation on local government reorganisation, as set out in the schedule to Appendix A of the report. The Council will work with other Kent local authorities to ensure that there is a consistent approach throughout the county, including the governance arrangements.

## 7. Financial implications

- 7.1. On 23 January 2025 Full Council agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to establish “the appropriate support and resource to deliver this programme of change (inclusive of recruitment to new posts as deemed necessary)” (minute 637b refers). The 2025/2026 budget, agreed by full Council on 27 February 2025, includes £450,000 to create a team to support the organisation to engage with the Government, other local authorities and public sector bodies to capitalise on the opportunities and maximise the

benefits that devolution and local government reorganisation could bring for Medway's residents.

- 7.2. It is too early to comment on the financial implications and broader impacts of Devolution itself, or even the longer-term impacts of Local Government reorganisation. In the short term, Government have promised capacity funding to councils who choose to push ahead with the policies outlined in the White Paper and we should pursue this accordingly.
- 7.3. The longer-term aim is to secure the Integrated Funding Settlement via a new 'Strategic Authority' at the earliest possible point. Whilst we must retain this focus given the likely positive impact for our residents, we must not lose sight of the fact that a new iteration of a unitary council for our existing area will be the recipients of this settlement.

## 8. Legal implications

- 8.1. The legal implications are contained within the body of the report.

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### Appendices

Appendix A – Letter from Jim McMahon OBE MP, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution dated 5 February 2025

### Background papers

#### [English Devolution White Paper](#)

The full weblink to the pdf is here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/676028c9cfbf84c3b2bcfa57/English\\_Devolution\\_White\\_Paper\\_Web\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/676028c9cfbf84c3b2bcfa57/English_Devolution_White_Paper_Web_Accessible.pdf)

The document is also available in html version on gov.uk, here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>