Appendix C

Our ref: GP/2025/LGR Call-in September 2025
Contact: Rita Mason
Date: 23rd September 2025

Councillor George Perfect
Leader of the Opposition
Member for Rainham North

Tel: 01634 332514
Gun Wharf, Dock Road,
Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR
george.perfect@medway.gov.uk

Councillor Vince Maple
Leader of the Council
Medway Council

Via email to avoid delay

Dear Leader,

I am writing on behalf of the Opposition Conservative Group in relation to the decision taken at Cabinet this evening, which itself updates your position in relation to Local Government Reorganisation. I wanted to write directly, as today, we will be exercising our powers within the Council's constitution to call-in this decision. As you will know, since becoming the Leader of the Opposition, my group has used this power sparingly and only in times where my Shadow Cabinet and wider group feel that additional scrutiny is required.

My Shadow Cabinet and the wider Conservative Group have several concerns about the decision taken this evening, which I will now set out:

1. Financial prudence – the Council is in a severe state of financial distress, which has necessitated the use of exceptional financial support, which was required in setting the 2024/5 Budget, along with the 2025/6 Budget. On 29th July 2025, Cabinet considered the round one revenue monitoring for this financial year, which showed an additional pressure of £10.9m, with the Council's reserves standing at around £10m, meaning that the Council would not be able to fund the overspend on the scale currently expected. Accordingly, you and your Cabinet instructed the Corporate Management Team to work to implement urgent actions to bring expenditure back within the Budget agreed by full council (Cabinet decision: 99/2025). Whilst the commissioning of the report agreed by this decision will be met within the Budget agreed with Full Council in February, if this report was not commissioned, this would count as a saving towards the Council's overall financial position. There is also the consequence of officer time and capacity which will further add to this cost.

   This report is by no-means necessary, given two options are already being considered by the strategic partner following the decision of Kent Leaders (including an option for four councils). Therefore, the spend on this report would effectively be contributing to the Council's overspend and therefore I am of the view, this is in need of further scrutiny.

2. Change of strategic direction – through the Member Working Group on Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution, we have always worked pragmatically with your administration and officers on local government reorganisation as we believe that this in the best interests of the people of Medway. The strategic programme around this, for us, was always clear. This being that Kent Leaders would choose two options that would then be

considered by the strategic partner, and the administration would then likely back one of the options which would be sent to government. The administration was clear that it would pursue a four unitary option. These two facts were established as policy at Cabinet Meetings earlier in this calendar year (cabinet decisions 33/2025, and 35/2025).

However, at a very late stage on 13th August, the administration suddenly announced a new four unitary map at the Kent Leaders meeting, which was shared with Medway Councillors and others shortly afterwards. It should be said that this map was not developed with any involvement of other Kent Councils (despite making changes to their existing borough and district boundaries), bypassed the working group, was not consulted nor discussed with other partners of the Council, and was presented extremely late. This map was, quite rightly, met with condemnation by other Kent Leaders, and was then subsequently rejected by other Kent Leaders at a meeting earlier this month. With the original four unitary option (which we understand you previously supported), and a three unitary option progressed. Subsequently to this, you then announced through an update on 13th September that you would continue to pursue the map announced on 13th August, however, contingencies around this have never been discussed.

I am therefore concerned that the strategic direction around local government reorganisation needs further scrutiny as currently this appears to me to be chaotic and without any overarching plan.

3. Scope and nature of business case – following on from point 2, I am concerned that even if the administration decided to proceed ignoring the concerns experts see within point 1, there is a lack of clarity about the scope and nature of this plan. Any business case submitted, I believe must be implementable and with a business case that makes clear recommendations, given how consequential these changes will be. I am concerned that by asking this to be pursued at the pace it is, without support from other Kent Councils, could mean that any business case produced would be unsatisfactory and likely unimplementable – which not only further strengthens my first point, but also, I believe, could be further damaging to the Council's reputation. I am therefore of the view that this needs further scrutiny.

I respect the administration's right to pursue its option for local government reorganisation, in line with guidance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, however, given the levels of public money involved in this work, along with the Council's extremely distressed financial position, a call-in is justified and necessary to enable the correct amount of scrutiny.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the relevant scrutiny committee who is also the Shadow Cabinet Member for Business Support Cllr Habib Tejan, along with your wider cabinet, my shadow cabinet and other group leaders on the Council.

Given the Council's financial position, I am also copying this letter to the Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government The Rt Hon Sir James Cleverly MP and Shadow Local Government Minister David Simmonds MP. I also intend to make this letter public.

With every good wish,

COUNCILLOR GEORGE PERFECT
Leader of the Opposition