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Kent LGR Business Case: Option 4B V2.0

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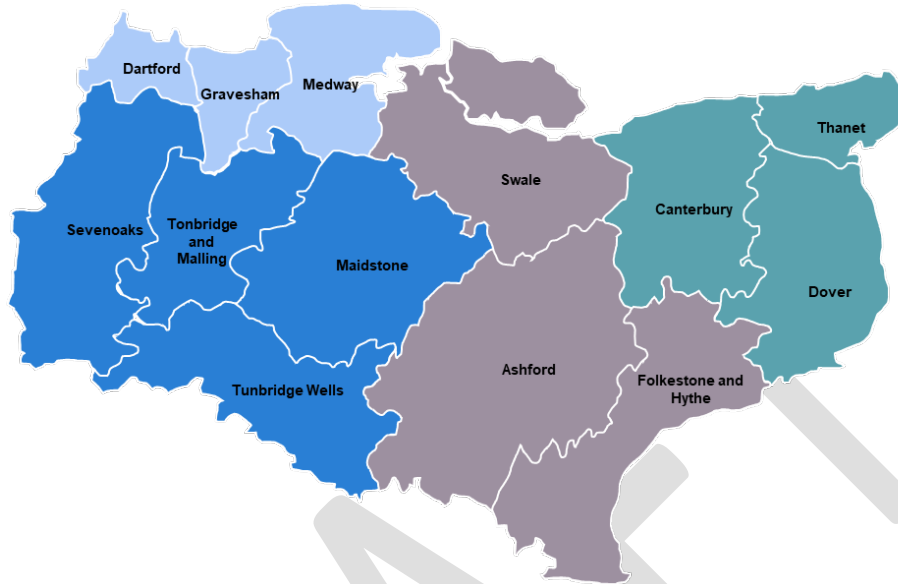
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Executive summary

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 • Gravesham • Medway	• Maidstone • Sevenoaks • Tonbridge & Malling • Tunbridge Wells	• Swale • Ashford • Folkestone & Hythe	• Canterbury • Dover • 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
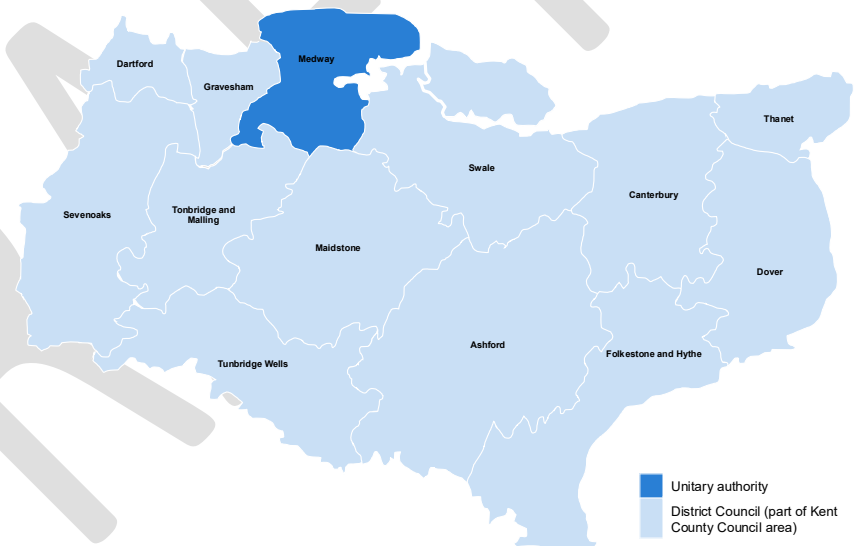
Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) offers a unique opportunity to create a more efficient, resilient and sustainable model.

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. • Each unitary has a recognised economic centre and international ports/airports, providing gateways to trade and economic growth. • Business rates tax bases strong (£70m–£113m retained), enabling financial independence. • Localised economic strategies possible while aligning with wider Kent ambitions. • Council tax bases are sufficient and differences modest, reducing disruption and complexity. • 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. • Population densities vary logically (urban vs rural), allowing tailored service priorities (eg, urban regeneration vs green infrastructure). • Balanced deprivation and social care caseloads promote equitable service distribution.	Criteria 1, 2, 3, 6

- Model supports localised reform while maintaining efficiency and scale.
- Existing partnerships and shared services enhance capacity and reduce fragmentation.
- 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). - Economies of scale in procurement, staffing, IT, HR, and infrastructure reduce duplication. - Simplified governance improves financial oversight and transparency, reducing risk of inefficiency. - Transformation and digital investment enabled by scale and capacity. - Avoids boundary changes, limiting disruption and extra costs. - Invest-to-save principles and joint transition planning minimise financial burden. - 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. - Recognisable community ties maintained (e.g., coastal towns, market towns). - Supports continuation of local traditions, civic institutions, and community networks. - Collaboration across boundaries remains possible for strategic issues. - 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. - Balanced councillor-to-elector ratios enable strong local representation and manageable workloads. - Structural/community engagement measures (parish councils, committees) enhance neighbourhood involvement. - The model supports place-sensitive governance balancing local responsiveness with regional coordination. - 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. - Streamlined governance better positioned for engagement with central government and regional bodies. - Aligns with functional economic areas and transport corridors enhancing coordination. - Supports Kent-wide strategic planning (housing, infrastructure, economic development).	Criteria 5

	• Collective commitment across councils strengthens the governance case for devolution.	
	• 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. • Supports integrated service delivery and breaks down silos. • Builds on existing footprints, minimising disruption and fostering collaboration with NHS, Police, and other partners. • Enables flexible, agile responses to emerging challenges. • Shared transition planning accelerates quick wins and coordinated transformation. • 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:

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 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

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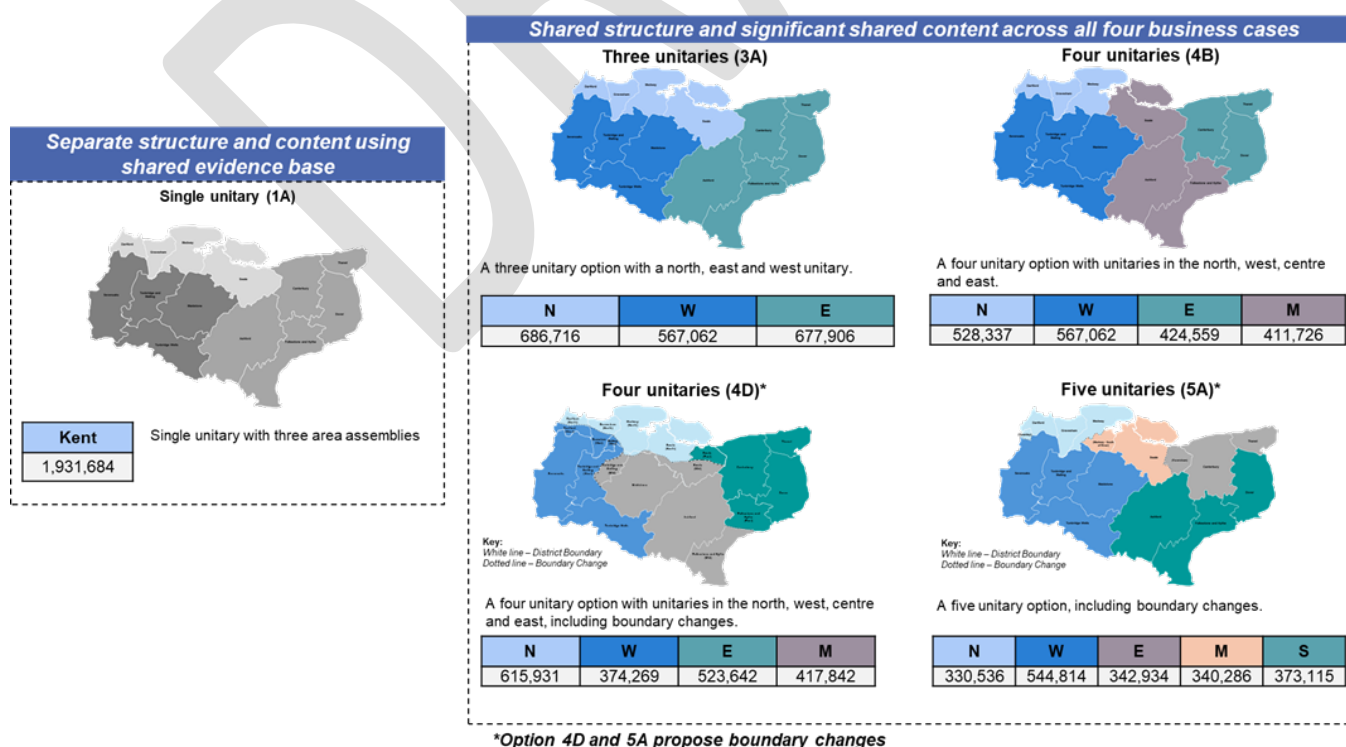
1. Establishing a single tier of local government
2. Efficiency, capacity and resilience to shocks
3. High-quality, sustainable public services
4. Collaboration to meet local needs
5. Enabling devolution
6. Strengthening community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

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

Separate structure and content using shared evidence base

Single unitary (1A)

Single unitary with three area assemblies

Kent
1,931,684

Shared structure and significant shared content across all four business cases

Three unitaries (3A)

A three unitary option with a north, east and west unitary.

N	W	E
686,716	567,062	677,906

Four unitaries (4B)

A four unitary option with unitaries in the north, west, centre and east.

N	W	E	M
528,337	567,062	424,559	411,726

Four unitaries (4D)*

Key:
White line – District Boundary
Dotted line – Boundary Change

A four unitary option with unitaries in the north, west, centre and east, including boundary changes.

N	W	E	M
615,931	374,269	523,642	417,842

Five unitaries (5A)*

Key:
White line – District Boundary
Dotted line – Boundary Change

A five unitary option, including boundary changes.

N	W	E	M	S
330,536	544,814	342,934	340,286	373,115

*Option 4D and 5A propose boundary changes

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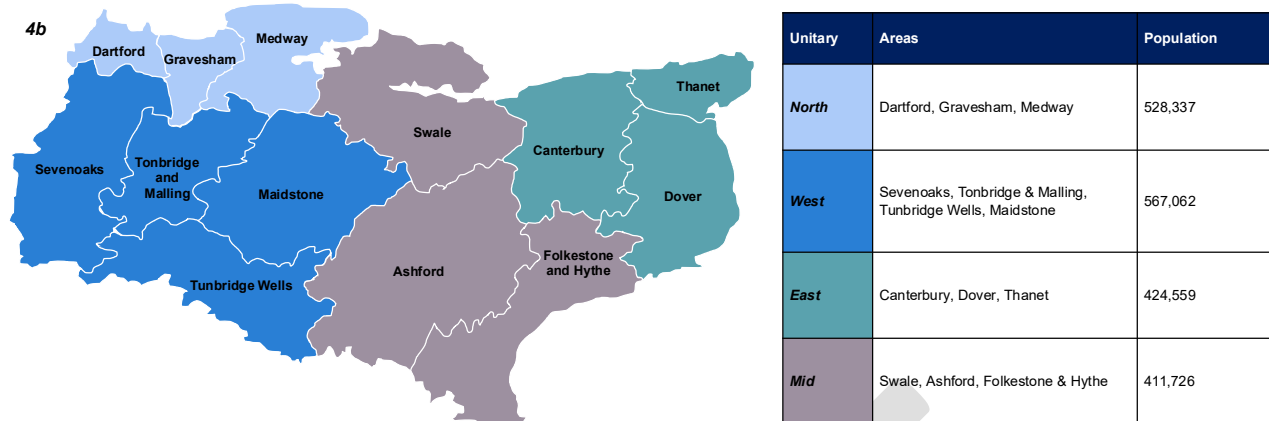
Within this section the majority of content is option specific, with some shared elements.

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.

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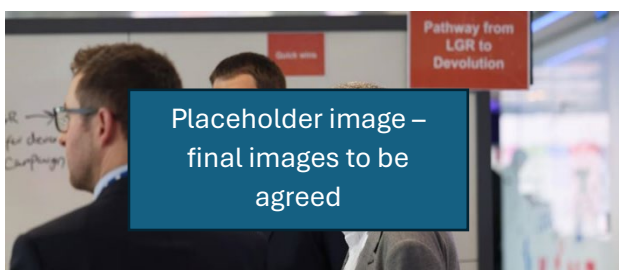
Options appraisal process

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**.

Section 2: The Kent context

This section includes:

Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy

Existing local government structures

Partnership landscape

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

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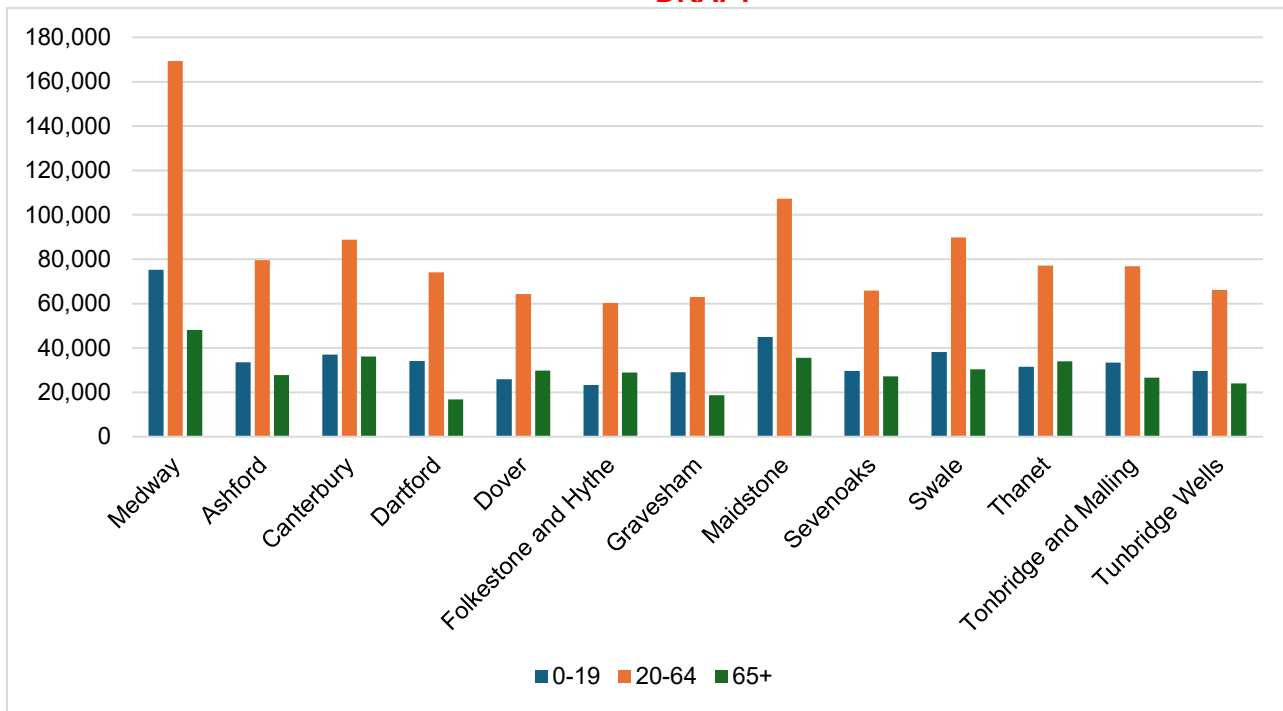
Elsewhere, local factors shape distinct community profiles: Maidstone and Folkestone and Hythe have significant Nepalese communities linked to the nearby barracks and the Gurkha regiment, alongside a growing Eastern European population.

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

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

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[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.

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[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.

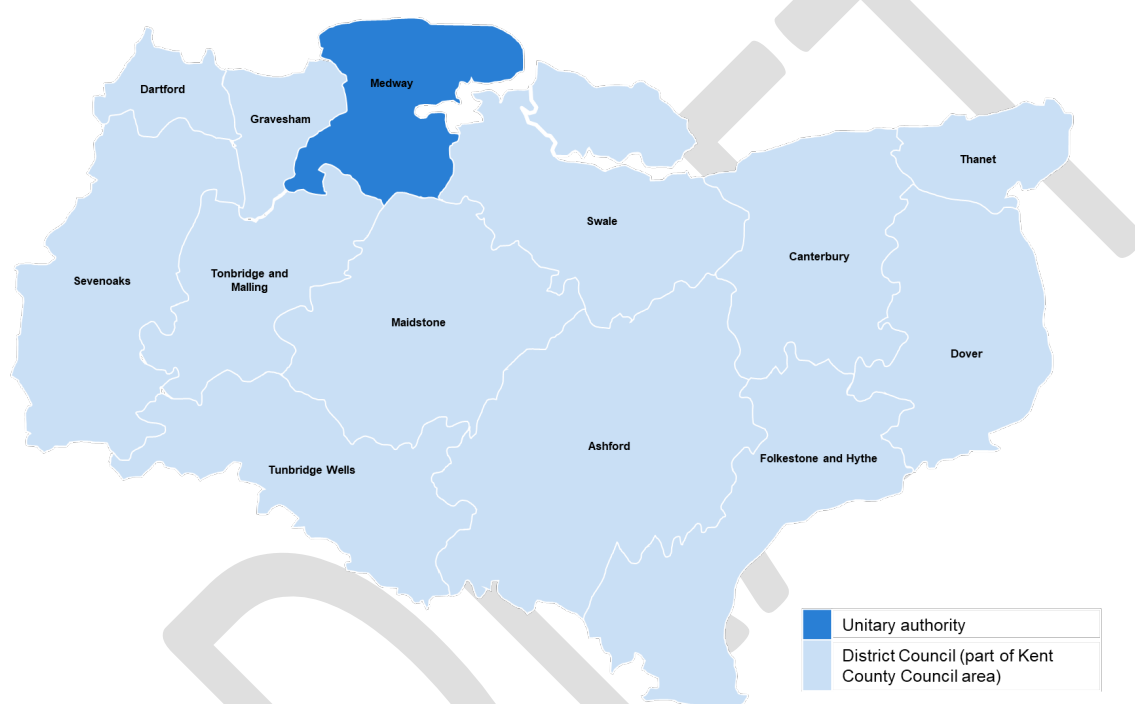*Figure 5: Current boundary lines in Kent*

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

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[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

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.
	• Rising social care costs, which threaten to consume budgets at the expense of other vital services.
	• Managing the distribution of debt and services during disaggregation.
	• Equalising tax bases and service levels across diverse areas ("levelling up, not down").
	• Ensuring financial resilience in the face of uncertainty and change.
	• Significant variation in financial viability across councils.
	• Risk of councils being unable to meet rising demand in adult social care, children's services, school transport, homelessness and contract inflation.
	• High and unpredictable costs linked to Kent's role in managing border and asylum-related responsibilities.
	• 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. • An ageing workforce with the risk of significant staff losses. • Uncertainty and anxiety among staff during restructuring and transition. • Cultural differences between councils, making it hard to realise opportunities and harmonise working practices. • Staff morale and concerns about job security.
Structure & governance	• Fragmentation and disaggregation of services leading to inefficiencies and duplication. • Siloed approaches between upper and lower tiers of government. • Strategic misalignment and lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, both internally and for residents. • Loss of identity for town and parish councils and the erosion of local democracy due to fewer councillors. • Branding and image challenges for local government. • 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. • Ensuring continuity and quality of services for diverse and geographically dispersed communities. • Meeting the needs of communities with different priorities and expectations. • Addressing the risk that smaller voluntary and community sector organisations may not survive the transition. • 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. • Ensuring continuity of services during and after organisational change. • Establishing the culture of the successor councils. • Overcoming skill shortages and ensuring the right talent is in place. • Managing the complexity of integrating services and delivering holistic support. • 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.

	• Inconsistent stages of Local Plan development leading to disjointed housing delivery and varied approaches to shared planning challenges. • 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. • Achieving timely and effective restructuring without losing momentum. • Navigating different cultures and leadership styles across councils and creating new cultural norms. • Ensuring that future devolution delivers real benefits and is not just a structural change.

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. • Streamlining and digitising processes across currently separated services, including AI, and creating data and evidence hubs to improve efficiency and support collaboration with partners. • Aggregating services to build resilience and enable more holistic strategies across education, housing, skills and job creation. • Creating a single front door for residents to access services, improving accessibility and user experience. • 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. • Developing a compelling sustainable growth narrative and pipeline to attract investment. • Planning for growth in key areas such as ports, distribution depots, the Thames Estuary and leveraging proximity to London. • 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. • Succession planning and supporting staff development to address an ageing workforce. • Empowering staff and fostering a positive, proactive culture. • Supporting staff through change, enabling career development and building resilience in the face of organisational restructuring. • 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. • Enhancing place-shaping by planning places, infrastructure and services more holistically. • Redesigning the sense of place and local identity, reconnecting people with their councils. • Improving accessibility to councils and services for all communities, including those in larger or more diverse geographies. • 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). • Sharing knowledge and best practice across Kent and beyond. • Integrating services to deliver more holistic support and strategy. • Creating a one-team culture around place, breaking down silos and enabling more inclusive, joined-up working. • 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. • Improving engagement with politics and public perception of councils. • Adopting fair funding models and ensuring best practice is shared and implemented. • 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

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. • Maintain strong community identity and accountability. • Ensure equity in service access and outcomes across Kent.
Integrated and joined up	• Enable seamless, joined-up service delivery across public services. • Build on existing partnerships and promote shared responsibility, and budgets and co-locate where appropriate. • 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. • Leverage data and AI to support early intervention, improve decision-making, and target resources effectively. • Ensure transparency and open data to build trust and inform priorities.
Financially resilient and efficient	• Adopt place-based financial planning and maximise asset efficiency. • Create efficient systems with flexible resource allocation based on demand. • 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. • Break down silos with collaborative problem-solving structures. • 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. • Deliver clear, shared vision and values, internally and externally. • 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
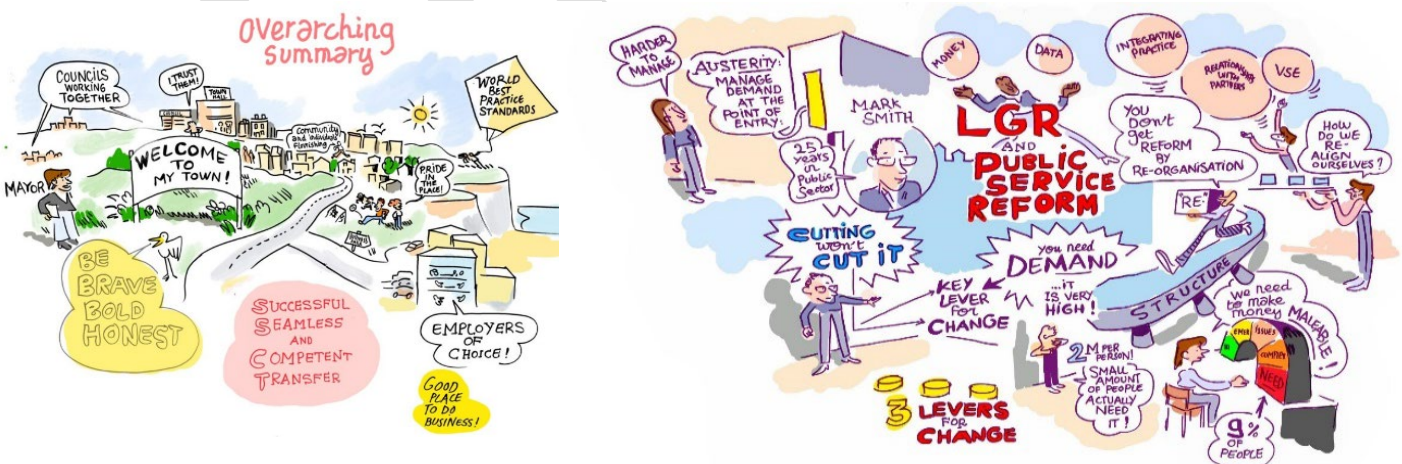
How the vision and design principles will be used

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.
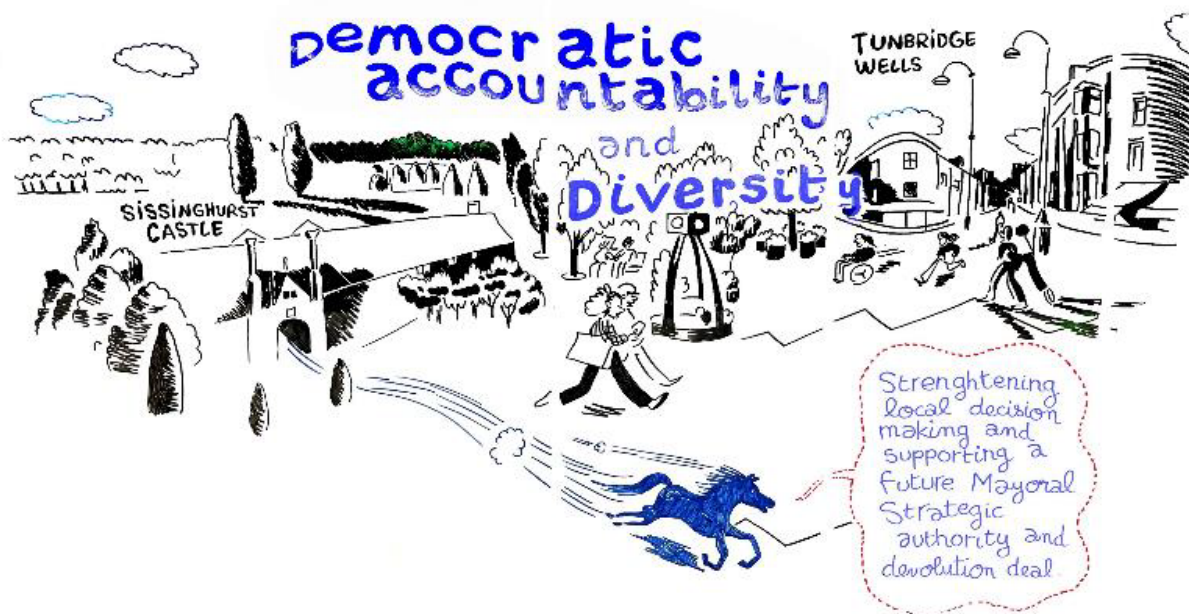
Section 5: The case for Option 4B

This section includes:

The summary case for Option 4B

- o **Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local Government**

- o **Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience**

- o **Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services**

- o **Criteria 4: Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)**

- o **Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities**

- o **Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment**

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*
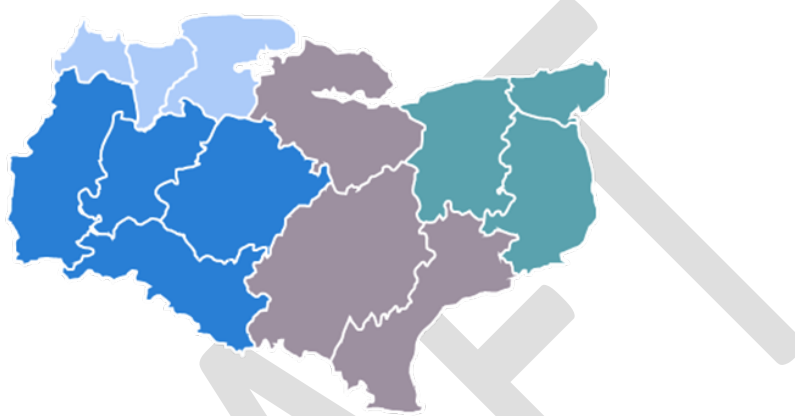
Metric	North	West	East	Mid
Population size (mid-2024)	528,337	567,062	424,559	411,726
Geographic area (sq km) (2024)	366	1,334	728	1,311
GVA per capita (£) (2023)	26,888	35,566	24,065	25,196

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. • Each unitary has a rich and unique industry, thereby supporting economic growth and localism. • The model offers a strong balance in Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita across unitary authorities. • The boundaries reflect both urban and rural communities, preserving local identity. • Councillor-to-electorate ratios ensure strong local representation and manageable workloads. • 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. • Financial metrics (fund balances, debt ratios) are healthy, with significant savings from integration. • Transition costs are moderate, and the structure allows for localised risk management. Provides a balanced population distribution among proposed unitary authorities. • Anticipated transition costs are manageable. • Ensures a stable financial footing with well-balanced reserves. • 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. • 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. • Each unitary aligns with health and care geographies, containing at least one acute hospital. • The model supports localised service delivery by strengthening alignment with existing partner organisations. • 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. • 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. • 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. • Balanced population ratios across councils enable strong, equal partnership in regional governance and robust decision-making capacity for future strategic authority. • 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. • 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) • The model enhances democratic accountability through the creation of smaller unitary authorities with lower councillor-to-elector ratios. • 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

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**

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.
	• Dartford is the strategic gateway to Kent, with the Dartford Crossing and proximity to London, supporting high commuter flows and logistics.
	• Ebbsfleet International Station has created significant housing and commercial development opportunities.
	• The Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) will enhance connectivity between Kent and Essex, boosting economic integration and accessibility.
	• 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.
	• The area is well positioned for clean growth, with a focus on sustainable urban development and high-tech industry.
	• Gravesham offers key opportunities in transport and infrastructure investment, given its proximity to Ebbsfleet, the River Thames, and the M25.
	• North Kent benefits from strong public transport and road infrastructure, enabling efficient access to London, the South East, and Europe.
	• 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.
	• 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.
	• 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.
	• Tunbridge Wells serves as a cultural and economic centre in West Kent, with a strong residential property market and an educated workforce.
	• Maidstone, the county town of Kent, hosts a concentration of public services and legal institutions, and is an important employment hub for the region.
	• 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	• Canterbury is a sub-regional economic centre, with significant cultural heritage, including three UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
	• The higher education sector is well represented in Canterbury through three universities and across east Kent through an established further education sector.
	• 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
	• Thanet boasts extensive coastline, Blue Flag beaches, and a growing creative and digital economy centred around Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs.
	• 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.
	• Dover is a critical international gateway, with the Port of Dover handling a significant amount of UK trade in goods.
	• Ports in Ramsgate and Whitstable offer opportunities to maximise UK trade capacity, resilience and industrial growth
	• 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. • Coastal regeneration and place-making strategies in all three districts aim to improve socio-economic outcomes and attract investment. • The area's natural and built heritage is among the strongest in Kent, supporting tourism and creative industries. • 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. • 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. • 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. • The growth of Kent Science Park offers significant opportunities for growth in the field of life sciences • Swale includes both mainland and the Isle of Sheppey, offering a mix of coastal, rural and industrial assets. • Folkestone & Hythe is defined by strong coastal communities, rural hinterlands and excellent connectivity to mainland Europe via the Channel Tunnel. • The district includes significant portions of the Kent Downs AONB and high-quality agricultural land across the Romney Marsh. • Mid Kent offers significant opportunities for infrastructure-led growth, including garden communities and town centre regeneration. • A strong location for mixed-use development, energy generation and climate resilience initiatives. • 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.

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[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.

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[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.

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.

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[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
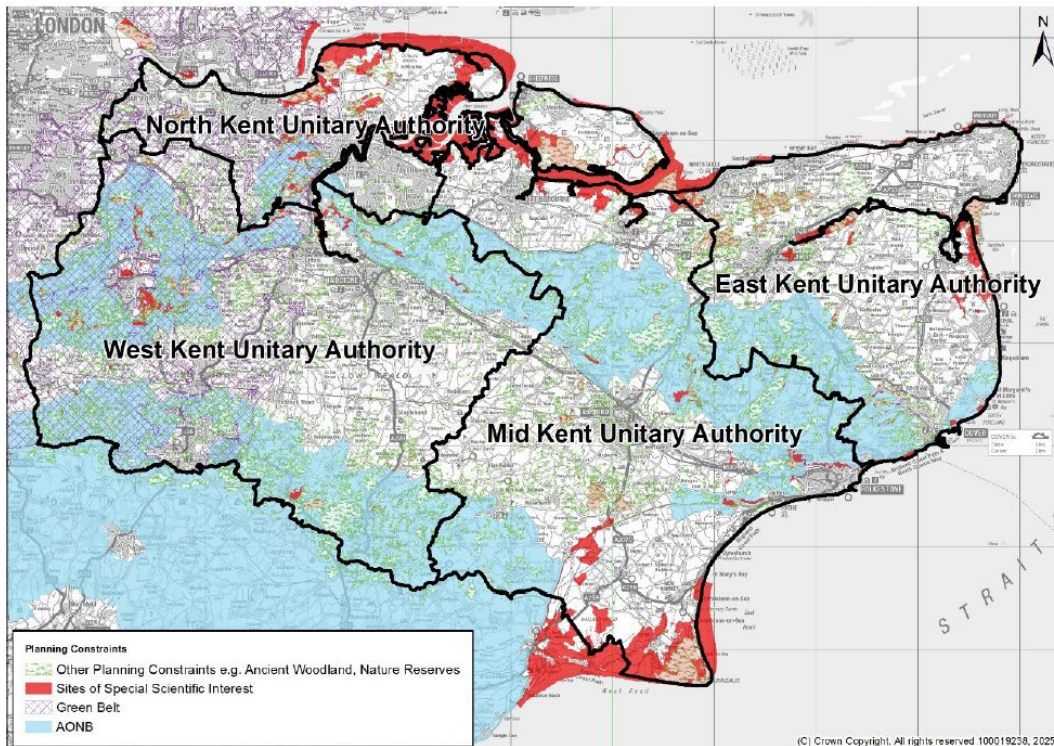
Travel to work patterns across Kent

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
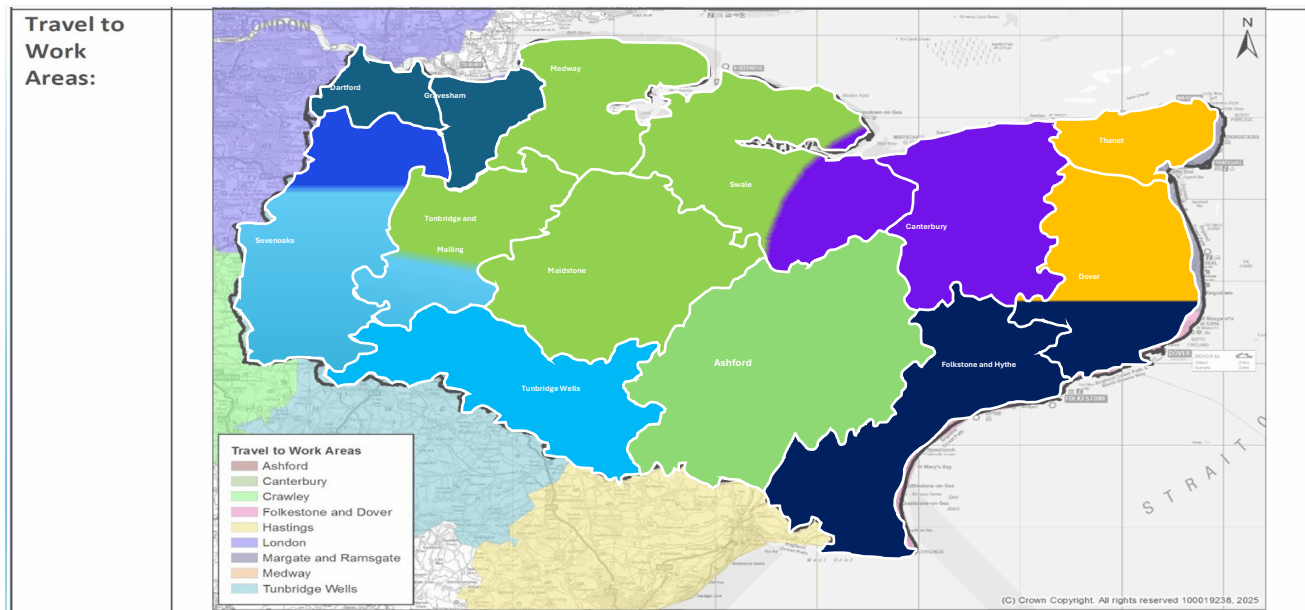
Functional geographies and travel to work areas

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*
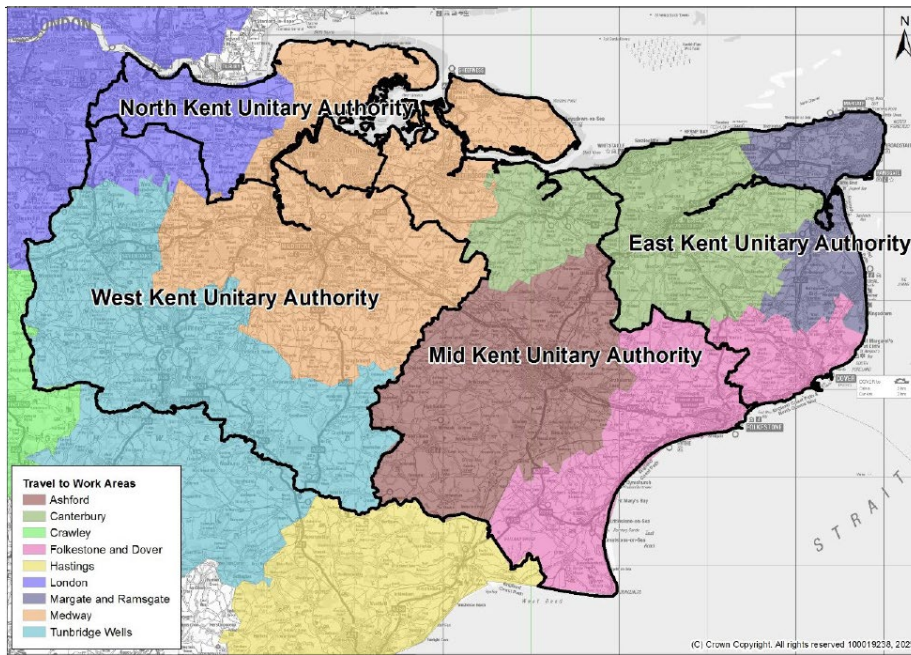
The observed travel patterns show alignment with the 4B. A summary of how each proposed unitary council corresponds with existing TTWAs is provided in the table below.

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. • 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. • 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. • 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%).

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[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. • 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. • 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. • 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. • 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.
	• 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
	• 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.
	• Tonbridge & Malling: Well-connected by M20 and M26 running east to west. Southeastern rail connects to Tonbridge and West Malling.
	• 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. • 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. • 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. • 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. • 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

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[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.

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.

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**

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

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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)*
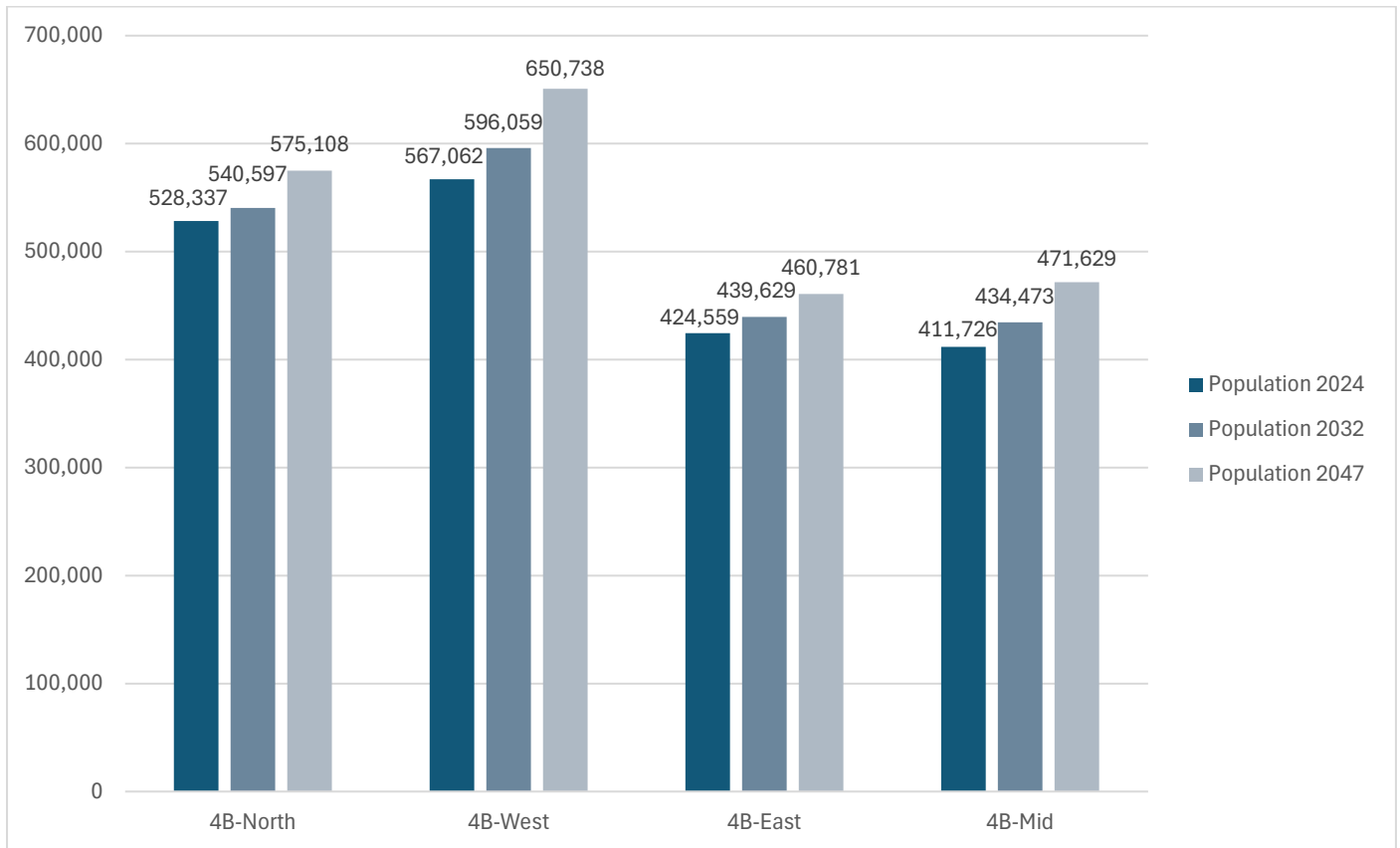
The argument for 4B: Balanced populations with room for growth

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*

Cumulative Impact of LGR and Breakeven Point (Option 4B)
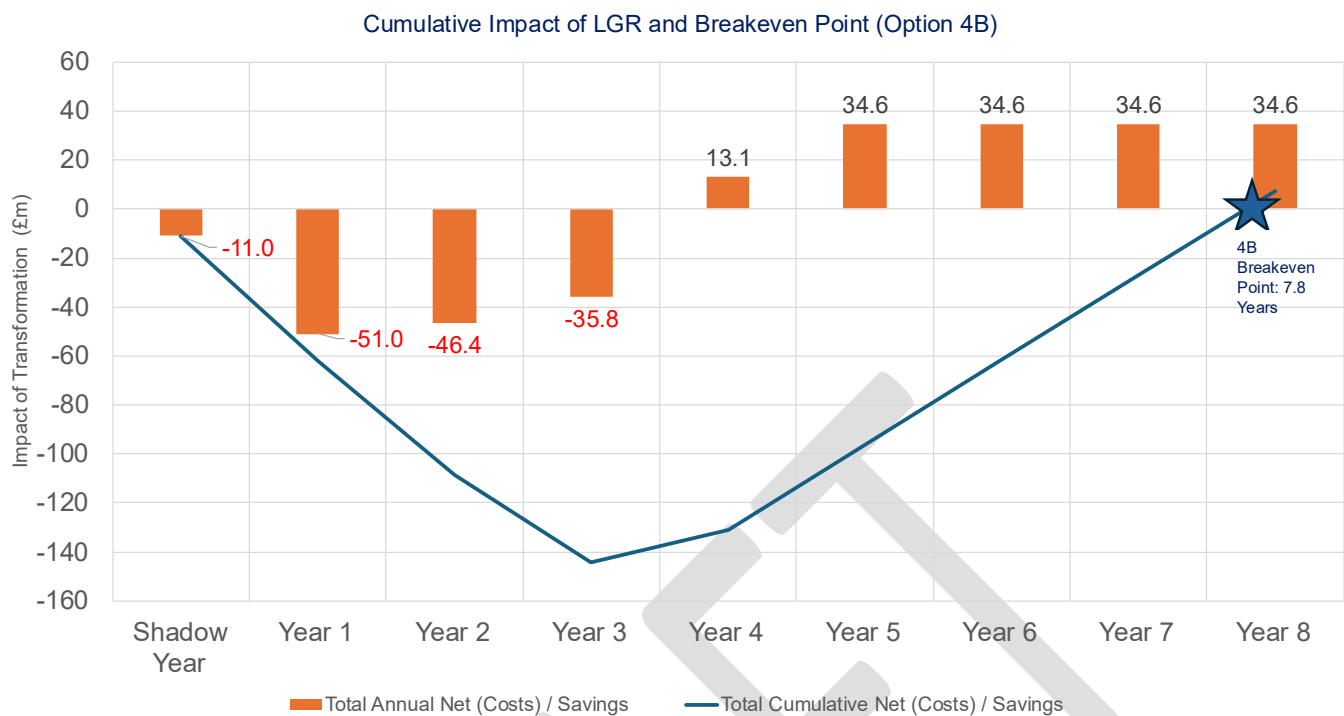
*Chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest end of the range

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.

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

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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.

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)
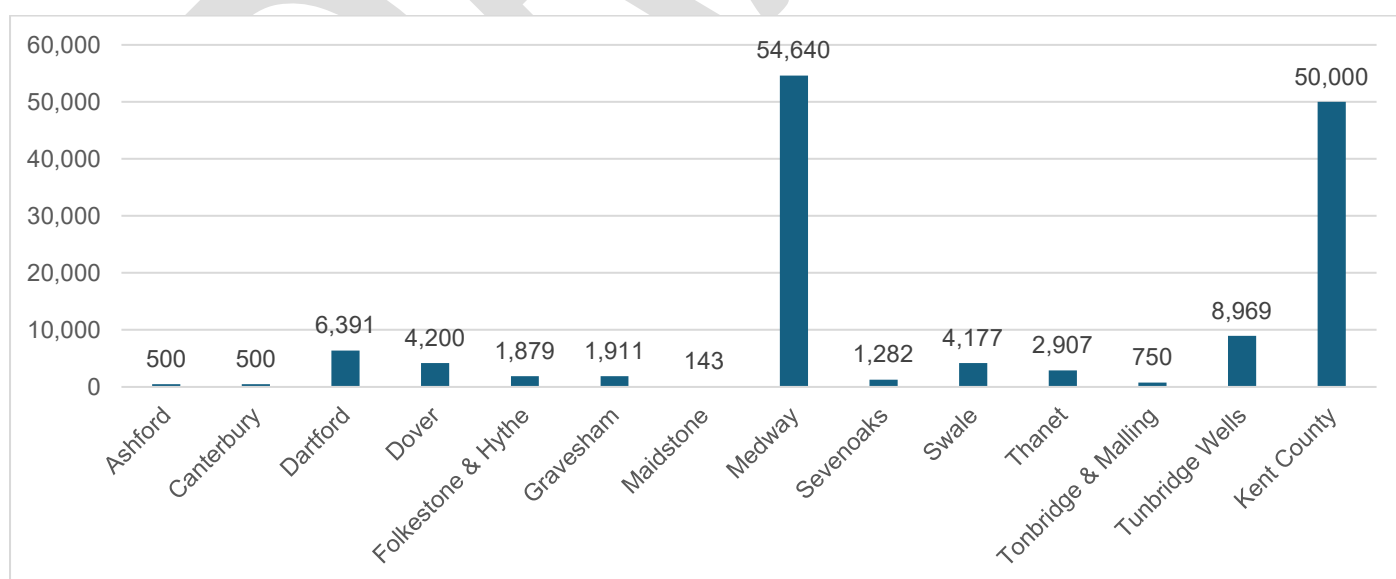
All existing councils will continue to focus on delivering savings and managing their ongoing budget gaps regardless of LGR.

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)

Figure 14: Total Usable Reserves (FY28/29) (£'000)
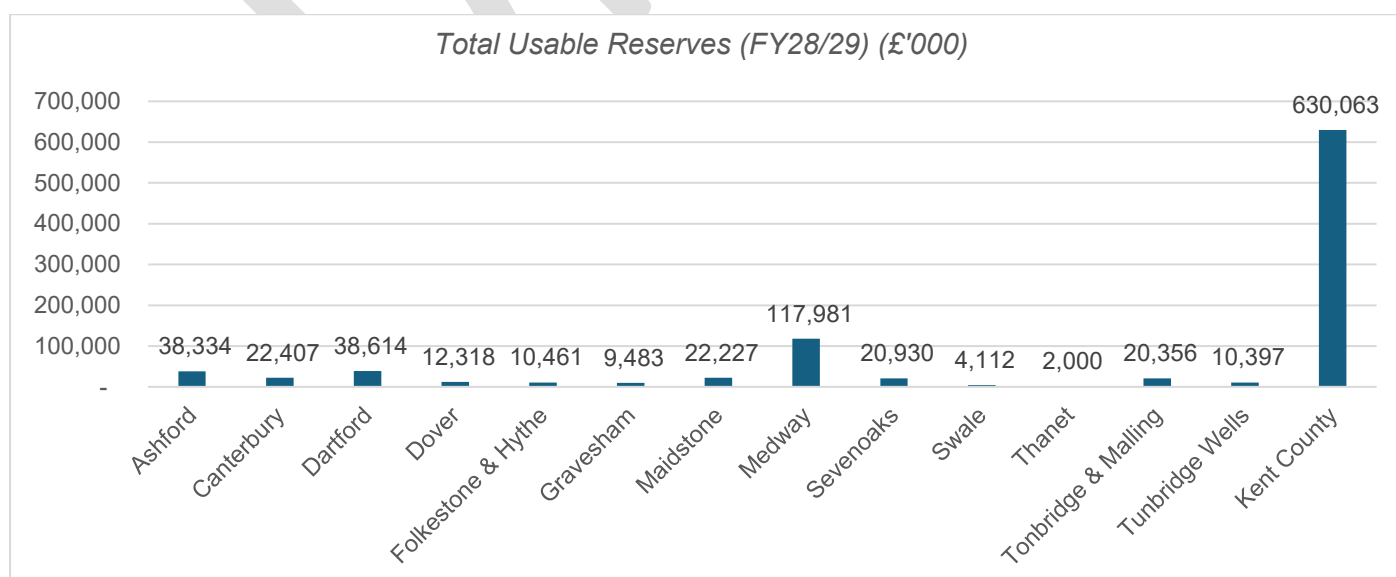
Note – for all districts, this amount related to General Fund balance, Earmarked Reserves, Capital Receipts Reserve and Capital Grants Unapplied.

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%

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[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

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[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**

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 (based on 23/24 spending)[31]	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent

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[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.

<u>Future ASC delivery and opportunities through LGR</u>

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:

  - o North Kent and Medway: urban waste optimisation and riverside recycling logistics.

  - o East Kent: coastal litter management and tourism-related waste strategies.

  - o Mid Kent: rural route rationalisation and community composting.

  - o 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

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. • By working closely with residents and local groups, services can better understand what matters most and tailor their offer accordingly. • Residents should feel that their voice is being listened to, and the subsequent service design reflects their input. • Services should be reshaped to reflect the needs of local people in flexible, community-focused provision. • By designing support around the lived experience of residents, Kent can deliver more effective, efficient, and equitable outcomes. • 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. • 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. • 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. • 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. • 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. • 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. • While there are excellent examples of joint working, these are often isolated and not yet embedded as the norm across the system. • 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. • 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. • 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.

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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]

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[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

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) <u>Stakeholder engagement programme</u>

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*

Health	• NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB)
	• Kent Integrated Care Alliance
	• NHS Provider Trusts
	  ○ East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust
	  ○ Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust
	  ○ Medway NHS Foundation Trust
	  ○ Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust
	  ○ Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust

Emergency services	• Kent Police • Kent Police and Crime Commissioner • South East Coast Ambulance Service
Social care and safeguarding	• Chairs of Safeguarding Boards – Adults and Children's • Chairs of any Partnership Board • Chair of Kent and Medway Resilience Forum
Education and skills	• University of Kent • Canterbury Christ Church University • University of Greenwich

	• University for the Creative Arts • FE colleges
Economic development	• Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce • Federation of Small Businesses
Government and Public Sector Partners	• Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) • National Highways • Port health authorities • Housing associations
Volunteering	• VCSE sector representation

The perspective of Kent residents

Figure 15: What Kent residents value most about their local council
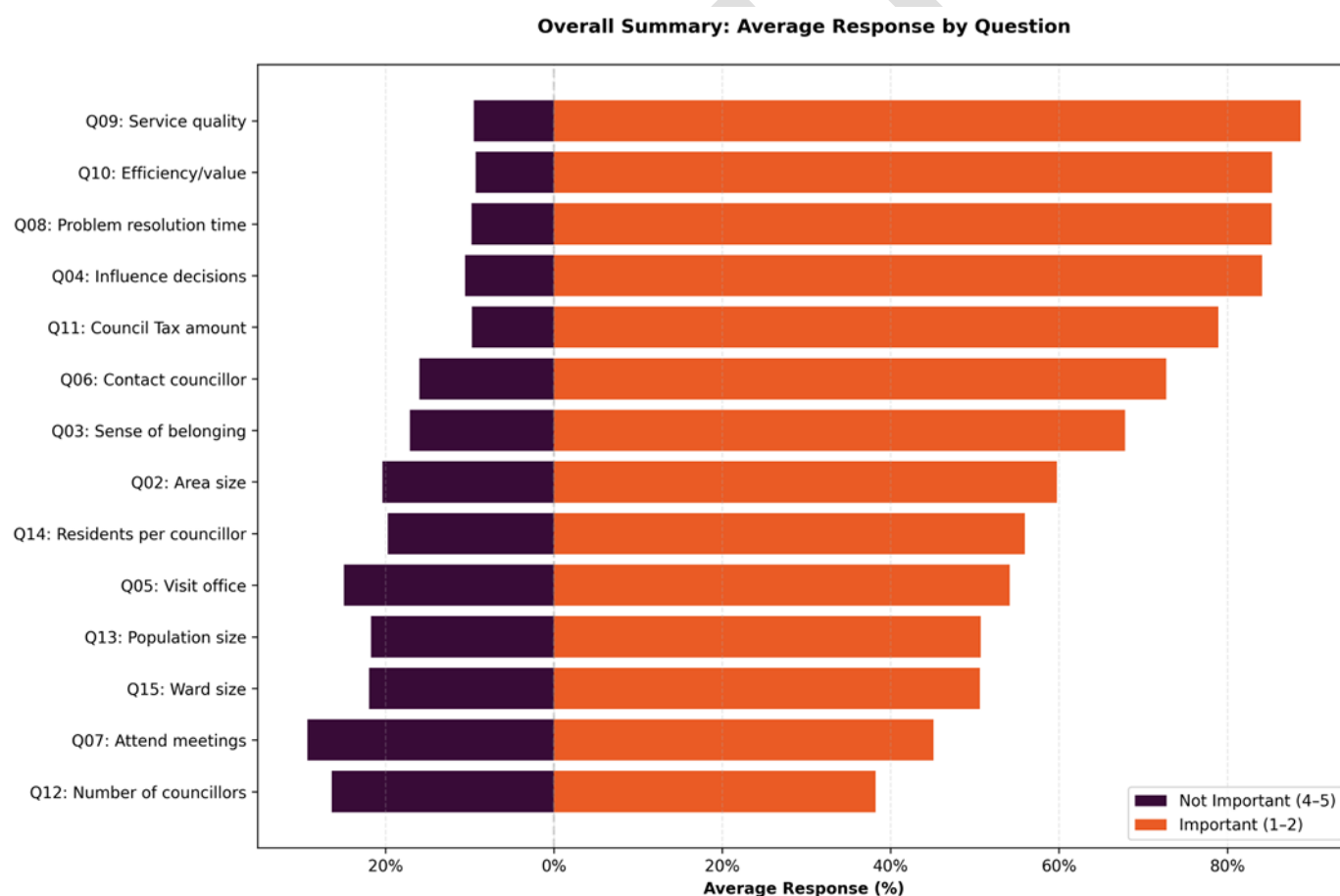
Overall, the highest-rated aspects were service quality, efficiency and value, problem resolution time, decision-making influence and council tax amount.

Figure 16: Opportunities identified by Kent residents from local government reorganisation
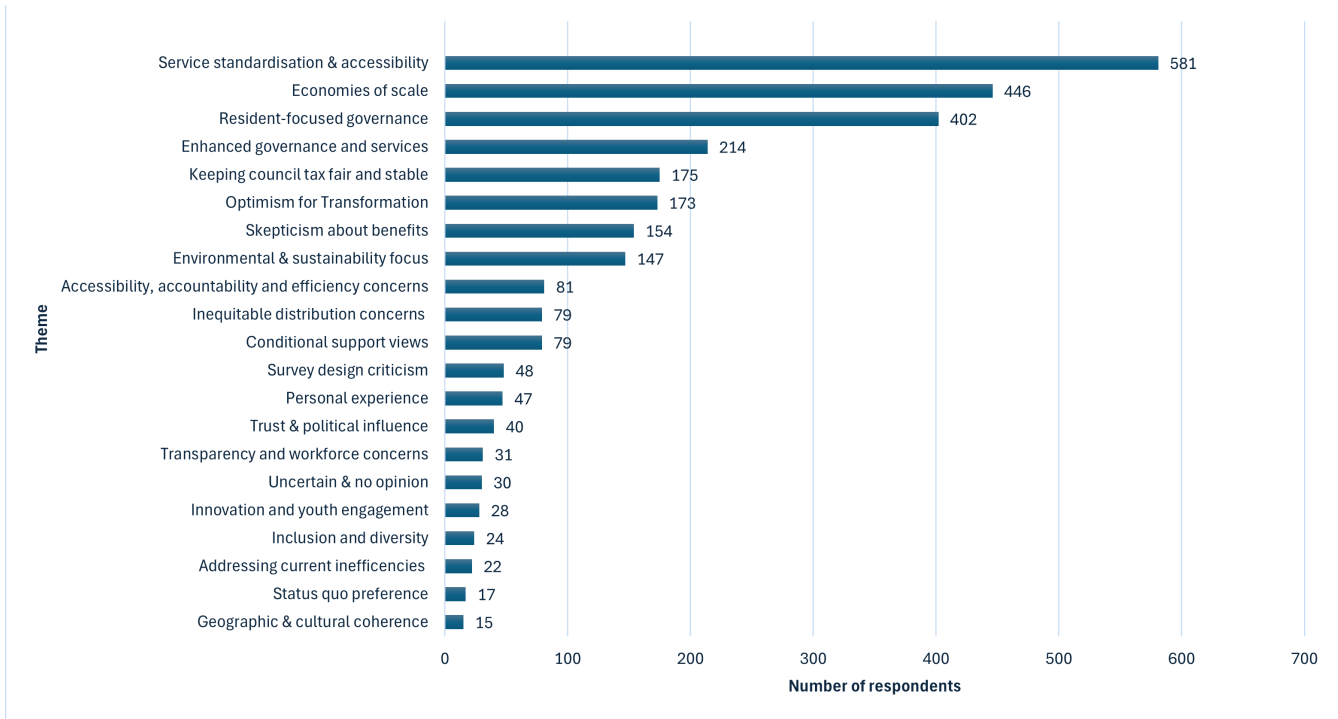
Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

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*
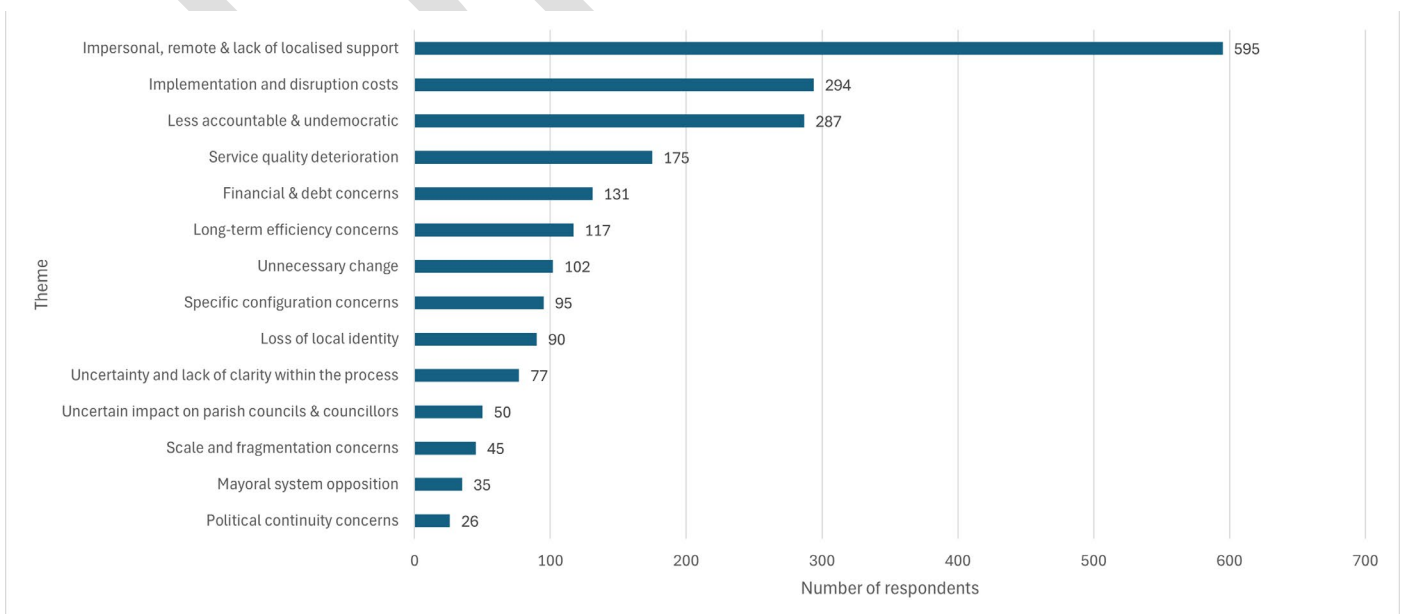
Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote with fears that larger councils could become disconnected from communities, particularly in rural and coastal areas.

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. <u>Service quality is a top priority for residents, yet many are concerned that services will deteriorate throughout the reorganisation process</u>

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. <u>Service quality and input into decision-making is of particular importance for residents with disabilities</u>

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. <u>Residents want to protect local identity, connection to community and democratic representation</u>

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. <u>There were concerns about loss of in-house heritage expertise and local heritage services.</u>

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."*

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. • Some stakeholders from parish councils emphasised parishes provide valued highly local, responsive community services and argue community identity is vital to resident wellbeing. • Some acknowledged reorganisation could bring efficiency and clarity benefits, but stress local democracy or community identity should not be sacrificed in pursuit of these. • 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. Residents • Some respondents opposed abolishing district councils and list risks such as service disruption, higher costs and weaker democracy. • 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. • 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…"*

	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. • 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."*

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 • Dartford • Gravesham • 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.** • 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. • Medway, with its larger urban area, includes town centres such as Chatham, Rochester, and Gillingham, which are focal points

for retail, leisure, cultural, and tourism facilities. Gravesend town centre also serves as a retail and leisure hub.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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 • Canterbury • Dover • 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.** • 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

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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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	**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.**
• Maidstone • Sevenoaks • Tonbridge & Malling • Tunbridge Wells	- 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. It is also notable as a commuter town with connections to London via the rail network.

- 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.

- Tunbridge Wells serves as a cultural and economic centre in West Kent, with a strong residential property market and an educated workforce.

- Maidstone, the county town of Kent, hosts a concentration of public services and legal institutions, and is an important employment hub for the region.

- 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.

- Characterised 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.

- 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:	**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.**
• Swale • Ashford • Folkestone and Hythe	- 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. - 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. - The Swale borough includes the towns of Sittingbourne, the historic Cinque Port of Faversham, Queenborough, and

Sheerness, with Sheerness having heavy-industrialised ports with deepwater harbours.

- 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.

- The borough of Ashford saw the largest population growth in Kent between 2011 and 2021, with a 14.6% rise to 118,000 inhabitants.

- In economic terms, Folkestone & Hythe is the third most deprived area in Kent, with a high unemployment rate and a majority of small businesses.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

This section includes:

Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent   **Criteria 5a**

Equal representation from all four corners of Kent   **Criteria 5c**

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

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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.

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**

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?

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.

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[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

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[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. • **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. • **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. • **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.
	• NACs will need to be supported and empowered in ways that acknowledge historic inequalities.
	   o 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.
	   o 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 o 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. **Councillor remuneration and practical support** will need to be reviewed where new expectations on councillors' time exceed current commitments. - A sustainable ecosystem of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations **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]. - 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. - Boundaries that promote local engagement and strategic influence - 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.

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[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

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.
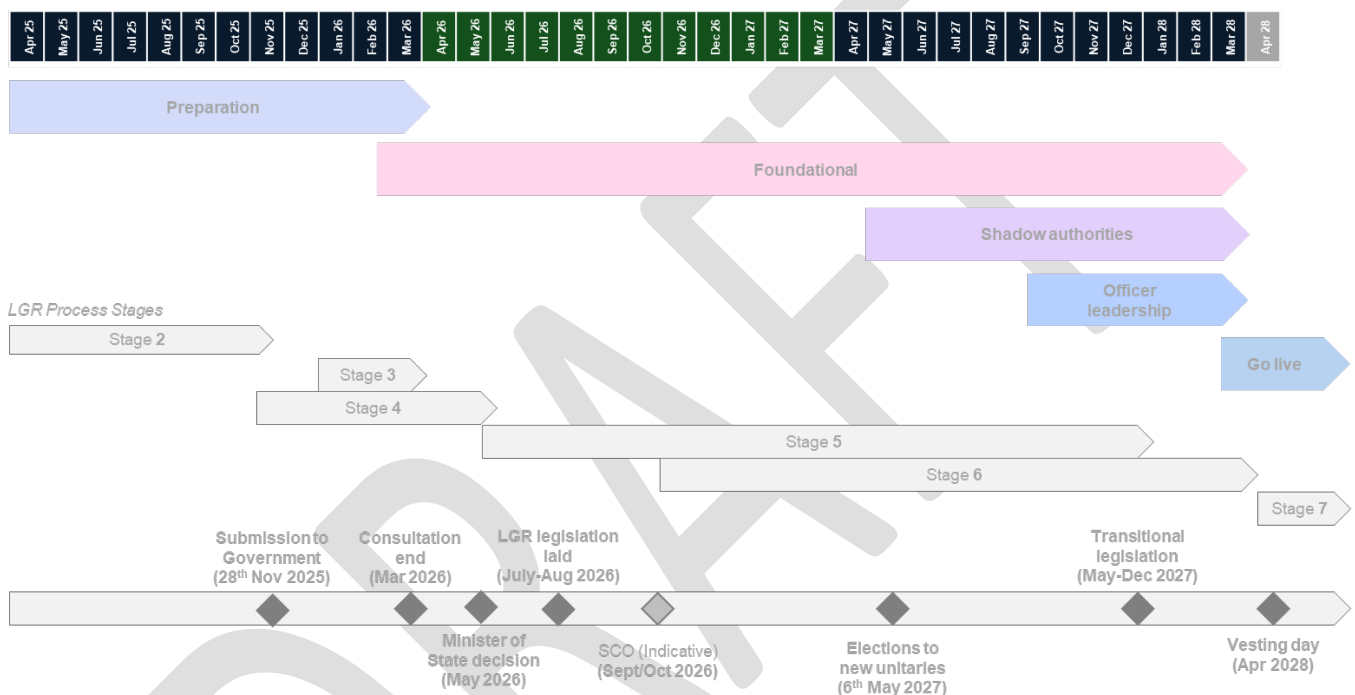
1. **Preparation** Before a decision on the shape of the new councils. We have started work on implementation early to set it up for success. We have a plan for Day One and are ambitious to deliver strong, cohesive councils to deliver transformation and public service reform beyond safe and legal transition. 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 • Set up the programme (governance, workstreams and finance) • Recruit Strategic Partner(s) • Agree target position for Day One and scenario planning • Set up the plan, timeline and critical path including provisional Day One requirements and milestones • Set up a data hub - gather and maintain consistent programme data • Define and agree scope of LGR-related decisions with sovereign councils
Foundational	• Adapting programme to specific milestones • Commencing Day One programme plan (what is in appropriate scope of the programme e.g. ICT infrastructure, treatment of systems and contracts) • Service alignment and transformation including reconfiguring existing area based working arrangements to match boundaries of new councils • Options appraisals and preparing for key decisions • Elections • Compliance with Structural Changes Order and legal checks and assurance • Project plan for safely winding down sovereign authorities
Shadow authorities	• Continuing delivery of Day One programme plan • Appointing Chief Executives and statutory and leadership roles • Member inductions and service briefings • Key decision timetable • TUPE transfer arrangements
Officer leadership	• Tier 2 and Tier 3 Leadership Recruitment • Service planning • Development of council plan, budget MTFP • Key policies and strategies (strategic priorities and corporate plans, unitary strategic risk register, constitution) • 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

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:

People   Technology   Finance   Contracts and legal   Property and estates   Data Hub   Comms and engagement
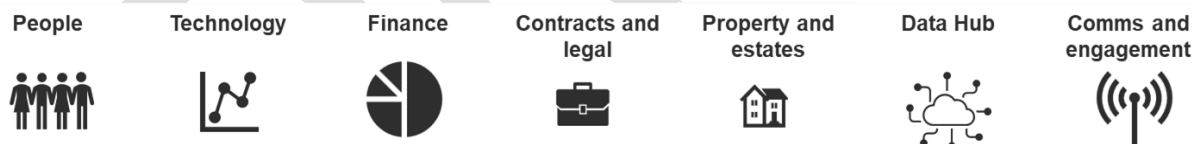
We will establish Unitary Delivery Groups to focus on preparations for the new councils.

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:

  o Building on existing close working arrangements;

  o 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;

  o 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.

Appendix 1: Options appraisal

This section includes:

Options appraisal approach

Options appraisal results

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*

Single unitary

1a

1b

1a
1,931,684

1b
1,931,684

Two unitaries

2a

2b

W	E
1,095,399	836,285

W	E
1,253,778	677,906

Three unitaries

3a

N	W	E
686,716	567,062	677,906

Four unitaries

4a

4b

4c

4d*

Key:
White line– District Boundary
Dotted line– Boundary Change

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

Five unitaries

5a*

Key:
White line– District Boundary
Dotted line– Boundary Change

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:

   o High = below 33rd percentile (most balanced)

   o Medium = 33rd to 66th percentile

   o 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

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)* |
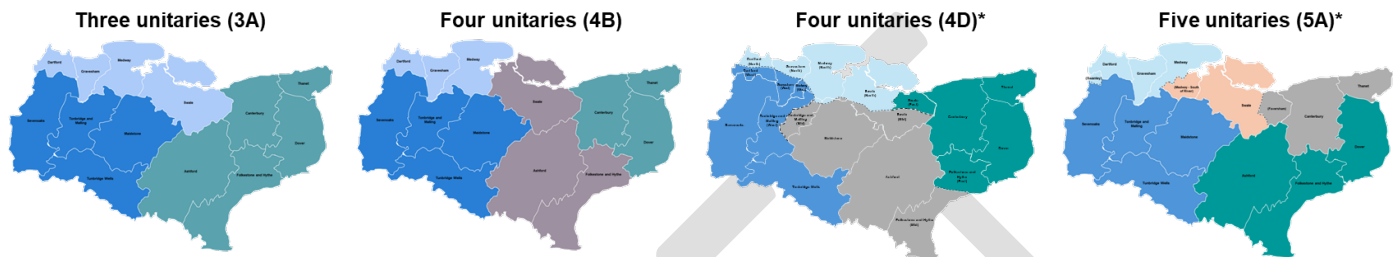
Purpose of financial model

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.

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:

1. Implementation costs	2. Reorganisation savings	3. Disaggregation costs
Estimates the one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model.	Estimates the annual high-level savings potential from efficiencies that can be unlocked through reorganisation (e.g. workforce, governance, systems).	Estimates the additional recurring expenditure that results from dividing upper tier (i.e. county level) services into multiple new upper tier authorities.

Assumptions within the model have been collectively reviewed and adjustments made to factor in Kent-specific context or any specific characteristics of proposed models.

Payback period
The savings and costs calculated for each option have been phased to show payback period for each option.

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.

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
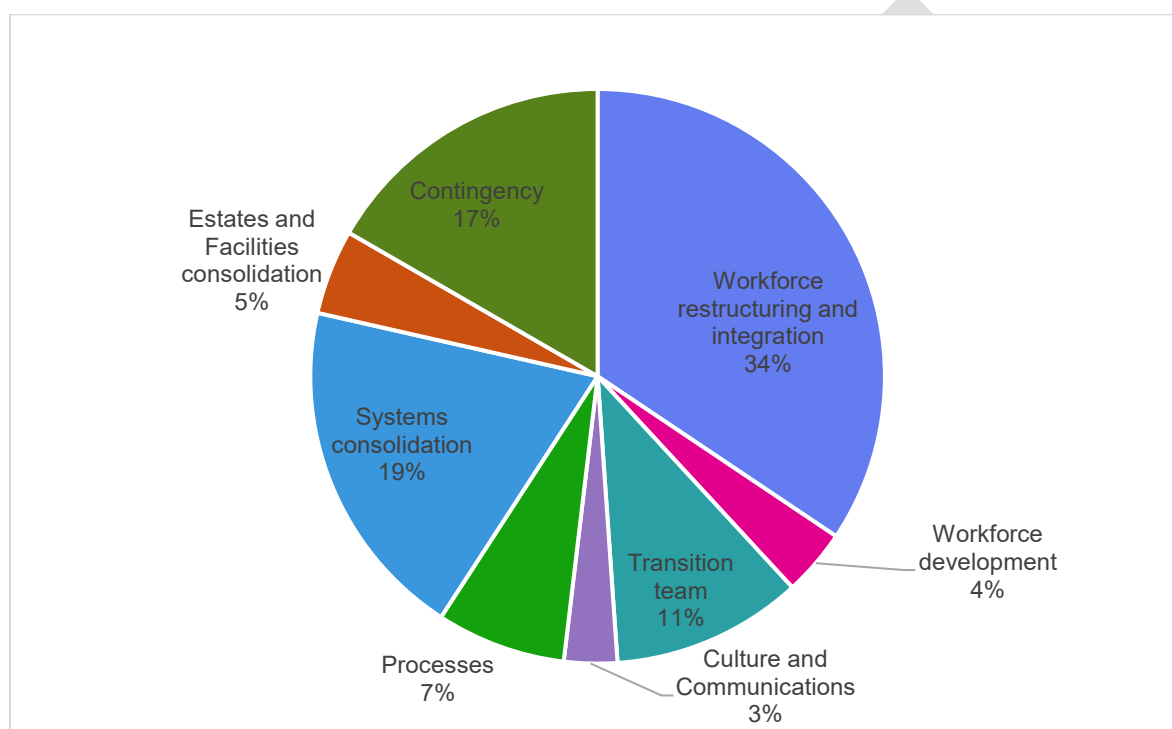
Phasing of implementation costs

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%

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
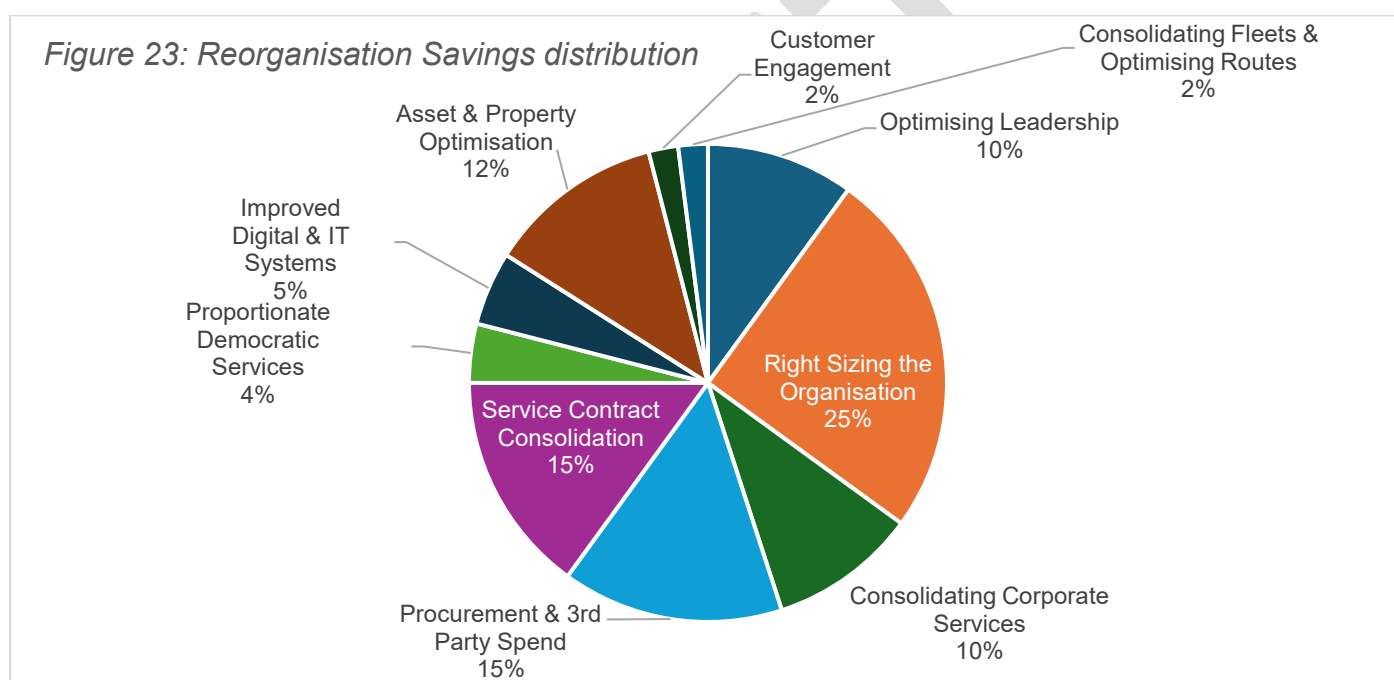
Note: a 10% contingency is also applied but has not been reflected in the graph above

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%

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) %

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[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.

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
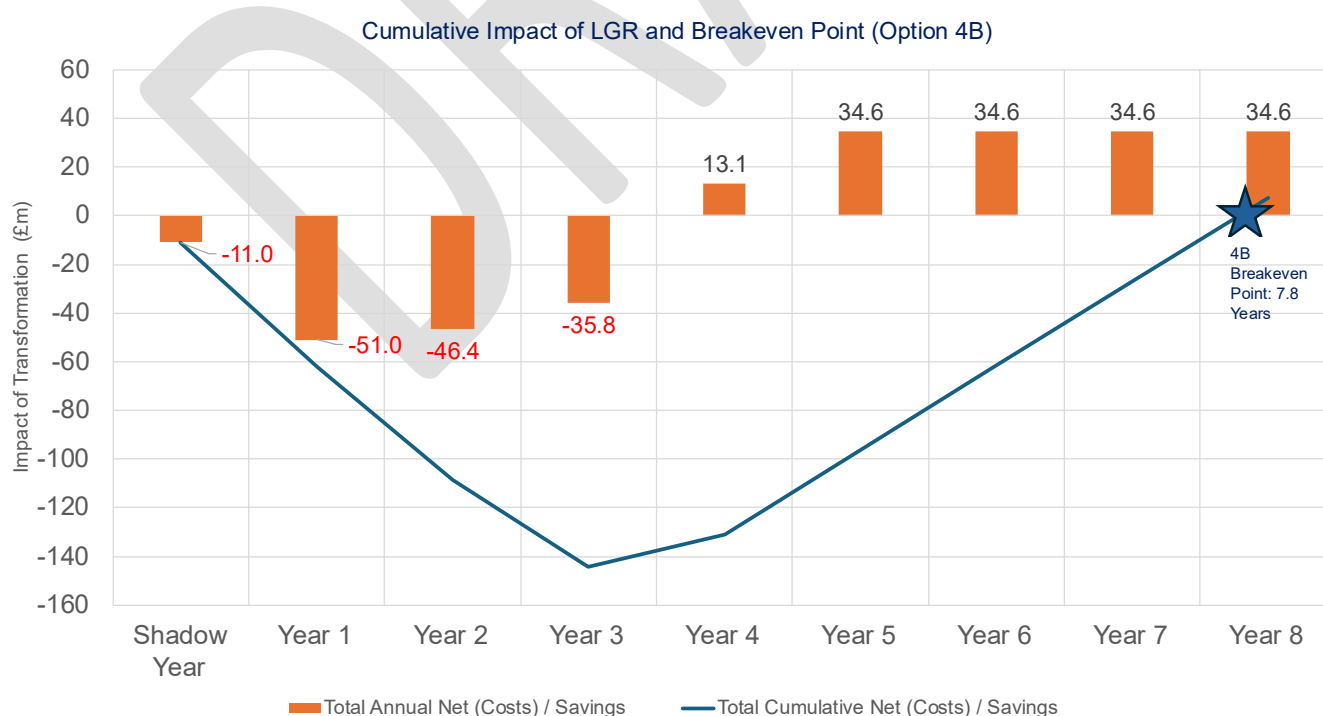
*The chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest point in the range.

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

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[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

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[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

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[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

	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

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[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

	1A	3A			4B				4D				5A				
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%

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[54] Publicly available data
[55] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202324-annual-publication