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# Kent LGR Business Case: Option 4D

## V2.0

**Four New Councils, One Bold Future for Kent**

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# Foreword (placeholder)

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# Executive summary

## Introducing Option 4D

This option is supported by Medway Unitary Authority and the District and Borough Councils of [insert]. The Option 4D business case sets out a four-unitary model that balances local identity with strategic capacity.



	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent
Population	615,931	374,269	523,642	417,842
Current council areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medway (98%)</li> <li>• Gravesham (87%)</li> <li>• Swale (81%)</li> <li>• Dartford (78%)</li> <li>• Small sections of Tonbridge and Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sevenoaks</li> <li>• Tunbridge Wells</li> <li>• Tonbridge and Malling (61%)</li> <li>• Dartford (22%)</li> <li>• Gravesham (13%)</li> <li>• Medway (2%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canterbury</li> <li>• Dover</li> <li>• Thanet</li> <li>• Folkestone and Hythe (64%)</li> <li>• Swale (Faversham area 17%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ashford</li> <li>• Maidstone (98%)</li> <li>• Folkestone and Hythe (36%)</li> <li>• Tonbridge and Malling (36%)</li> <li>• Swale (3%)</li> </ul>
	<p>A strategically vital growth corridor, defined by its dynamic mix of urban regeneration, industrial innovation, and world-class connectivity along the Thames Estuary. Anchored by Medway, Gravesham, Dartford, and Swale, it will drive economic opportunity, while celebrating a rich</p>	<p>A prosperous, knowledge-driven region with a highly skilled workforce, strong commuter links to London, and a landscape of historic market towns and rural villages. The area will leverage its high quality of life, green infrastructure, and cultural assets to attract investment and serve as a centre for</p>	<p>A distinctive coastal and rural economy, acting as the UK's gateway to Europe through its major ports and international transport links. The area will focus on regeneration, tourism, green energy, and creative industries, underpinned by strong educational institutions, a vibrant cultural scene, and a</p>	<p>The historic heart of the county, combining the county town of Maidstone, the growth hub of Ashford, and rural and coastal communities. With excellent transport connectivity and a balanced economic base, it will drive infrastructure-led growth, innovation and sustainable development, while</p>



heritage and diverse, youthful communities.

innovation, education, and environmental stewardship.

commitment to delivering quality services across its diverse communities.

retaining its strong identity and civic traditions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

	Option 1a	Option 3a	Option 4b	Option 4d	Option 5a
<b>Approach to drafting</b>	Kent County Council leading with some shared input around finance and services.	Common approach to drafting with input from councils.			
<b>Structure, formatting and branding</b>	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.

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

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

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

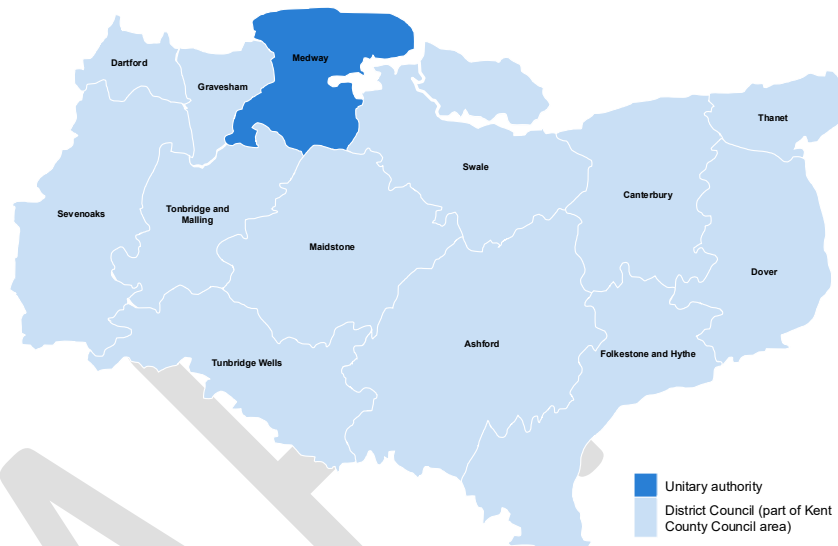
Kent currently has a two-tier local government system.

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

Medway Council functions separately as a unitary authority.

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

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



### Challenges and opportunities (see section 3)

Councils across the county face financial pressures and rising demand.

In Kent, key pressures include:

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

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

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

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

Our vision for local government in Kent is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Option 4D: Four New Councils, One Bold Future for Kent**

Option 4D is a modern, locally attuned model for Kent and Medway which offers a forward-thinking approach to local government, combining financial resilience and efficiency with a deep respect for community identity and heritage. By restructuring Kent and Medway into four strong, locally focussed unitary authorities, it brings decision making closer to the people it affects, ensuring services are designed around real lives rather than distant structures. Boundaries are drawn around natural geographies, economic corridors, and historic communities, creating councils that are functional, recognisable, and locally accountable.

This simpler, stronger structure empowers communities, protects Kent's distinct character, and unlocks the full potential of devolution. Each council – serving between 375,000 and 625,000 residents – balances scale with local voice, aligns with government guidance, and provides capacity for sustainable growth.

**The case for Option 4D (see section 5)**

Option 4D's boundaries are carefully drawn to reflect Kent's natural growth and transport corridors, such as the M2/A2, Thames Gateway, M20/HS1 and geographic landmarks, ensuring that each council is both functional and recognisable to residents. It ensures coherent service delivery, preserves historic civic centres and cultural assets, maintains partnerships across health, policing, education, and voluntary sectors, and creates a robust platform for a future Kent & Medway Combined Authority. It is premised on the strong belief that efficiency arises from integration, simplification, and accountable local government.

Together, these features make Option 4D the most balanced, future-ready model for Kent and Medway - delivering scale without sacrificing identity. Key strengths include:

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- **Balanced population and fiscal scale:** Each council is of optimum size for long-term sustainability, with robust tax bases and economic output. Council tax rates are closely aligned, minimising disruption and supporting fiscal resilience across all councils.
- **Functional economic and transport corridors:** Boundaries reflect Kent’s natural economic and travel patterns, supporting coherent policy implementation and efficient service delivery.
- **Preservation of local identity and heritage:** The model respects historic communities, civic centres, and cultural assets, retaining a strong sense of place and pride.
- **Continuity of partnerships and institutions:** The geography aligns with existing economic, health, policing, education, transport, emergency, and voluntary-sector partnerships, enabling effective partnership working.
- **Devolution readiness:** Four balanced, functional councils form the ideal platform for a future Kent & Medway Combined Authority, meeting government expectations for scale, parity, and collaboration.

Summarised below are the key arguments for why option 4D is the best model for Kent and Medway.

<b>Key theme</b>	<b>Arguments</b>
<b>Balanced population and fiscal scale</b>	<p>Four councils, each serving <b>375,000–625,000 residents</b>, meet the optimum size for a viable council. This ensures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A strong resident voice</li><li>• Financial resilience</li><li>• Sustainable budgets</li></ul> <p>Each area is designed to be economically robust within its geography, supporting financial resilience and growth. GVA and council tax bases are balanced.</p> <p><i>Criteria 1, 2, 5, 6</i></p>
<b>Functional housing, economic and transport geographies</b>	<p>Boundaries follow Kent’s natural transport and travel routes, as well as key infrastructure sites, supporting economic development and service delivery. The coherent geographies will enable environmental financial management to take place at scale. Boundaries follow natural and defined features such as rivers, transport and economic corridors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>North Kent</b> – Thames Gateway growth and port economy</li><li>• <b>East Kent</b> – coastal regeneration and health equality</li><li>• <b>Mid Kent</b> – M20/HS1 corridor and balanced rural-urban growth</li><li>• <b>West Kent</b> – rural, commuter and environmental heartland</li></ul> <p>Option 4D will enable a more coherent approach to housing strategy across the region.</p> <p><i>Criteria 1, 2, 3</i></p>
<b>Financial Sustainability</b>	<p>Local government reorganisation will require investment in the short term, however if implemented well, the net annual savings could result in a payback period of around 7.9 years, resetting local government for the</p>

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next fifty years, delivering public service reform and leading to longer term financial sustainability.

*Criteria 2*

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**Preservation of local identity and heritage and a sense of community**

Boundaries respect historic communities and cultural assets, retaining a strong sense of place and pride. The model is explicitly designed to reflect and reinforce local community identities, fostering stronger relationships with voluntary, community, and faith sectors (VSFS), and enabling more effective public engagement and regeneration initiatives.

*Criteria 1, 4, 6*

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**Efficient and representative democratic arrangements**

Option 4D achieves enhanced accountability and a strong local focus, with democracy and fairness at its core. Each council will have 65-91 councillors, with a ratio of roughly 1 councillor per 4,500-5,000 residents.

*Criteria 1, 2, 5, 6*

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**Targeted, high-quality public services & Public Service Reform**

Creating councils with a closer proximity to their citizens will enable the targeted, community-led delivery of statutory services, with resources managed more effectively and services tailored to local needs. Option 4D aims to create a balanced, place-based approach to services delivery and embeds the principles of community-first, prevention, collaboration, and digital innovation, enabling services designed around residents, not organisations.

*Criteria 3*

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**Alignment with health and care systems**

The model builds on Kent and Medway's strong collaborative networks, with alignment to the ICB health and care partnerships. Furthermore, it builds on regional collaborations to drive growth, skills and strategic infrastructure. This is demonstrated through the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) and through the Transport for the South East (TfSE) arrangement.

*Criteria 3, 6*

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**Devolution readiness**

Four balanced councils provide a strong foundation for future devolution and regional collaboration. A balance in population and fiscal strength will provide parity of influence and shared governance within a devolution deal.

The four council model is sufficiently large to act strategically and efficiently yet remain connected to local communities.

*Criteria 5*

**Implementation plan (see section 6)**

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

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

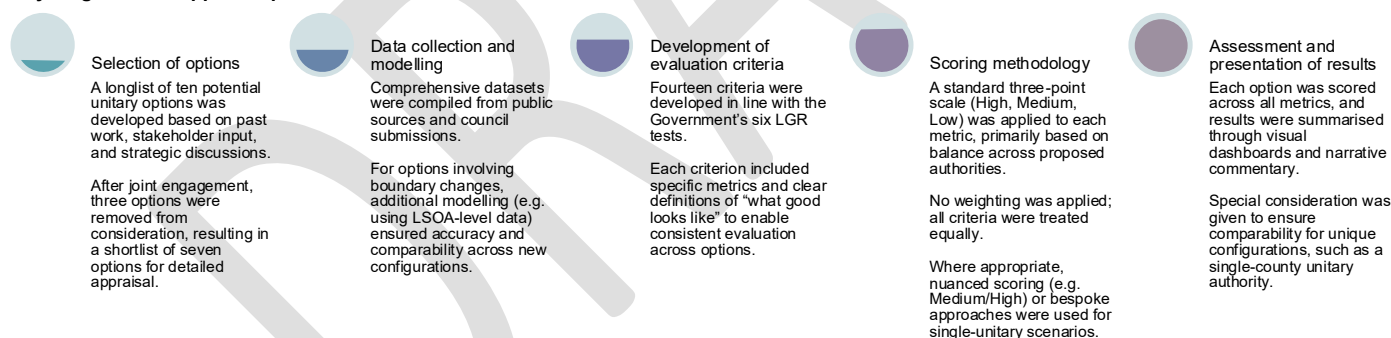
The programme builds on Kent's history of joint working and lessons from previous LGR efforts, supported by targeted governance, workstreams and stakeholder engagement to mitigate risks related to service disaggregation, aggregation, ICT and working together, aiming for a seamless, efficient transition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

## Options appraisal (see Appendix 1)

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

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

### Key stages of the appraisal process:



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

## Financial modelling (see Appendix 2)

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

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

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

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The headline numbers for Option 4D are set out below:

LGR option	Implementation costs (one-off) (£m)	Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m)	Disaggregation costs (£m)*	Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)**	Estimated payback period
Option 4D	(135.9)	67.5	(32.9) – (48.6)	18.9 – 34.6	7.9 – 14.5 years

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

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

**Data sources** (see Appendix 3)

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

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



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# Section 1: Purpose and approach

This section includes:

**Purpose of the business case**

**A collaborative approach across all Kent councils**

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# Purpose of the business case

## Responding to the Government’s request

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

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

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

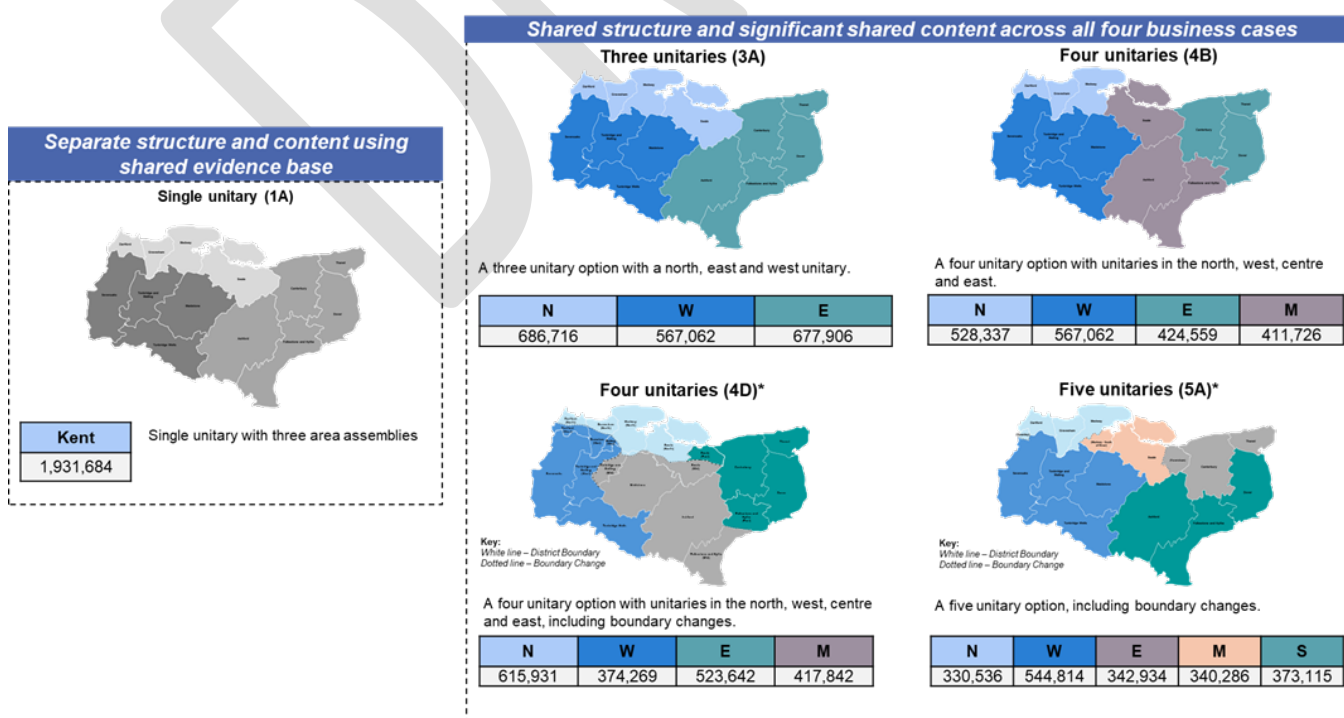
1. Establishing a single tier of local government
2. Efficiency, capacity and resilience to shocks
3. High-quality, sustainable public services
4. Collaboration to meet local needs
5. Enabling devolution
6. Strengthening community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

## Five business cases across Kent

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

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

Figure 1: The five business cases



\*Option 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 4D

This proposal presents a recommended four-council model (Option 4D) for the future of local government in Kent. In response to the Government’s letter and subsequent feedback, it sets out a clear case for why this model is best aligned with the Government’s six criteria for reform.

**Figure 2: Population across Option 4D**



Unitary Area	Population	
<b>North</b>	Medway (98%), Gravesham (87%), Swale (81%), Dartford (78%), small parts of Tonbridge and Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%)	615,931
<b>West</b>	Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling (61%), Dartford (22%), Gravesham (13%), Medway (2%)	374,269
<b>East</b>	Canterbury, Dover, Thanet, Folkestone and Hythe (64%), Swale (Faversham area 17%)	523,642
<b>Mid</b>	Ashford, Maidstone (98%), Folkestone and Hythe (36%), Tonbridge and Malling (36%), Swale (3%)	417,842

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This option is supported by **[insert council names]**. Key factors for putting forward this specific geography are outlined in Table 1 and summarised below:

- The model creates four smaller councils with balanced populations, whilst recognising this will be constrained by the distribution of population centres.
- The four councils are more aligned with the natural way the areas already work.
- Physical and geographic features act as clear and identifiable boundaries between areas.
- The bespoke four council model reflects the importance of transport corridors in respect of both their economic function for travel to work and the natural border that they create.
- The model has the lowest range of elector ratios between future councils and a reasonable average elector ratio.

**Table 1: Rationale for boundary changes**

Priority Theme	4D Rationale
Balanced population and fiscal scale	<p>Four councils of 375,000–625,000 residents each meet optimum size for viable councils, ensuring equality of voice, financial resilience, and sustainable budgets (as per MHCLG guidance).</p> <p>Each area is designed to be economically robust within its geography, supporting financial resilience and growth. GVA and council tax bases are balanced.</p>
Functional housing, economic and transport geographies	<p>Boundaries follow Kent’s natural transport and travel routes (M2/A2 Thames Gateway, M20/HS1, A21 and coastal corridors), as well as key infrastructure sites such as the Dungeness power station in Mid Kent, supporting economic development and service delivery. The coherent geographies will enable environmental financial management to take place at scale.</p> <p>Boundaries follow natural and defined features such as rivers, transport and economic corridors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>North Kent</b> – Thames Gateway growth and port economy</li> <li>• <b>East Kent</b> – coastal regeneration and health equality</li> <li>• <b>Mid Kent</b> – M20/HS1 corridor and balanced rural-urban growth</li> <li>• <b>West Kent</b> – rural, commuter and environmental heartland</li> </ul> <p>Option 4D will enable a more coherent approach to housing strategy across the region.</p>
Financial Sustainability	<p>Local government reorganisation will require investment in the short term, however if implemented well, the net annual savings could result in a payback period of around 7.9 years, resetting local government for the next fifty years, delivering public service reform and leading to longer term financial sustainability.</p>
Preservation of local identity and heritage	<p>Boundaries respect historic communities and cultural assets (e.g. Canterbury, Rochester, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone) retaining a strong sense of place and pride.</p>

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and a sense of community	The model is explicitly designed to reflect and reinforce local community identities, fostering stronger relationships with voluntary, community, and faith sectors (VSFS), and enabling more effective public engagement and regeneration initiatives.
Efficient and representative democratic arrangements	Option 4D achieves enhanced accountability and a strong local focus, with democracy and fairness at its core. Each council will have 65-91 councillors, with a ratio of roughly 1 councillor per 4,500-5,000 residents.
Targeted, high-quality public services & Public Service Reform	Creating councils with a closer proximity to their citizens will enable the targeted, community-led delivery of statutory services, with resources managed more effectively and services tailored to local needs. Option 4D aims to create a balanced, place-based approach to services delivery and embeds the principles of community-first, prevention, collaboration, and digital innovation, enabling services designed around residents, not organisations. Transition costs are minimised by using existing district boundaries wherever possible, reducing complexity and safeguarding service continuity during transition.
Alignment with health and care systems	Each area matches one of the four existing Kent & Medway Health and Care Partnerships, supporting integrated delivery across NHS, public health, and social care. Geography aligns with existing economic, education, transport, emergency, and voluntary-sector partnerships, minimising disruption and ensuring delivery continuity. This is demonstrated through the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) and through the Transport for the South East (TfSE) arrangement.
Devolution readiness	<p>Four balanced councils provide a strong foundation for future devolution and regional collaboration. A balance in population and fiscal strength will provide parity of influence and shared governance within a devolution deal.</p> <p>The four-council model is sufficiently large to act strategically and efficiently yet remain connected to local communities.</p>

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

## A collaborative approach across all Kent councils

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

### Building on strong relationships

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

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

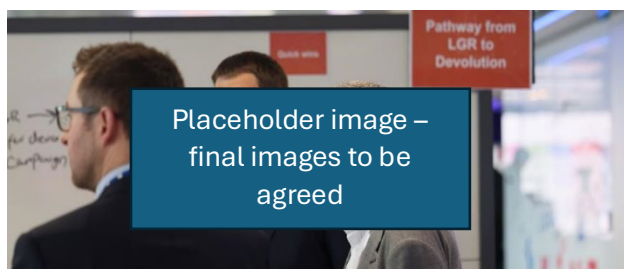
Our governance structure includes several key components:

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

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

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

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





## Options appraisal process

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

The approach included the following key steps:

1. **Option selection:** an initial longlist of 10 options was developed based on previous analysis submitted to government and local discussions regarding potential options. Through political engagement across Council Leaders, this was refined to a shortlist of seven options for full appraisal.
2. **Data collection and modelling:** data was gathered from publicly-available sources and direct council submissions which was used to model the potential structure and characteristics of each option, including assumptions where boundary changes were involved.
3. **Evaluation framework:** 14 evaluation criteria were developed, aligned to the government's six LGR criteria. For each criterion, specific metrics and definitions of "what good looks like" were agreed to enable consistent assessment.
4. **Scoring methodology:** each metric was assessed using a three-point scale (high, medium, low), based primarily on balance or distribution across proposed new councils. Additional guidance was applied where balance was not a relevant factor.
5. **Assessment process:** all options were scored against all metrics with results presented in dashboards and supported by narrative commentary. The output was comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad. No weighting was applied and the appraisal did not rank or recommend a preferred option.

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

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

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

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

## Stakeholder and public engagement

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

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

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

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

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

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## Section 2: The Kent context

This section includes:

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

**Existing local government structures**

**Partnership landscape**

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## Overview of Kent: geography, population, economy context

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

Figure 3: Map of Kent



### Kent geography

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 22: Population and geography data for Kent

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

### 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.<sup>4</sup>

- 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

<sup>1</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales>

<sup>2</sup><https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales>

<sup>4</sup><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.<sup>5</sup>

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.

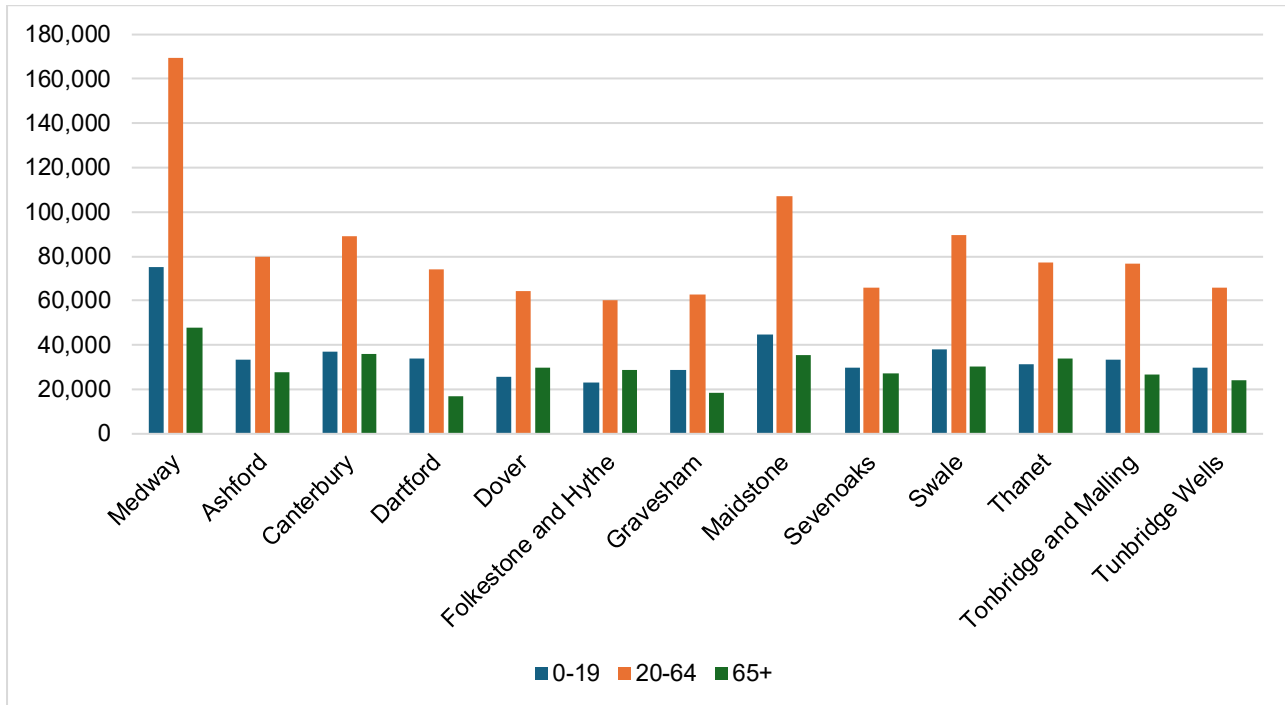
Together, these patterns reveal a complex and locally-varied picture of diversity across Kent.

**Figure 4: Population across Kent (mid-2024)<sup>6</sup>**

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

<sup>6</sup> <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<sup>7</sup>, 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<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.locateinkent.com/why-kent/kent-economy/>

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

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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.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>.

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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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.kmep.org.uk/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-07-30/hcws48>



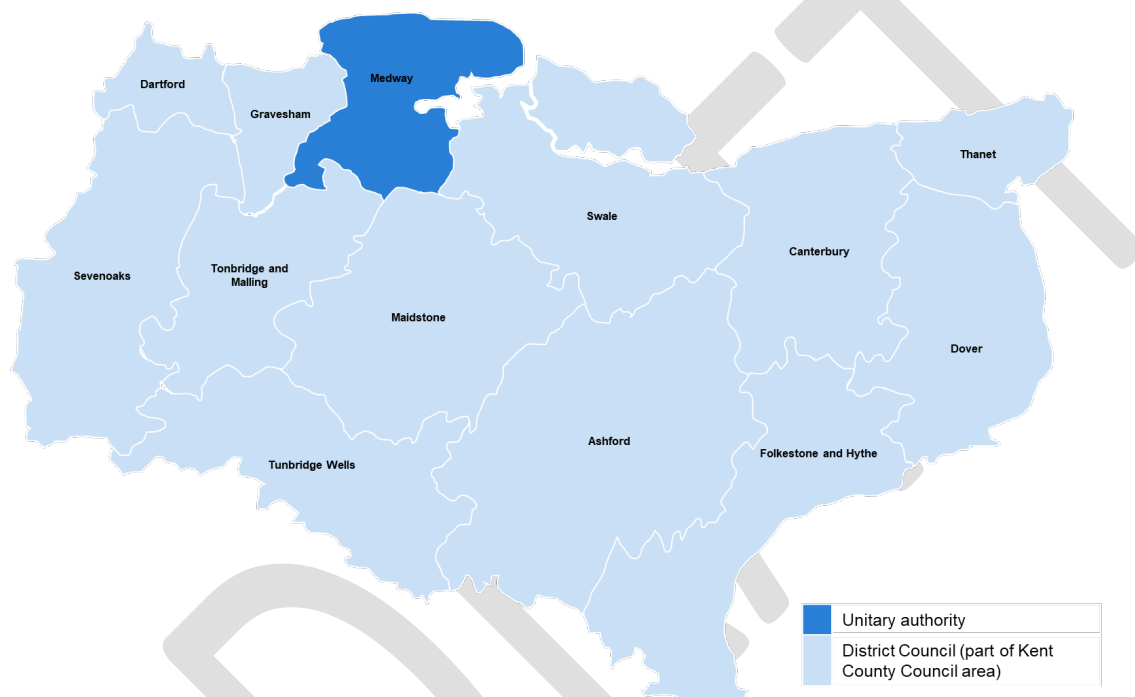
## Current local government structures

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

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

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

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



**Table 3: Characteristics of areas in current boundary lines**

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

<sup>11</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales>

<sup>12</sup><https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about>

<sup>13</sup> FY2025/26 data received from KFOG

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Partnership landscape

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

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

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

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

**Table 4: Key partners across Kent**

Key partners	Description
<b>NHS Kent and Medway</b>	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.
<b>Kent Fire and Rescue Services</b>	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.
<b>Kent Police and PCC</b>	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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The feedback from the interim engagement phase has directly informed the development of LGR proposals.

All models seek to build on existing partnerships, promote more joined-up decision-making and integrated service delivery, reduce silo working and ensure future structures are fit for purpose, both in meeting local needs and supporting strategic collaboration across the public sector.

They also provide a strong foundation for potential devolution arrangements, including the opportunity to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority where appropriate, aligning local governance with long-term ambitions for greater powers and funding.

## Section 3: Challenges and opportunities

This section includes:

**Key challenges to be addressed by Kent Councils**

**Opportunities through local government reorganisation**

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## Key challenges to be addressed by councils across Kent

The government's White Paper highlights the challenges facing local government – challenges that are strongly felt in Kent. Maintaining the status quo is not a viable option and has been discounted due to the urgency and scale of the pressures on the current system and the need for structural reform to enable long-term sustainability.

Local government in Kent is under growing pressure from financial constraints and rising demand for services. There is also a need for structural reform: the current two-tier system, comprising Kent County Council, Medway Council and 12 district councils has inbuilt duplication and inefficiency impacting service delivery, governance, workforce stability and community representation.

These issues are compounded by the county's unique geographic and demographic context.

Kent's financial landscape mirrors national challenges but is intensified by its strategic position and diverse councils.

Wide variation in council debt levels, taxbase strength and income capacity creates uneven financial baselines and sustainability risks.

Higher border-related costs present operational challenges to the county further straining the system.

Protecting existing government investment and identifying a more resilient model is essential.

Below is a summary of the key challenges for Kent, relevant to any future model.

**Table 53:** Challenges for Kent

### Funding & financial

- Persistent financial constraints and the challenge of fair funding, especially when all councils are seeking additional resources.
- 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.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Risk of losing central government investment in coastal regeneration, public health, infrastructure and border-related services during transition.</li></ul>
<b>Workforce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly for social care roles and in areas close to London.</li><li>• An ageing workforce with the risk of significant staff losses.</li><li>• Uncertainty and anxiety among staff during restructuring and transition.</li><li>• Cultural differences between councils, making it hard to realise opportunities and harmonise working practices.</li><li>• Staff morale and concerns about job security.</li></ul>
<b>Structure &amp; governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fragmentation and disaggregation of services leading to inefficiencies and duplication.</li><li>• Siloed approaches between upper and lower tiers of government.</li><li>• Strategic misalignment and lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, both internally and for residents.</li><li>• Loss of identity for town and parish councils and the erosion of local democracy due to fewer councillors.</li><li>• Branding and image challenges for local government.</li><li>• Systemic complexity, overlapping responsibilities and inconsistent service delivery across Kent's 14 councils.</li></ul>
<b>Community &amp; identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintaining local character and identity amid large-scale restructuring and in future geographies for successor authorities.</li><li>• Ensuring continuity and quality of services for diverse and geographically dispersed communities.</li><li>• Meeting the needs of communities with different priorities and expectations.</li><li>• Addressing the risk that smaller voluntary and community sector organisations may not survive the transition.</li><li>• Variation in identity, demographics and economic conditions making consistent representation and service access more difficult.</li></ul>
<b>Service delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protecting and enhancing key services (adults, children, SEND, homelessness) while managing demand and costs.</li><li>• Ensuring continuity of services during and after organisational change.</li><li>• Establishing the culture of the successor councils.</li><li>• Overcoming skill shortages and ensuring the right talent is in place.</li><li>• Managing the complexity of integrating services and delivering holistic support.</li><li>• Challenges arising from Kent's role as a gateway to Europe, including managing transport, borders and asylum-related services across multiple tiers.</li></ul>

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- 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.

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**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.
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## Opportunities through local government reorganisation

**Regardless of the model selected by government, all future Kent councils will work together to maximise the opportunities arising from the simplification of local government structures and the devolution of powers and funding to a new strategic authority.**

Kent faces a pivotal moment to reshape its future through structural reorganisation.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) presents a strategic opportunity to streamline governance, tackle long-standing inefficiencies and build a more resilient, effective and financially sustainable system.

By moving toward a more unified model, Kent can unlock greater accountability, improve service delivery and position itself to fully capitalise on future opportunities for sustainable growth, investment and devolution.

Below is a summary of the key opportunities for Kent. These are discussed in relation to the proposed model.

**Table 6: Opportunities for Kent**

<b>Public service reform</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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).</li> <li>• Streamlining and digitising processes across currently separated services, including AI, and creating data and evidence hubs to improve efficiency and support collaboration with partners.</li> <li>• Aggregating services to build resilience and enable more holistic strategies across education, housing, skills and job creation.</li> <li>• Creating a single front door for residents to access services, improving accessibility and user experience.</li> <li>• Delivering structural reform that improves financial sustainability through economies of scale, streamlined service delivery and harmonised tax and income strategies.</li> </ul>
<b>Growth and devolution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing devolution deals to unlock new powers and funding, enabling councils to drive growth and shape their own destinies.</li> <li>• Developing a compelling sustainable growth narrative and pipeline to attract investment.</li> <li>• Planning for growth in key areas such as ports, distribution depots, the Thames Estuary and leveraging proximity to London.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

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<b>Workforce and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attracting and retaining top talent, especially in competitive areas near London and Essex.</li><li>• Succession planning and supporting staff development to address an ageing workforce.</li><li>• Empowering staff and fostering a positive, proactive culture.</li><li>• Supporting staff through change, enabling career development and building resilience in the face of organisational restructuring.</li><li>• 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.</li></ul>
<b>Community and place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focusing on resident-centred approaches including early intervention and impactful prevention.</li><li>• Enhancing place-shaping by planning places, infrastructure and services more holistically.</li><li>• Redesigning the sense of place and local identity, reconnecting people with their councils.</li><li>• Improving accessibility to councils and services for all communities, including those in larger or more diverse geographies.</li><li>• Designing governance arrangements that better reflect Kent's diverse communities, strengthening local accountability and enhancing trust between residents and local government.</li></ul>
<b>Collaboration and integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building wider partnerships across health, housing, policing, education and the voluntary/community and faith sector (VCFS).</li><li>• Sharing knowledge and best practice across Kent and beyond.</li><li>• Integrating services to deliver more holistic support and strategy.</li><li>• Creating a one-team culture around place, breaking down silos and enabling more inclusive, joined-up working.</li><li>• 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.</li></ul>
<b>Trust and engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Re-establishing trust and confidence in local government.</li><li>• Improving engagement with politics and public perception of councils.</li><li>• Adopting fair funding models and ensuring best practice is shared and implemented.</li><li>• Enhancing local accountability and trust by designing governance arrangements that are more representative of Kent's diverse communities.</li></ul>



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## **Section 4: Vision and principles for Local Government Reorganisation**

This section includes:

**A shared vision for future local government in Kent**

**Design principles for reorganisation**

**How the vision and principles were co-developed**

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## A shared vision for future local government in Kent

Our shared vision for Kent is:

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

All Leaders recognise that LGR in itself will not deliver the change required. It must be the catalyst for fundamental reform in how we deliver our services, how we work with our partners and how we deliver for all communities across Kent.

Our ambition for Kent's future is bold and resident-focused. We will deliver local government that is financially resilient, community-rooted and digitally enabled, delivering services that are simpler, smarter and more joined up.

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

- 1 **Strengthen identity** and maintain a deep sense of place and belonging.
- 2 **Build trusted, transparent relationships** with residents through open communication and active engagement.
- 3 Provide **seamless, resident-first experience** with easy, secure access to services.
- 4 Deliver **place-based, people-centred services**, focused on early intervention, prevention and improving life chances.
- 5 **Use data and technology smartly** to personalise support, anticipate needs and improve outcomes.
- 6 **Work in strong partnership** with statutory partners including health, education and the police as well as community organisations to meet residents' needs.
- 7 **Build community resilience** to social, economic and environmental challenges through inclusive, forward-thinking services.

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

### LGR and devolution

All of the councils in Kent are supportive of devolving powers to a strategic authority to ensure decisions about the county are made in the county.

We do not underestimate the vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport and the benefits it would bring in terms of public service reform.

This is an opportunity to improve life chances for all.

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Aligning the timeline of the strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation, by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services or to reaggregate services to go into a strategic authority shortly after.

This approach would require additional cost and create further disruption to staff as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government.

All councils in Kent support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority in April 2028 to operate alongside the future councils.

This will enable a seamless transition, enable synergies in programme management and leadership capacity and provide clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government in Kent will work.

Clarity for partners is critical given our ambitions regarding public service reform.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving service outcomes.

Our ambitions for devolution and the link to LGR is articulated further against Criteria 5.

### **Why Option 4D is best placed to deliver on our vision**

Option 4D proposes a four-unitary authority model across Kent. This model is best placed to deliver on the vision of the future of Kent due to its alignment with key principles of localism, community identity, and effective governance. By establishing four distinct unitary authorities, the model balances strategic capability and alignment with a strong sense of community identity and belonging. The 4D model provides the strongest and most coherent foundation to deliver Kent's shared vision for the future. It does this, by creating a system of local government that is financially resilient, community-rooted, and digitally enabled, offering services that are simpler, smarter, and more joined-up. The model maintains a strong sense of community by preserving local identities and encouraging active civic participation, which is vital for social cohesion and stimulating economic growth.

The 4D model creates four geographically balanced councils for North, East, Mid and West Kent, each serving approximately 375,000–615,000 residents, thus enabling effective scale for strategic services while maintaining strong local identity. The four proposed areas reflect natural travel-to-work patterns, housing market areas, and established service corridors, ensuring coherent local leadership and planning, for example:

- North Kent (including Medway and Thames Gateway): Anchored in manufacturing, ports, and logistics, with strong higher education and innovation capacity.
- Mid Kent: Centred around Maidstone and Tonbridge, combining a growing rural economy with major transport interchanges and housing growth.
- East Kent: Defined by coastal regeneration, tourism, and life-sciences growth linked to Discovery Park and the Port of Dover.
- West Kent: Encompassing prosperous commuter towns and rural landscapes, supporting high-value professional and service industries

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Governance under this model remains accessible and closely connected to local communities. Furthermore, democratic accountability is significantly enhanced through the creation of four equal-sized councils. The 4D model creates councils that promote fair representation, shared leadership, and balanced regional influence, helping to build trust and strengthen engagement with local communities. Additionally, the model enables more targeted prevention and early intervention strategies. Smaller, locally aligned councils are better equipped to co-design and deliver neighbourhood-based services, allowing for greater flexibility and agility.

Finally, the model supports stronger people centred, place-based delivery and more effective partnership working. It enables a deeper understanding of community needs, which is difficult to achieve at a larger scale, and ensures that services are tailored and responsive to the unique characteristics of each area.

As Kent Leaders have emphasised, Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution are intrinsically linked; Option 4D allows both to progress in parallel, maximising local powers and investment. Option 4D establishes the optimal foundation for devolution with a future Kent and Medway Strategic Authority, enabling local delivery through the four councils while retaining strategic capacity at a county-wide level. The model supports devolution in practice by aligning local boundaries with functional economic areas and the NHS Integrated Care System. This will enable joined-up investment in skills, transport, and housing, providing a clear, Kent-wide structure capable of negotiating and delivering a devolution deal. Option 4D positions the region to realise the greatest impact from partnerships and service integration. Kent and Medway already benefit from mature multi-agency partnerships such as the:

- **Kent and Medway Health and Care Partnerships (HCPs)**  
Working with Medway and District Council's to deliver more joined up working not just with social care and public health colleagues, but also education, planning, housing, environmental health and leisure services.
- **Kent and Medway Safeguarding Boards (Adults and Children)**  
Multi-agency partnerships bringing together councils, NHS, and police to coordinate safeguarding strategy and oversight.
- **Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP)**  
The primary business and local government partnership, it drives economic strategy, skills, infrastructure investment, and productivity across Kent and Medway.
- **Higher Education Partnership**  
Universities of Kent, Greenwich, Canterbury Christ Church, and the University for the Creative Arts collaborate with councils and industry to drive innovation, research, and skills development.
- **Kent Voluntary Sector Leaders Group (VSLG) and Medway Voluntary Action (MVA)**  
Umbrella bodies supporting voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations to collaborate with councils on social impact, health inequalities, and community resilience.
- **Kent Resilience Forum**  
A partnership of organisations and agencies who work together to improve the resilience of Kent and Medway, and to ensure a coordinated response to emergencies that could have a significant impact on communities.

Option 4D builds on these foundations rather than fragmenting them. It creates councils that are the right size for efficiency and resilience. It will enable continued collaboration across key sectors including health and social care integration through aligned footprints; strategic infrastructure

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planning through shared transport and environmental partnerships; and economic and skills growth via established pan-Kent mechanisms. Devolution will be key to delivering strategic growth and support regional tourism across Kent. This ensures service reform and improvement can be achieved through continuity, not disruption, as well as providing much needed stability during transition.

In terms of democratic accountability, Option 4D provides the best balance between strategic capability and local accountability. With an average councillor-to-resident ratio of 1:4100–1:4700, it maintains strong democratic representation and safeguards local responsiveness. The 4D model will allow delegated decision-making through Neighbourhood Area Committees; a greater empowerment of Town and Parish Councils; and meaningful engagement with communities to strengthen trust and transparency as well as improve the design and delivery of services. This approach protects local identity while enhancing inclusivity and responsiveness in decision-making. Comparative evidence from the Hampshire and Solent four-unitary model shows that a 4UA configuration provides the most stable and credible platform for reform, balancing financial savings with lower implementation risk.

Like Hampshire, the 4D model will deliver:

- manageable transition costs and a realistic implementation timetable;
- a balanced population and financial profiles across the four areas;
- clear accountability for statutory and place-based services;
- and the ability to adapt to changing demand through data-driven service design.

## Design principles for future Kent Councils

To achieve our shared vision for Kent, a set of guiding principles have been agreed by its Leaders. While decisions on the detailed design and delivery models of future councils will be a matter for the respective leadership teams, these principles provide a blueprint for future council design.

*Table 7: Future council design principles*

Design principles	Description
<b>Service and resident-centric</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design services around resident needs with a resident-first mindset.</li> <li>• Maintain strong community identity and accountability.</li> <li>• Ensure equity in service access and outcomes across Kent.</li> </ul>
<b>Integrated and joined up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable seamless, joined-up service delivery across public services.</li> <li>• Build on existing partnerships and promote shared responsibility, and budgets and co-locate where appropriate.</li> <li>• Embed co-production and community-based service design.</li> </ul>
<b>Data-driven and digitally enabled</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in modern digital infrastructure which allows our service delivery and enabling activity to be joined up, and automated where appropriate.</li> <li>• Leverage data and AI to support early intervention, improve decision-making, and target resources effectively.</li> <li>• Ensure transparency and open data to build trust and inform priorities.</li> </ul>
<b>Financially resilient and efficient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt place-based financial planning and maximise asset efficiency.</li> <li>• Create efficient systems with flexible resource allocation based on demand.</li> <li>• Secure long-term funding and manage transition costs carefully.</li> </ul>
<b>Empowered and future-focused workforce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain and support skilled staff through predictable roles and strong leadership.</li> <li>• Break down silos with collaborative problem-solving structures.</li> <li>• Modernise terms and conditions for a more agile and attractive public service offer.</li> </ul>
<b>Clear, consistent and bold leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be brave, honest and aspirational in setting direction and expectations.</li> <li>• Deliver clear, shared vision and values, internally and externally.</li> <li>• Ensure messages on devolution, change and local ambition are well understood.</li> </ul>

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.

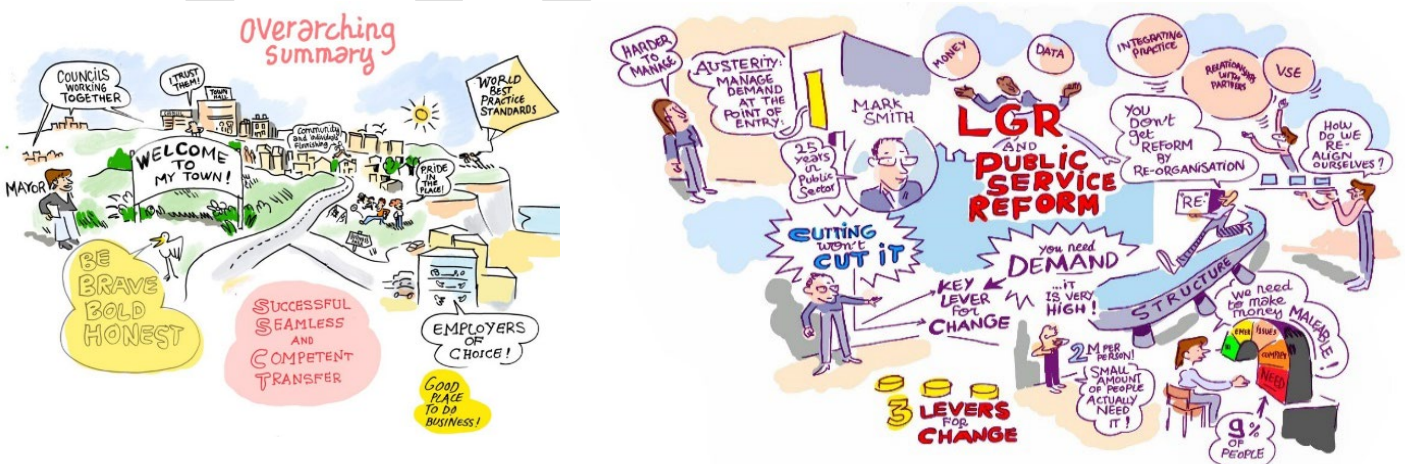
Participants were supported throughout by a facilitation team which guided discussions, captured key insights and ensured all voices were heard.

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 17<sup>th</sup> September



## How the vision and design principles will be used

The outputs from the event serve as the foundation for continued work on Kent's LGR journey.

They will inform more detailed design work, engagement with stakeholders and the development of a compelling case for change.

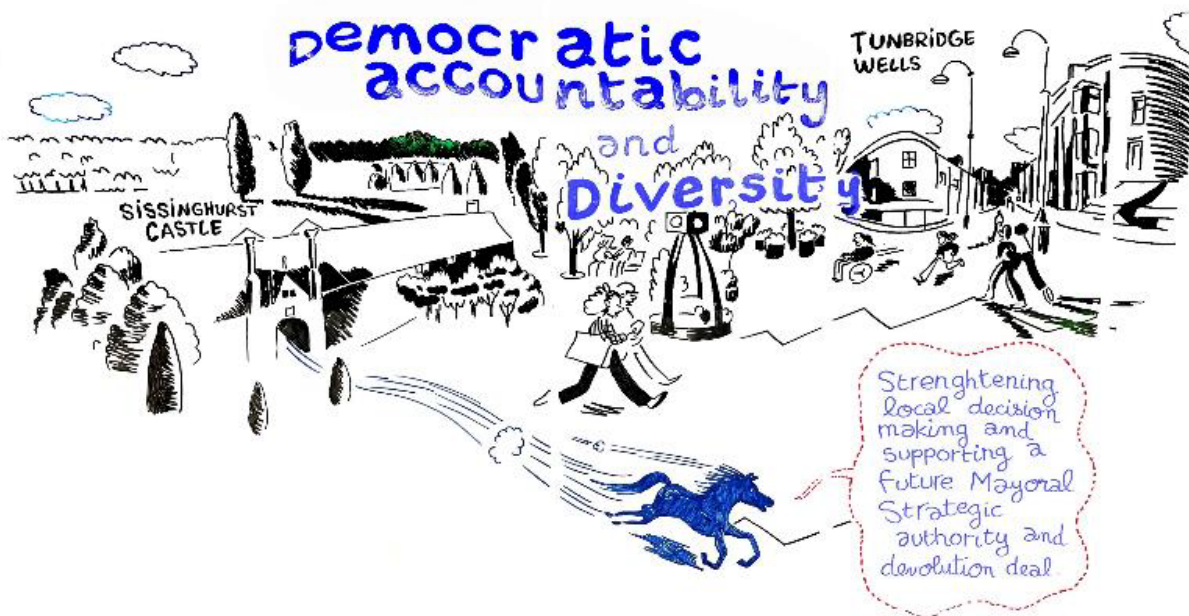
Most importantly, they represent a shared commitment by Kent's leaders to act collectively in the interests of residents, staff, and communities.

This forward-looking framework sets a foundation for a more resilient, responsive and cohesive Kent by 2028.

This vision provides a clear strategic direction for the future of local government in Kent.

It will guide future design discussions, inform service transformation and tie in with the region's approach to devolution.

It will be used to align decision-making, support engagement with residents and partners and ensure implementation remains focused on outcomes for people and communities.





## Section 5: The case for Option 4D

This section includes:

### The base case

### The summary case for Option 4D

- **Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local Government**
- **Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience**
- **Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services**
- **Criteria 4: Reflecting local identity and supporting a shared vision (Working together to understand and meet local needs)**
- **Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities**
- **Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment**

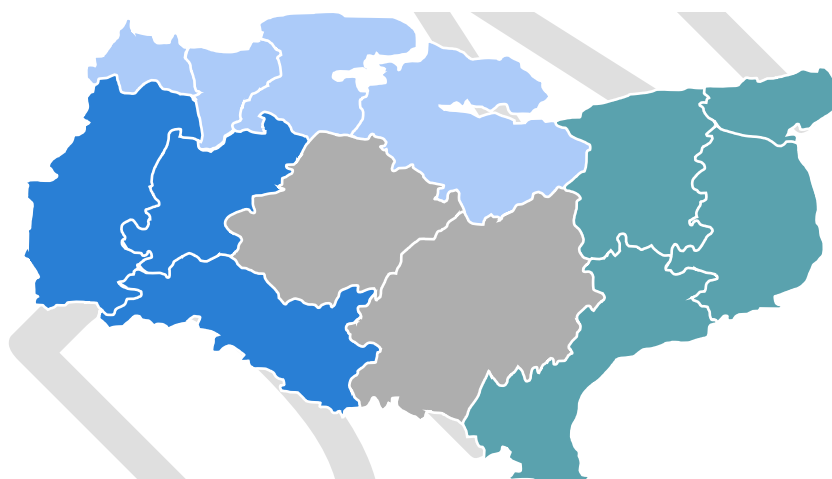
## The base case

This is a Type B modification entailing modifications to existing Kent council boundaries under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This section details the base case from which the modification has been developed.

Our modification, based on unmodified council boundaries, is for four new councils using the existing boundaries of:

- **North council:** Medway, Swale, Gravesham and Dartford (Population 686,716)
- **West council:** Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling (Population 379,295)
- **East council:** Canterbury, Dover, Thanet and Folkestone & Hythe (Population 536,970)
- **Mid council:** Ashford and Maidstone (Population 328,703)

**Figure 7: 4D unmodified council boundaries and key metrics by unitary**



Metric	North	West	East	Mid
Population Size (mid-2024)	686,716	379,295	536,970	328,703
Geographic Area (sq km) (2024)	739	941	1,085	974
GVA per capita (£) (2023)	25,977	38,540	24,245	28,868

We submit the above in line with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Option 4D, a modification of 4B is the only configuration that meets all six Government criteria while maintaining balance between scale, identity and capability. It meets the government criteria as follows:

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

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- The base case has four community-based councils with balanced and aligned economic strength and tax bases, supporting sustainable growth.
- Each unitary has a rich and unique industry, thereby supporting economic growth and localism.

### **Criteria 2:** Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience

- The base case facilitates well-balanced population sizes, supporting effective service delivery and building resilience.
- Financial metrics (fund balances, debt ratios) are healthy, with significant savings from integration.
- Achieves balanced scale with stable revenue bases and realistic implementation costs.

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

- The base case supports localised service delivery by strengthening alignment with existing partner organisations and shared infrastructure.
- Population sizes support localised reform whilst also maintaining economies of scale.

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

- The base case is aligned with our shared vision and creates smaller councils to better reflect the diverse nature of Kent communities.
- Strengthens local democracy through proportionate representation and area-based governance.

### **Criteria 5:** Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

- The base case creates balanced population ratios across councils, which enables strong, equal partnership in regional governance and therefore robust decision-making capacity for a future strategic authority.
- Establishes a coherent structure for a future Kent and Medway strategic authority.

### **Criteria 6:** Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

- The base case creates smaller councils better linked to communities which will enable community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment building on a culture of partnerships and coproduction.

## **Request for modification**

However, and in line with government guidance and wider provision within the Act, we request that the Secretary of State immediately modifies this submission and replaces it with the modified proposal contained in this document which is the submission we are seeking to implement.

The proposal uses the existing District boundaries of Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, Canterbury, Thanet, Dove and Ashford

- **North council:** The parts of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale north of the M2 and small parts of Tonbridge & Malling and Maidstone (Population 615,931)

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- **West council:** Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, parts of Tonbridge and Malling, and the remaining parts of Dartford, Gravesham and Medway (Population 374,269)
- **East council:** Canterbury, Thanet, Dover, parts of Folkestone and Hythe and parts of Swale (Faversham) (Population 523,642)
- **Mid council:** Maidstone, Ashford, parts of Tonbridge and Malling (Kings Hill, East and West Malling, Ditton, New Hythe and Aylesford), parts of Swale and parts of Folkestone and Hythe (Population 417,842)

The proposal requests the following boundary modifications:

- 1) Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale split following the M2 / A2, with the northern parts creating the North unitary;
- 2) A further split to Swale to align Faversham with the East unitary;
- 3) The remaining parts of Swale to be included in the Mid unitary;
- 4) Darenth, Longfield, Joyden's Wood, New Barn, South Darenth and areas to the south of the A2 currently part of Dartford, included within the West unitary
- 5) Isted Rise, Meopham, Cobham, Sole Street, Vigo and areas to the south of the A2 / M2 currently part of Gravesham to be included in the West unitary
- 6) Blue Bell Hill Village and parts of Walderslade, currently part of Tonbridge and Malling, included with the North unitary;
- 7) Lords Wood and parts of Walderslade, currently part of Maidstone, to be included in the North unitary;
- 8) Kings Hill, East and West Malling, Ditton, New Hythe, Eccles and Aylesford areas currently Part of Tonbridge and Malling bordering Maidstone currently part of Tonbridge and Malling to be part of the Mid unitary rather than West
- 9) Folkestone and areas to the east to remain part of the East unitary
- 10) Hythe, Dymchurch, St Mary's Bay, New Romney, Lydd and rural areas currently part of Folkestone and Hythe to be part of Mid unitary rather than East

### Definitions

- Faversham and surrounding area** Encompasses the wards of Priory, St Anns, and Abbey, parts of the wards of Boughton and Courtenay, East Downs, and Watling north of the M2/ A2, and part of the ward of Teynham and Lynsted east of Tenyham.
- Wards south of Swale** Encompasses parts of the wards of Boughton and Courtenay, East Downs, Hartlip, Newington and Upchurch, Teynham and Lynsted, and West Downs south of the M2 / A2
- Ward south of Medway** Part of the ward of Rainham South East south of the M2.
- Ward west of Medway** Encompasses parts of the wards of Cuxton, Halling & Riverside and Rochester West & Borstal south of the M2.
- Wards south of Gravesham** Parts of the wards of Cuxton, Halling & Riverside and Rochester West & Borstal south of the M2.
- Wards south of Dartford** Encompasses the wards of Joyden's Wood, Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet and Maypole & Leyton Cross, and parts of the wards of Bean & Village Park, Darenth and Wilmington, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley south of the A2.
- Wards to the north-east of Tonbridge and Malling** Encompasses the wards of Aylesford South & Ditton and Kings Hill, and parts of the wards of Aylesford North & North Downs, Birling, East Malling, West Malling & Offham, East and West Peckham, Mereworth & Wateringbury and Leybourne & Ryarsh, Larkfield.

**Folkestone and surrounding areas** Encompasses the wards of Broadmead, Cheriton, East Folkestone, Folkestone Central, Folkestone Harbour, parts of the wards of Hythe east of Seabrook and Horn Street, and parts of the wards of Hythe, North Downs East and North Downs West north of the mainline / HS1 rail line and M20.

**Hythe and surrounding areas** Encompasses the wards of Hythe Rural, New Romney, Romney Marsh, and Walland & Denge Marsh, parts of the wards of Hythe west of Seabrook and Horn Street, and parts of the wards of Hythe, North Downs East and North Downs West south of the mainline / HS1 rail line and M20.

**Figure 8: Proposed councils (Option 4D) and key metrics by unitary, including existing council names**



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

Metric	North	West	East	Mid
Population Size (mid-2024)	615,931	374,269	523,642	417,842
Geographic Area (sq km) (2024)	649	881	1,021	1,188
GVA per capita (£) (2023)	25,995	37,204	24,127	29,666

**Rationale for modifications**

**Primary Considerations**

The proposed boundary arrangements under the 4D model have been developed to create four coherent, balanced and community aligned councils that meet the Government’s criteria for local identity, viability and efficiency, in accordance with the following guiding principles:

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1. **Community Identity:** Boundaries have been redrawn to establish areas that reflect and strengthen a sense of shared community identity and cohesion.
2. **Physical and Geographic Boundaries and Features:** To utilise clear, recognisable physical and geographic features – such as major roads, rivers, and landscape changes – as defining boundaries between areas. The model follows travel to work, housing market, and service use patterns. Boundaries also reflect existing partnerships across health, education and policing footprints minimising disruption to joint arrangements.
3. **Population Balance:** To achieve, as far as practicable, a balanced distribution of population across councils, recognising that this is constrained by the existing pattern and concentration of population centres as well as sufficient economic capacity to deliver sustainable services and fiscal balance across all four councils.
4. **Existing Boundaries:** To maintain existing principal boundaries wherever possible for continuity and to minimise disruption.

### **Area-Specific Changes**

#### **Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale**

A division is proposed along the M2 motorway, which serves as a clear and consistent physical boundary between these areas. This alignment provides a logical and clear separation that reflects established travel patterns and community links.

#### **Blue Bell Hill Village**

Blue Bell Hill Village is proposed to be included within the North area due to its position and primary access via the roundabouts at the top of Blue Bell Hill. Although most of the village lies south of the M2, its proximity to the North area and relative isolation from surrounding settlements support this inclusion. While some parts of the village fall naturally with the West area, the boundary has been extended to ensure the entire village sits cohesively within North. This approach reflects both functional and geographic considerations, ensuring consistent access and connectivity.

#### **Swale**

A revised boundary is proposed around Teynham and Faversham, with Faversham moving to the East council and Teynham remaining in the North, and the remainder of Swale (south of the M2) aligning to the Mid council.

This approach is consistent with existing health service boundaries and recognises the distinct social and geographic characteristics of Faversham, in contrast to Sittingbourne and Sheppey. Faversham aligns naturally with the East area, while Sittingbourne and the wider Swale area are more closely associated with Medway and the Medway Foundation Trust (MFT).

Faversham residents associate much more strongly east towards Canterbury than in the current Swale district. In response to a Boundary Commission review in 2015, Faversham Town Council commented that the “residents do not look to the villages of the proposed Mid Swale but look eastward to the rest of Faversham, which has the shopping streets, the swimming pool, the library

etc. In so far as they need to look beyond their own town for things, Faversham people tend to go not to Sittingbourne but to Canterbury for shopping, education, entertainment and healthcare.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Kings Hill, East and West Malling, Ditton, New Hythe, Eccles and Aylesford**

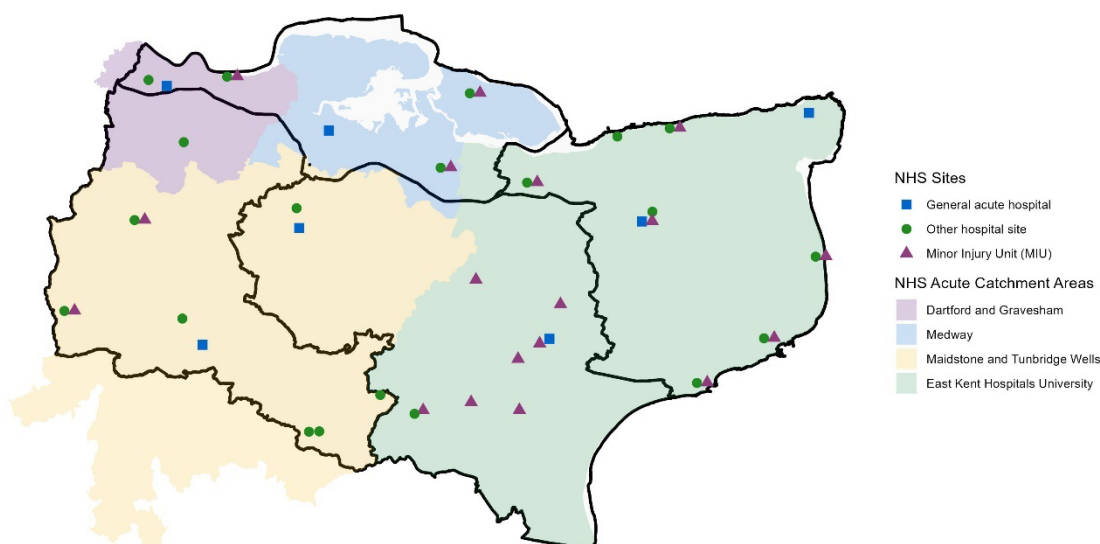
It is proposed that the Mid council boundary where Maidstone borders Tonbridge and Malling extends further west to encompass urban fringe areas adjacent to Maidstone. These areas are more closely aligned in character and function with the Mid region than with the predominantly rural remainder of Tonbridge and Malling.

### **Folkestone and Hythe**

Folkestone and Hythe split based on the Folkestone area and Hythe areas, then following the mainline and HS1 rail lines and M20 up to the existing council boundaries. This reflects both the differing characteristics of Folkestone and Hythe and the relative deprivation patterns observed in western areas. Consideration has also been given to the proximity of Ashford and its connections to western settlements. The proposed split location has links to some of the existing ward boundaries amended using the town within addresses to determine the split.

This model offers the best opportunity to align local government reorganisation with the NHS’s vision for integrated, community-based care. Its focus on natural communities, appropriate scale, and strategic boundaries will support the ICB’s objectives for population health, service integration, and effective partnership working.

**Figure 9: 4D boundaries against NHS sites and acute catchment areas**



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Data Sources: SHAPE Place, NHS Digital, Medway Council  
Produced by: Medway Public Health Intelligence Team

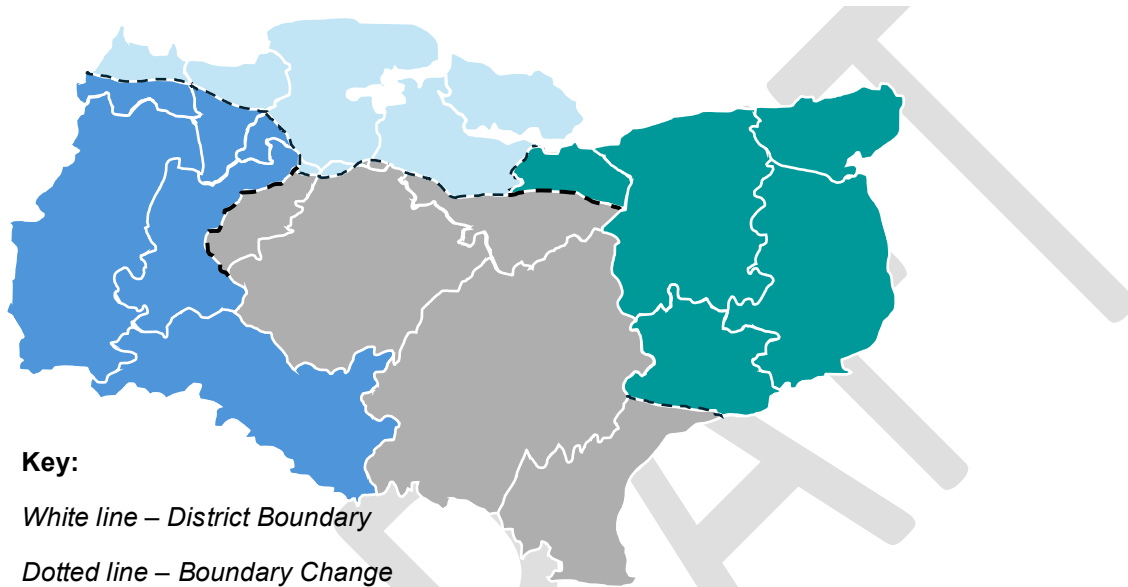
<sup>14</sup> <https://favershamtowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Town-Council-response-to-Local-Government-Boundary-Commission-England-draft-proposals.pdf>



# The summary case for Option 4D

Option 4D offers a once-in-50-year opportunity to realign local government in Kent around boundaries that better reflect local identity, sense of place, travel-to-work patterns, and health geographies. The proposed four council model provides a balanced and locally grounded structure – sufficiently large to deliver efficient, high-quality services at scale, yet local enough to preserve historic and cultural identities and strengthen community connection. It aligns with Kent’s economy, supports long-term financial sustainability and resilience, and enables strategic collaboration to enhance service provision and deliver lasting benefits for residents.

Figure 10: Proposed councils (Option 4D) and key metrics by unitary



Metric	North	West	East	Mid
Population Size (mid-2024)	615,931	374,269	523,642	417,842
Geographic Area (sq km) (2024)	649	881	1,021	1,188
GVA per capita (£) (2023)	25,995	37,204	24,127	29,666

The summary case for Option 4D, organised by Government’s six criteria for LGR, is set out below:



**Table 4: Arguments for the proposed model**

<p><b>Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government</b></p>	<p><b>Four strong councils, large enough for delivery at scale, small enough to preserve local identity and allow manageable service delivery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four councils that are large enough to deliver high-quality services efficiently, yet small enough to preserve local identity and maintain close connections with residents, leading to more responsive service design and closer alignment with local priorities.</li> <li>• Largely towards the lower end of the Government's 500,000 population guideline, the size of the councils provides headroom for growth while enabling more focused and responsive service delivery.</li> <li>• 4D demonstrates consistent alignment to major Kent industries, with strong internal industry links.</li> <li>• Balanced council tax base and population density, geographic area and transport connectivity despite imbalance in historic housing delivery and green-belt designation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Boundaries Aligned with Identity, Movement, and Geography</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed boundaries are designed to better reflect local identity, sense of place, travel-to-work areas, and health geographies, creating councils that correspond to how residents live and move. This model also reflects historic and cultural geographies, balancing rural and urban areas and respects natural transport corridors.</li> <li>• Community-based boundaries make it easier for councils and the NHS to work together. The 4D model aligns with the local healthcare system and prioritises prevention and early intervention in-line with the NHS's 10 Year Health Plan for England.</li> <li>• Option 4D offers the best internal transport cohesion across councils – ideal for efficient service delivery and coherent policy implementation.</li> <li>• Smaller areas such as Dartford, Gravesham, and Medway in the North unitary individually have lower travel times and well-connected infrastructure. This will lead to more manageable geographies for efficient, responsive service delivery with fewer logistical barriers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Efficient and Representative Democratic Arrangement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Option 4D achieves the lowest range of elector ratios between councils and a reasonable average elector ratio, ensuring fairness, effective governance, and stronger local democracy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Criteria 2: Efficiency, capacity and</b></p>	<p><b>Efficient Delivery at Scale</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four appropriately sized councils ensure operational resilience and efficiency.</li> </ul>

<p><b>withstanding shocks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good balance in council tax and debt profiles supports fiscal resilience across all councils.</li> <li>• The inclusion of more economically diverse areas within individual councils may offer opportunities to distribute resources more equitably and design budgets around localised needs.</li> </ul> <p><b>Financial Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each council has a robust tax base and economic capacity, with GVA per capita ranging from £24,127 (East Kent) to £37,204 (West Kent).</li> <li>• Council tax rates are closely aligned, minimising disruption and administrative complexity during transition.</li> </ul> <p><b>Resilience to Financial Shocks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population and economic capacity are distributed in a manner that aligns with the local identities, economics strategies, and existing partnerships, supporting the effective delivery of core services and the ability to withstand financial shocks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Criteria 3: High quality and sustainable public services</b></p>	<p><b>Targeted Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller, focused councils enables the targeted, community-led delivery of statutory services such as Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and Public Health.</li> <li>• Each council can focus more precisely on the specific needs of its smaller, defined population, designing services that align to local challenges. For example, East Kent can prioritise coastal services and tourism, while West Kent can focus on rural needs and agriculture. This can lead to better-tailored social care services and more efficient statutory service delivery.</li> <li>• Resources can be managed more effectively, ensuring adequate funding and staffing for social care and statutory services.</li> <li>• Better local knowledge – better alignment with health geographies creates opportunities to draw from examples of commissioning and partnership working over a Medway and Swale footprint.</li> </ul> <p><b>Integration with Health and Education for Resilient Service Models</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The model strengthens collaboration with NHS and education partners, supporting Integrated Health Systems and local System Leadership.</li> <li>• Place-based health and wellbeing strategies can be implemented, tackling health inequalities through prevention and early intervention. The NHS 10 Year Plan published earlier this year very clearly sets out a primary focus on prevention and early intervention. To achieve the scale of ambition contained within the plan, the NHS has expressed that it will need to forge much closer partnerships with local government and other local public services.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Option 4D will enable the implementation of place-based health and wellbeing strategies, tackling health inequalities through prevention and early intervention. The smaller scale facilitates faster decision-making, local innovation, and targeted deployment of resources.</li> <li>Integrated teams spanning local authorities, NHS Trusts, and community providers can operate more effectively within manageable geographies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs</b></p>	<p><b>Preserving Identity and Sense of Place</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Option 4D preserves the cultural, historic, and geographic identities of Kent's communities, creating boundaries that reflect real community connections. This is best evidenced in Swale, where the residents of Faversham feel a closer connection to Canterbury and Ashford than to Sittingbourne and the rest of Swale which looks more towards Medway and relies on services such as the Medway Foundation Trust.</li> <li>Option 4D is bold and forward-thinking. It is driven by allegiances and patterns of behaviour rather than lines on a map, aligning better with community ties and providing a solid framework for the next 50 years.</li> <li>The smaller council sizes help to build a sense of place and community that could be difficult to achieve on a larger scale. We know that people inherently feel a sense of pride and belonging and engagement with their immediate geographical area, championing their place which would be difficult to achieve with larger councils. There is a risk that fewer councils would be remote from the communities they serve, disconnected from residents, businesses and partners and more reactive in-service delivery.</li> <li>Follows logical boundaries along natural transport routes and economic corridors, such as the M2, Thames Gateway, coastal zones, and importantly also recognises distinct existing communities throughout Kent socially, culturally and economically.</li> <li>Keeps governance closer to residents, helping to protect local identities and maintain a stronger connection between decision-makers and their communities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Alignment with Local Preferences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aligns with the preferences of public service partners and local organisations, emphasising proximity, local knowledge, and continuity of relationships.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Criteria 5: Supporting devolution arrangements</b></p>	<p><b>Foundation for Devolution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The model's four balanced councils provide a strong foundation for future devolution, ensuring equitable representation and accountability within a Mayoral Combined Authority.</li> <li>Each council reflects a coherent economic geography, aligned with transport, housing, and employment patterns. This creates councils</li> </ul>

	<p>capable of participating meaningfully in county-wide or regional strategic planning and investment.</p> <p><b>Efficient and Democratic Governance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Populations around 375,000–625,000 allow for manageable council sizes (approx. 65–91 members), supporting effective local democracy. Larger unitaries of 650,000-750,000 residents would require unwieldy councils of over 115 members, undermining effective local democracy.</li> <li>• Smaller councils will fundamentally offer a more localised form of governance. It will ensure councillors and council officers remain connected to their local communities and decision making remains close to the communities served, giving residents confidence that their local authority understands their needs, and their representatives listen to their views, building trust and confidence in their council.</li> <li>• A four council model will allow for a majority vote in scenarios where unanimity is not possible in a vote across the four councils and the Mayoral Strategic Authority. A three unitary council model in Kent would provide four new entities overall and would come with an inbuilt barrier to decision-making which would cause undue delay and complication.</li> <li>• Our experience in Medway is that of an agile council, with minimal bureaucratic layering and an ability to make swift decisions when responding to challenge and opportunity that is representative of a population of &gt;292,000.</li> <li>• Four councils will be better able to address the specific needs of our residents, being more closely attuned, providing services that are better tailored, benefitting from a closer local knowledge.</li> <li>• The Devolution assessment highlights that smaller, well-defined unitary councils provide stronger building blocks for a future MCA, a four unitary option would ensure equal-sized partners, promoting fair representation, shared leadership, and balanced influence across the region.</li> <li>• Four councils will be incentivised to collaborate on shared priorities such as transport, housing, and environmental concerns. This will strengthen regional investment strategies, particularly in economic corridors like the Thames Gateway (North Kent) and the Channel Ports (East Kent).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Criteria 6: Stronger community engagement and</b></p>	<p><b>Deep Community Connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The model is explicitly designed to reflect and reinforce local community identities, helping people feel more connected to their local services.</li> </ul>

**neighbourhood empowerment**

- Smaller councils will foster stronger relationships with local voluntary, community, and faith sectors (VCFS).
- Existing partnerships such as Medway Voluntary Action and the Gillingham Task Force demonstrate the benefits of proximity, shared trust, and responsiveness.
- The model will enable us to hold services accountable and remain responsive to local needs. Knowing the community helps VCFS organisations advocate more effectively for citizen needs and represent local interests in discussions with policymakers and other strategic stakeholders.
- There will be more effective collaboration and support for community initiatives due to stronger, more personal and enhanced relationships with local voluntary organisations. This community engagement will enhance trust and cooperation between service providers and residents. This will improve the quality of care and support provided.

**Enhanced public engagement**

- Local councils of manageable scale to lead community-centred regeneration, co-designing solutions with residents and local organisations.
- Proximity to residents will allow smaller councils to engage more effectively with the community, ensuring that regeneration initiatives are informed by local insights and receive broader support. Our best example of this is perhaps our work in Chatham Intra, with the High Street Heritage Action Zone and the Chatham Design Code, which has delivered significant impact, revitalising Medway through heritage-led regeneration, creative industries - boosting local pride, and the wider economy.

**Supporting Growth & Regeneration**

- Smaller councils are more attuned to local needs and aspirations, supporting community-centric development and co-creation. The model will enable us to implement projects of local resonance. A good example of this is the work of the Gillingham Task Force, a forum which attracts the local MP, Cabinet Members and senior council officers and many local residents. It is difficult to conceive how this approach could be replicated across the number of towns linked to a larger 650k-750k authority.

**Strengthened community bonds**

- Smaller authorities in a four-council model can maintain a strong sense of community by preserving local identities and encouraging active civic participation, which is vital for social cohesion, inclusion and collective growth. Our best evidence of this is our Medway Place programme, where businesses and key stakeholders across Medway come together to provide insight into their business or

story, helping to shape Medway's Place Brand and opportunities across Medway.

### Tailored Services for Growth

- As a recipient of UKSPF, Medway has been able to administer a fund for local businesses that aligns precisely with the original policy objectives and supports and celebrates the distinct characteristics of the area. In a much larger council area it would be very difficult to cater for the demand and run a process which serves the area so acutely well. In Medway, the delivery approach for UKSPF facilitated the targeted allocation of resources to projects and communities most in need, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and tangible impact of social regeneration initiatives within our communities.

## How the case for change is structured against government criteria

What follows is the case for change detail, setting out how the proposed model meets the government's six criteria.

It is a combination of shared content across four options (3A, 4B, 4D and 5A) and content specific to the individual options.

Sections and sub-sections are set out below, including how they align to Government criteria, as stated in the letter dated 5 February 2025.

**Table 5: Structure of case for change and link to Government criteria**

Section headings	Sub-section headings	Govt criteria
<b>Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government</b>	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
<b>Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience</b>	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
<b>Criteria 3: Delivering high-quality and sustainable public services</b>	Improving delivery of key services	3a, 3c
	Public service reform	3b
<b>Criteria 4: Working together to understand and meet local needs</b>	Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design	4a, 4c
	Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance	4b
<b>Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution</b>	Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent	5a, 5b
	Population sizes that support devolution	5c

and regional priorities		
Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent	6a, 6b
	Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)	6a, 6b

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# Criteria 1: Establishing a single tier of local government

This section includes:

- |   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| <b>Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base</b>            | <b>Criteria 1a</b> |
| <b>Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery</b> | <b>Criteria 1b</b> |
| <b>Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure</b>          | <b>Criteria 1d</b> |

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## Alignment with functional economic areas and a sustainable tax base

**Criteria 1a.** Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

**Each of the four proposed councils under Option 4D is designed to be economically robust, with GVA and council tax bases that underpin long-term financial sustainability. 4D strategically groups areas with complementary economic profiles and infrastructure assets, such as major ports, international gateways, and economic centres, so that every unitary benefits from both scale and local strengths. This enables each council to participate fully in regional growth and provides a resilient, equitable foundation for Kent’s long-term prosperity.**

### Aligning councils with growth opportunities

Option 4D brings together areas with diverse but complementary economic strengths and infrastructure, creating a model that aligns with Kent’s distinct economic geographies while fostering collaboration for future growth.

**Table 6:** Growth opportunities across the four councils

<p><b>North Kent:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medway (98%)</li> <li>• Swale (81%)</li> <li>• Gravesham (87%)</li> <li>• Dartford (78%)</li> <li>• Small sections of Tonbridge and Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%)</li> </ul>	<p><b>North Kent is the South East’s powerhouse for growth and connectivity</b></p> <p>North Kent, which spans Medway, Gravesham, Dartford, Swale (north of the M2) and small areas of Tonbridge &amp; Malling and Maidstone, is a powerful economic corridor at the heart of the Thames Estuary region. It combines some of the South East’s fastest-growing urban centres with nationally significant transport and industrial infrastructure.</p> <p>North Kent’s strategic position between London and continental Europe gives it unrivalled potential to anchor growth, innovation and regeneration across Kent and Medway. It is a powerful mix of waterfront regeneration, industrial innovation, and world-class connectivity, making it one of the UK’s most strategically positioned growth zones. It combines the cultural energy of Medway’s university city with the logistical strength of Thames Gateway ports and Freeport development zones.</p> <p>High-growth sectors include advanced manufacturing, engineering, creative and digital industries, and professional services. Ongoing public and private sector investment is enabling accelerated growth across key sites.</p> <p><b>Strategic Infrastructure Assets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Thames Estuary Gateway:</b> Incorporates the Port of Sheerness, London Thamesport, and the emerging Freeport East Kent corridor, linking river-based logistics with rail and motorway access (M2, A2, M20, HS1).</li> </ul>
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- **Medway City Estate and Innovation Park Medway:** Priority regeneration zones driving high-value employment in advanced manufacturing, engineering, and creative industries.
- **Ebbsfleet Garden City and Thames Gateway Parklands:** Nationally recognised housing and infrastructure growth points, with transport integration to HS1 and Crossrail via Ebbsfleet International.
- **Lower Thames Crossing:** The UK's largest road-building project, expected to reshape connectivity across North Kent and significantly enhance freight and commuter movement.
- **HS1 and North Kent Line:** Enable high-speed connections to London, Ashford and Europe—supporting commuter resilience and business investment.
- **Bluewater Shopping Centre:** North Kent's strategic location attracts high-profile businesses and sustained consumer traffic from across the South-East – it is home to Bluewater, one of Europe's leading retail and leisure destinations.
- **M2 Junction 5:** £100 million improvement scheme recently completed at M2 Junction 5, enhancing safety and capacity at a critical freight and commuter junction.
- 

#### **Growth and Regeneration Corridors**

- **Medway Regeneration Arc:** Anchored in Chatham, Strood and Gillingham, integrating brownfield renewal, waterfront housing and the Innovation Park. Focus areas include Chatham Intra, Rochester Riverside, and the Dockside University Quarter.
- **Swale Northern Arc:** Extending from Sittingbourne to Sheppey, connecting new industrial and logistics hubs with Medway's employment catchment.
- **Gravesend and Dartford Growth Zones:** Key regeneration areas leveraging Ebbsfleet's growth momentum and expanding mixed-use developments along the Thames corridor.
- **Blue Bell Hill and A229 corridor:** Strategic upgrade opportunities linking Medway Towns to Maidstone and the M20, improving freight and commuter efficiency.

#### **Strategic Opportunities for the Future**

North Kent will be the South East's most connected, competitive and sustainable growth corridor – a gateway where innovation, infrastructure and inclusive communities drive the future of the Kent economy.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Freeport and Estuary Enterprise Zone:</b> Driving inward investment, customs-free manufacturing, and trade with Europe and global markets.</li> <li>• <b>Lower Thames Crossing Growth Corridor:</b> Unlocking industrial and residential expansion along the A2 corridor and supporting the “North Kent Growth Arc”.</li> <li>• <b>AI-enabled public services and digital infrastructure:</b> Opportunity to become the testbed for smart-city innovation through data-driven transport management, digital health, and predictive public-service design.</li> <li>• <b>Decarbonisation and resilience:</b> Major opportunities in energy efficiency, retrofitting, and renewable generation aligned with the Thames Estuary Growth Board’s Net Zero Plan.</li> <li>• <b>Devolution and spatial leadership:</b> The proposed unitary council for North Kent would have the scale, coherence and assets to lead regional planning, transport integration and investment partnerships under a Kent Mayoral Strategic Authority.</li> </ul>
<p><b>West Kent:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sevenoaks</li> <li>• Tunbridge Wells</li> <li>• Tonbridge and Malling (61%)</li> <li>• Dartford (22%)</li> <li>• Gravesham (13%)</li> <li>• Medway (2%)</li> </ul>	<p><b>West Kent is characterised by a highly skilled workforce and strong knowledge-based sectors</b></p> <p>West Kent is a dynamic area defined by its highly skilled workforce, quality of life, and strength in knowledge-based industries. Its strategic location near London and strong sector diversity makes it a key driver of innovation and professional services in Kent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Among the most qualified populations in the South East, supporting high-value sectors and knowledge based industries.</li> <li>• Talent pool attractive to employers in finance, legal, life sciences, and the creative economy.</li> <li>• Well-positioned for commuter-led growth and remote-working professionals.</li> <li>• High green infrastructure, high quality of life and heritage towns enhance appeal to investors.</li> <li>• Regional centre for retail, culture, and business with a thriving property market..</li> </ul> <p><b>Economic Growth Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Knowledge and innovation corridor:</b> The West Kent area sits within the “Golden Triangle” between London, Gatwick and the Thames Estuary, offering scope for innovation clustering in life sciences and green tech.</li> <li>• <b>Creative and digital industries:</b> Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks host fast-growing creative, design and media sectors supported by cultural infrastructure and flexible workspace development.</li> </ul>

- **Life sciences and health technology:** Building on the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust footprint and links to the Kent and Medway Medical School, there is potential for co-location of research, diagnostics and med-tech firms along the A21 corridor.
- **Advanced manufacturing and logistics:** Industrial growth areas at North Farm (Tunbridge Wells), Quarry Hill and West Malling are benefitting from strategic connectivity and redevelopment of older employment land.
- **Rural diversification and green growth:** Opportunities to extend agritech, viticulture and tourism in the High Weald AONB and North Downs, linking with Visit Kent and South East LEP initiatives.
- **Housing and mixed-use developments:** Strategic sites around Kings Hill, Tonbridge, and Paddock Wood provide opportunities for high-quality, well-connected communities aligned with infrastructure investment
- **Strategic growth drivers:** London commuter economy, high-value business clusters, innovation corridors, rail and road connectivity upgrades

#### Major Infrastructure Projects

- **A21 Tonbridge to Pembury and A228 corridor upgrades:** Building on completed sections, current investment focuses on further capacity improvements, junction safety schemes and sustainable transport links connecting the A21 and A228 corridors to the M20, M26 and key employment areas.
- **South Eastern Main Line and High Speed 1 extensions:** Enhanced rail capacity and service frequency from Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge to London Bridge and Cannon Street. Electrification and station upgrades are central to maintaining the competitiveness of the West Kent commuter economy.
- **Digital infrastructure investment:** Rollout of gigabit broadband and 5G coverage in Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks; focus on remote-working hubs and digital inclusion to strengthen SME productivity.
- **Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge town-centre regeneration:** Public realm and mixed-use schemes designed to increase footfall, retail resilience and local cultural offer; key projects include the Amelia Scott cultural hub and redevelopment of former civic and retail sites.

**East Kent:**

- Canterbury
- Dover
- Thanet
- Folkestone and Hythe (64%)
- Swale (Faversham area 17%)

**East Kent is a gateway for innovation, tourism, and green energy**

East Kent combines coastal infrastructure, green energy capacity and cultural tourism, forming a unique, future-focused economic landscape. With direct access to continental Europe and strong institutional assets, the area is well-placed for strategic investment and innovation.

**Strategic Infrastructure:**

- East Kent's economic geography is defined by its ports, railways and energy infrastructure. The Port of Dover, handling over £122 billion of UK–EU trade annually, is the UK's busiest roll-on/roll-off port and a linchpin of national logistics. Continued investment in customs technology, freight processing and port access roads underpins its long-term resilience.
- The Channel Tunnel at Folkestone further reinforces East Kent's international gateway role, while planned improvements to the A2 and M2 corridors, the M20 and the A256 East Kent Access Road strengthen strategic connections between ports, industrial sites and London.
- The High Speed 1 (HS1) rail line connects Ashford, Folkestone, Canterbury, and Thanet directly to London St Pancras, cutting journey times and underpinning major housing and employment growth zones such as Ebbsfleet, Canterbury Riverside, and Otterpool Park. Continued upgrades to the A2/M2 and M20 corridors, together with the planned Lower Thames Crossing, will further improve east–west freight and commuter movement.
- Complementary digital and energy projects such as broadband expansion, the Cleve Hill Solar Park near Faversham (the UK's largest solar farm), and the coastal renewables programme at Ramsgate position East Kent at the forefront of the South East's clean-energy economy.
- Ashford International Station.
- High-performing universities including University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University drive economic development and innovation.

**Growth and Infrastructure Projects:**

East Kent's growth strategy is anchored by a series of major mixed-use and housing-led regeneration schemes that aim to deliver new communities, attract investment and revitalise coastal towns. Key projects include:

- **Otterpool Park Garden Town (Folkestone & Hythe):** up to 10,000 homes with integrated employment land, green corridors and sustainable transport links.
- **Canterbury Riverside and City Centre Regeneration:** a comprehensive renewal programme enhancing the university

city's cultural quarter, public realm and active-travel connections.

- **Thanet Coastal Regeneration Programme:** focused on Margate, Ramsgate and Cliftonville, combining heritage restoration with creative-industry investment. Major renewable energy assets including the Thanet Offshore Wind Farm and emerging developments at Green Port Ramsgate.
- **Dover Waterfront and Western Docks Revitalisation:** delivering new port infrastructure, housing and commercial space.
- **Faversham Expansion Area:** strategic growth zone linking the town's historic centre with the A2 corridor and Cleve Hill renewables site.
- Major housing and commercial developments like South East Faversham and Mountfield Park will deliver thousands of new homes, jobs, and community assets.
- Coastal position supports logistics, maritime activity, and offshore innovation.
- Public investment in Margate Digital Campus and cultural assets underpin a vibrant visitor economy.

Collectively, these schemes will deliver tens of thousands of new homes, modern workspaces and sustainable transport infrastructure, supporting both population growth and economic renewal.

### **Employment and Skills**

East Kent is a centre for high-value employment growth in life sciences, logistics, creative industries and green technology.

- **Discovery Park Enterprise Zone (Sandwich):** a national centre for life sciences and technology hosts more than 160 businesses and contributes over £300 million GVA per year through life-science and technology innovation.
- **Manston Business Park and Airport Redevelopment:** Manston Business Park and emerging aviation-logistics plans provide opportunities in advanced manufacturing and air-freight services.
- **London and South East University Group:** Collaboration between the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and East Kent College Group is supporting a pipeline



	<p>of local skills and research partnerships through a proposed East Kent Skills Compact, forming the basis of an emerging East Kent Skills Compact to align education, training and industry demand. Importantly sitting at the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Creative and Cultural Economy:</b> Growth in creative sectors driven by the Turner Contemporary, Folkestone Creative Quarter and Marlowe Theatre is generating new employment in digital media, tourism and cultural production, and enhancing the visitor economy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mid Kent:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ashford</li> <li>• Maidstone (98%)</li> <li>• Folkestone and Hythe (36%)</li> <li>• Tonbridge and Malling (36%)</li> <li>• Swale (3%)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mid Kent is a regional hub for infrastructure-led growth and innovation</b></p> <p>Mid Kent is the region's engine for infrastructure-led growth and high-tech innovation. With Maidstone at its heart and strong transport links, the region offers scalable opportunities for business investment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent transport connectivity via the M2, M20, and A249 corridors.</li> <li>• A £100 million upgrade to Junction 5 of the M2 enhances safety and unlocks new logistics capacity between Maidstone, Sheppey, and the Dover-London corridor.</li> <li>• Key sites include Sittingbourne's Kent Science Park.</li> <li>• Home to high-value industries in biotech, advanced engineering, manufacturing, and digital, including Nobel Prize-winning research.</li> <li>• Tonbridge &amp; Malling's market towns support small-scale industry, logistics, and growing professional services.</li> <li>• Balanced economic mix provides resilience and adaptability.</li> <li>• Strong university and college networks provide a continuous talent pipeline across technical, creative, and professional sectors.</li> <li>• Business-education partnerships foster innovation and workforce readiness.</li> <li>• The area includes the <a href="#">Sevington Inland Border Facility</a> playing a crucial role in ensuring connection with Europe, as the industrial equivalent to Ashford International for passengers and Dungeness Power Station, with its history of nuclear power generation and the potential for a future site for <a href="#">small modular reactors</a>.</li> <li>• Lydd Airport – with plans to become a future hub for flights in and out of South East England.</li> </ul>

- Maidstone, the county town of Kent, is a key centre for public service delivery and regional coordination in the future council structure.
- Forms a central link between North and East Kent and the rest of the South East.
- Location and infrastructure position Mid Kent as a logistics and business hub with growth-ready capacity.

### **Major Growth and Regeneration Projects**

Mid Kent's growth is characterised by large-scale, masterplanned communities and strategic employment developments that align housing delivery with innovation and sustainable transport. Key projects include:

- **Ashford Commercial Quarter and Waterbrook Park:** flagship business destinations anchored by logistics, life sciences, and high-value engineering, leveraging HS1 connectivity.
- **Otterpool Park Garden Town:** a 10,000-home, sustainable new settlement in Folkestone and Hythe, blending high-quality housing with employment, schools, and green infrastructure; a national exemplar for long-term place-making.
- **Heathlands Garden Community (Lenham):** a 5,000-home mixed-use development led by Maidstone Borough Council and Homes England, designed to deliver sustainable rural growth with integrated transport and local services.
- **Kent Medical Campus (Maidstone):** a nationally significant life sciences cluster adjoining Junction 7 (M20), part of the North Kent Enterprise Zone, specialising in healthcare, med-tech, and research collaboration with Kent's universities.
- **Ashford Designer Outlet and Repton Park Expansion:** expanding tourism, retail, and leisure infrastructure, underpinning local employment and attracting regional spend.
- **Eureka Park, Waterbrook Park Phase 2 and M20 Corridor Logistics Sites:** logistics and distribution investment zones supporting Kent's freight and e-commerce growth.

### **Balanced economy and tax base**

The four-council model is designed to ensure economic viability and long-term financial sustainability across Kent. Each geography is structured around complementary strengths, with a recognised economic centre and international port (or equivalent infrastructure), enabling gateway



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access to trade and growth. Whilst West Kent leads in productivity and tax base, the other three councils are sufficiently robust and balanced to avoid creating undue disparities.

**Table 7: Economy and tax base metrics for Option 4D**

	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent
<b>Gross Value Added (GVA)<sup>15</sup> (£m)</b>	16,011	13,924	12,634	12,396
<b>GVA per capita (productivity)<sup>16</sup> (£)</b>	25,995	37,204	24,127	29,666
<b>Council tax base (no. of band D equivalent properties)<sup>17</sup></b>	197,265	150,602	180,623	151,161
<b>Council tax average band D rate (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes)<sup>18</sup> (£)</b>	1,904	1,874	1,907	1,907
<b>Gross business rates<sup>19</sup> (£)</b>	£123m	£81m	£82m	£78m
<b>Unemployment Rate (%) Apr 24-March 25<sup>20</sup></b>	3.50%	2.48%	4.21%	3.53%
<b>Deprivation score (2019)<sup>21</sup></b>	0.44	0.24	0.54	0.29

### Alignment to GVA economic measurements

Option 4D strongly aligns to the geographies for economic measurement of GVA contained in the International Territorial Level (ITL). The map clearly demonstrates that the 4D model aligns very closely to the level 3 geographies across Kent.

<sup>15</sup> [Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>17</sup> Financial data return submitted by councils

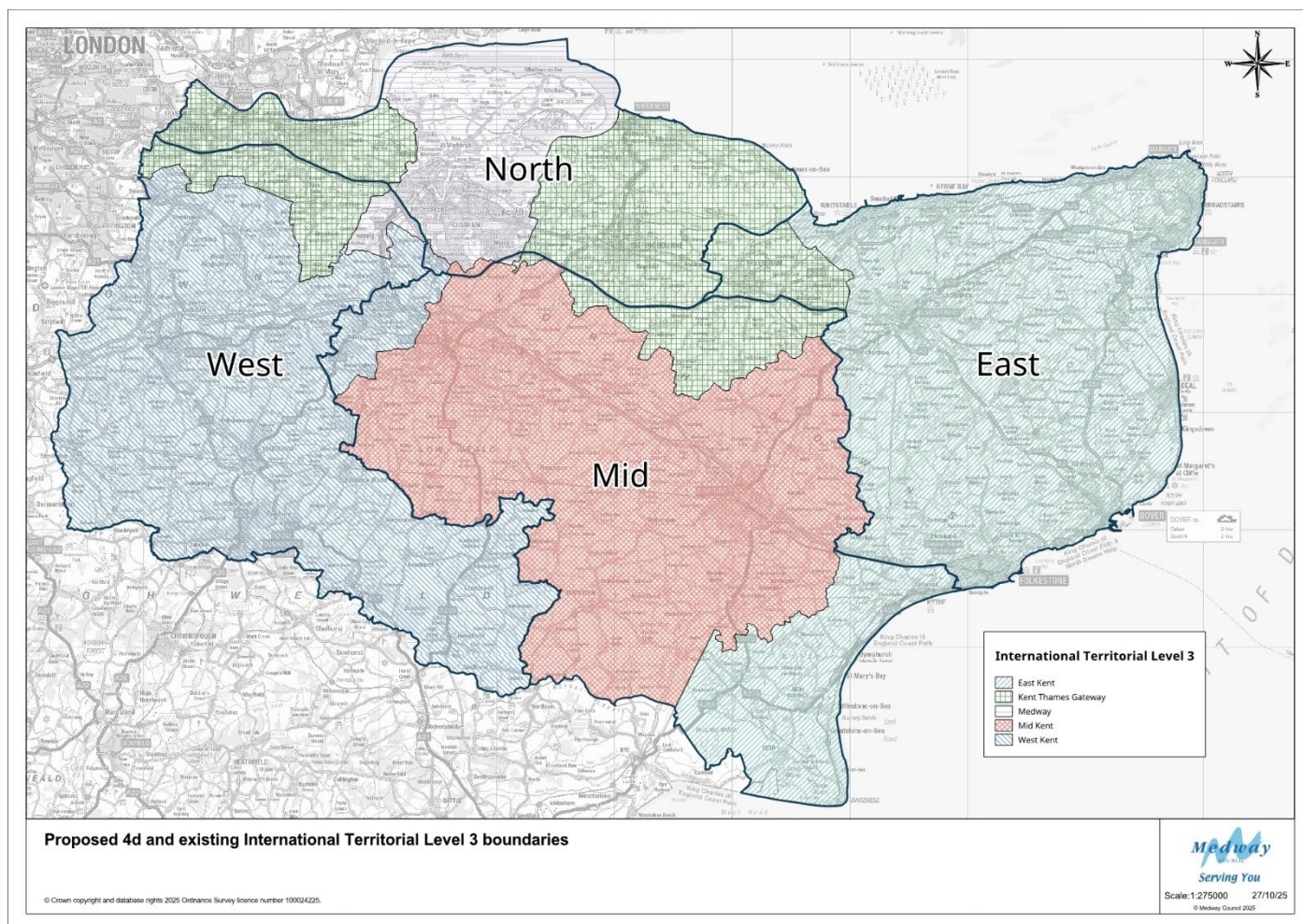
<sup>18</sup> Financial data return submitted by councils

<sup>19</sup> [National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>20</sup> [LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics](#)

Figure 11: ITL 3 in UK at January 2025 overlaid with 4D boundaries



## Business rates

Business rates tax bases are strong, with each unitary generating between £81 million and £123 million in retained business rates. All four councils have the economic capacity to operate independently and sustainably.

Imbalances between proposed councils are countered by strong growth potential, which will support longer-term economic growth and prosperity across the whole of Kent. Each council will be able to tailor economic and employment strategies to local needs, while aligning with the wider strategic ambitions of Kent.

## Council tax

Each council has a sufficient council tax base to support service delivery, ranging from 151,161 to 197,265 Band D equivalent properties. Option 4D has some of the lowest differences in average band D rates between council of each of the multi-unitary options, ranging from £1,874 to £1,907. This minimises disruption for residents and reduces administrative complexity during transition.

## Council tax harmonisation

Council tax harmonisation is an important and sensitive area. Council tax rates must be consistent by the eighth year of a unitary authority and there are currently significant disparities in council tax rates across Kent.

**Table 12: Current council taxbase, rates and yield**

Current council	2024-25 final taxbase <sup>22</sup>	Current combined	
		Band D rate <sup>23</sup>	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>671,778</b>		<b>£1,231,758,633</b>

The baseline council tax point to which the rates will be harmonised will be set through key decision by the shadow authorities.

This is a sensitive political decision as it is likely to result in an increase in council tax rates for residents in areas which currently charge lower rates.

Council tax harmonisation is governed by the referendum limits so the increase will be in line with what is legal and acceptable under the current system.

This also means the total council tax bill across Kent will be lower than if all current councils increased rates at the maximum allowed as would be typical in local government.

This is because residents who currently pay rates at, or higher than, the baseline rate set by the shadows will have their council tax rate frozen or potentially reduced to align with the baseline rate.

While there are many different scenarios including the baseline rate and the rate of increase, council tax harmonisation can be achieved within seven years and we have not assumed any increase in council tax rates into the financial modelling.

<sup>22</sup> Financial data return submitted by councils

<sup>23</sup> Financial data return submitted by councils

## Strategic geographic boundaries to support housing and infrastructure delivery

**Criteria 1b.** Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.

**Option 4D establishes four balanced and coherent Unitary Authorities that aligns Kent's geography with its functional realities- transport corridors, environmental zones, and economic clusters – to support local needs across North, West, East and Mid Kent. It offers a pragmatic balance between localism and region-wide strategic coordination, making it well-suited for managing land, planning, infrastructure, and environmental priorities across Kent.**

### Geographies and population

The model provides the most effective framework for coordinated spatial planning, infrastructure investment, and locally responsive service delivery that achieves a strong balance of population, population density, and geographic area across the four proposed councils. This balance enables effective governance, manageable service delivery footprints, and equitable representation.

*Table 8: Geographies and population in 2023 and 2032 forecasts*

	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent
<b>Population (mid-2024)<sup>24</sup></b>	615,931	374,269	523,642	417,842
<b>Geographic area (sq.km)<sup>25</sup></b>	649	881	1,021	1,188
<b>Population density (people per sq.km) (mid-2024)<sup>26</sup></b>	949	425	513	352
<b>Forecast population 2032 ONS<sup>27</sup></b>	634,721	386,102	543,313	446,622
<b>Forecast growth</b>	3.1%	3.2%	3.8%	6.9%

### Sensible geographies

The model reflects the diversity of Kent's geography, from dense urban areas to rural and coastal districts. Population densities vary from **352 people per sq km in Mid Kent** to **949 people per sq km in North Kent**, reflecting the region's natural settlement patterns. The geographic areas of the proposed councils range from **649 square km in North Kent** to **1,188 square km in Mid Kent**. This avoids the creation of overly large rural councils that would be difficult to manage operationally, or very small urban councils that lack spatial flexibility. The size of these councils

<sup>24</sup> [Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas \(December 2023\) in the UK](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics](#)



allows for strategic land allocation, supporting development in the most suitable locations and avoiding piecemeal or reactive planning.

This spread in population density, from 352 people per sq km in Mid Kent to 949 people per sq km in North Kent, reflects the natural variation in settlement patterns across Kent and allows each unitary to tailor its service delivery to local requirements. For example, councils with higher densities, such as North Kent, can focus on urban regeneration and transport, while lower-density areas, such as Mid Kent, can prioritise land use planning, green infrastructure, and climate resilience.

The coherent geographies of option 4D will allow environmental management to take place at scale, with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and Green Belt areas preserved and effectively managed. Climate resilience and energy generation can be embedded within each region, tailored to the specifics of each area, such as rural and coastal considerations.

These geographies support infrastructure-led planning by aligning with major transport corridors and key growth areas. Strategic transport links such as HS1, M2, A2, Dartford Crossing, and the Channel Tunnel are distributed across the four areas, ensuring each unitary has access to national and international connectivity. This distribution simplifies infrastructure delivery by aligning planning authorities with existing economic corridors and transport hubs, reducing duplication and enabling more effective capital investment.

### **Alignment with Housing and Economic Geographies**

The model enables a more coherent and strategic approach to housing planning across Kent, with each geography retaining sufficient scale and diversity to support tailored housing strategies—urban regeneration in East Kent, garden communities in Mid Kent, and commuter housing in North and West Kent. Cross-boundary coordination will aid planning and housing delivery in managing shared constraints such as environmentally sensitive areas. It aligns closely with travel-to-work areas, housing market boundaries, and economic corridors, allowing each authority to plan and deliver housing growth in a way that reflects local demand and infrastructure capacity, for example:

- **North Kent** – integrates the Thames Gateway, one of the UK’s largest regeneration zones, linking Ebbsfleet, Rochester Riverside and Swale’s northern growth areas under one coherent authority.
- **Mid Kent** – connects Maidstone, Tonbridge and Ashford growth corridors, enabling coordinated planning across key transport hubs (M20, A229, HS1) and major housing developments such as Heathlands and Chilmington.
- **East Kent** – brings together the coastal towns of Canterbury, Dover and Thanet, aligning regeneration, heritage, and tourism with strategic housing delivery, especially along the A2/HS1 corridor.
- **West Kent** – maintains the distinct rural and commuter settlement pattern of Sevenoaks, and Tunbridge Wells, safeguarding environmental assets while supporting smaller-scale, high-quality developments.

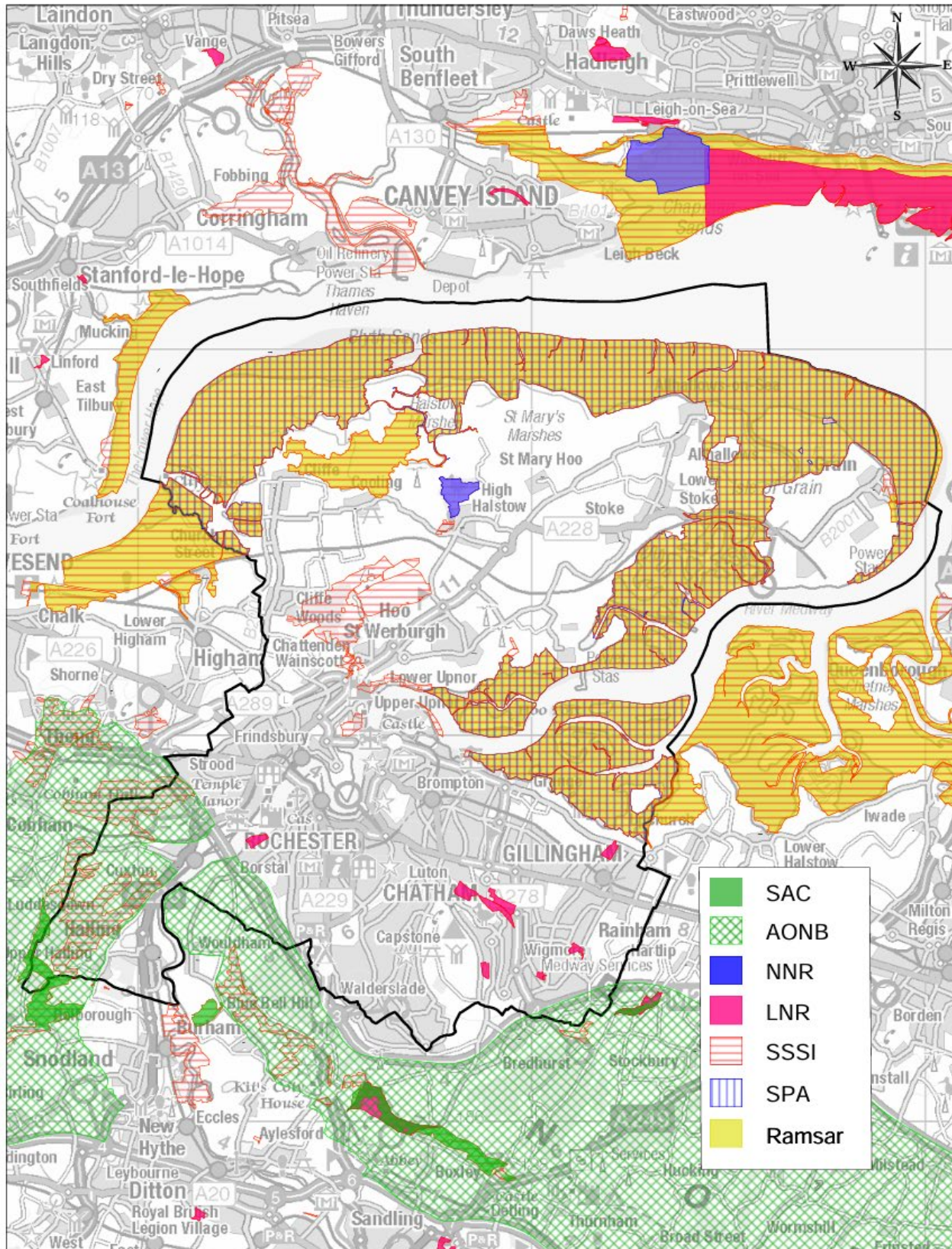
By mirroring functional housing markets, the 4D model enables more consistent, evidence-based housing need assessments and more effective cross-boundary infrastructure planning as well as

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being the most capable of maintaining housing momentum while addressing barriers such as land viability, nutrient neutrality, and cross-district coordination.

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Figure 12: Map of spatial planning constraints



### Environmental Constraints Map



Serving You

Scale: 1:135000 08/10/14



## Coordinated Infrastructure and Transport Planning

Under the 4D model, each council is large enough to plan and deliver major infrastructure projects but small enough to ensure place-based accountability:

- Boundaries follow key infrastructure routes such as the M2, M20, HS1 and River Medway, ensuring each authority has a coherent transport network to plan around.
- The model supports integrated local transport planning, with the ability to align housing growth with public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure.
- It strengthens engagement with regional partners such as Homes England, National Highways and Network Rail, improving the alignment of investment and reducing duplication.
- Through pan-Kent collaboration mechanisms, large strategic infrastructure—such as the Lower Thames Crossing, East Kent coastal transport improvements, and Otterpool Park Garden Town—can be coordinated across the four councils and the future Kent & Medway Combined Authority.

### Travel infrastructure

Kent benefits from a comprehensive strategic transport network.

Major motorways including the M2, M20, M25, and M26 provide vital road links to London, the wider south east and key ports such as Dover and Folkestone.

These roads primarily connect Kent from the east to west through the districts and eventually into London.

While the east to west connection is strong, the north to south connection through Kent is less direct, particularly for those not commuting into London.

The county is also well-served by rail, with services operated by Southeastern on the North Kent Line, Chatham Main Line and the UK's only domestic high-speed rail service, High Speed 1 (HS1), which connects Kent to central London via St Pancras International in under 40 minutes.

The 4D model enables transport and infrastructure planning to be organised around Kent's natural movement corridors the major road, rail and port routes that shape commuting, logistics and economic growth. Each new council will encompass coherent transport geographies that connect local networks to the county's and nation's wider strategic systems.

The proposed 4D model aligns governance boundaries with Kent's five primary strategic transport corridors.

**Table 9: Role and Strategic Importance of transport corridors**

Corridor	Role and Strategic Importance
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<b>M2 / A2 and HS1 (North Kent Corridor)</b>	Gateway between London, Medway, the Thames Gateway and Dover; carries international freight and commuter flows.
<b>M20 / A20 and HS1 (Mid-Kent Corridor)</b>	Core international route linking London, Ashford, Folkestone and the Channel Tunnel; major growth and logistics spine.
<b>A21 / Tonbridge–Hastings (West Kent Corridor)</b>	Connects commuter and rural West Kent to the London and South Coast economies.
<b>Thames Gateway &amp; River Corridors</b>	Port and industrial logistics routes including the Port of Sheerness, Thames Estuary Freeport and Medway ports.
<b>East Kent Coastal Corridor (A256 / A299)</b>	Connects Ramsgate, Sandwich, Dover and Canterbury to the wider M2/HS1 network; key to coastal regeneration.

Under the 4D model, each council will share an integrated housing, transport and economic corridor, enabling Local Plans, Local Transport Plans and infrastructure investment to be co-designed. Transport responsibilities are consolidated within a single tier of government, eliminating duplication between county and district layers. In the advent of Devolution, Cross-boundary strategic projects (e.g. Lower Thames Crossing, Ashford International rail interchange, Thanet Parkway, and Canterbury–Dover coastal improvements) are managed collaboratively through a pan-Kent transport board under the future Combined County Authority (CCA). Boundaries that follow the M2 and M20 corridors ensure that planning for growth and congestion management can be undertaken holistically rather than fragmented between councils.

The 4D model will allow integration with wider systems, complimenting existing partnerships and transport strategies by:

- Aligning with National Highways strategic road network boundaries and Network Rail's South East route.
- Supporting consistent engagement with Transport for the South East (TfSE) and Homes England for infrastructure funding.
- Enabling data-driven transport modelling and joint investment across corridors—particularly for decarbonisation, EV infrastructure, and modal shift programmes.
- Residents experience better-connected local transport systems, with integrated ticketing, bus reform and active-travel networks designed at the right local scale.
- Businesses benefit from improved freight and commuter reliability through coordinated investment in corridors critical to Kent's £49 billion economy.

- Councils can collectively plan for sustainable transport integration, supporting decarbonisation, growth and productivity across the Thames Gateway, Ashford International, and coastal regeneration zones.

### Strategic transport corridors across the four unitaries

The River Medway and the M2 as a natural dividing line.

Many patterns of daily life - travel, work, schooling, and markets - are already shaped by the barrier created by the M2 and the River Medway. Education commissioning, housing markets and service delivery are often split naturally by the river. Recognising this in administrative boundaries helps reduce disruption and aligns council functions with lived geographies.

**Table 10:** Transport connectivity across the four councils

<b>North Kent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>High-Speed Rail:</b> 37 minutes to London via HS1; connections to Ashford and Europe.</li> <li>• <b>Road Network:</b> M2, A2 and future Lower Thames Crossing creating new investment corridors.</li> <li>• <b>River Infrastructure:</b> Expanding river freight and clean-energy projects along the Thames and Medway.</li> <li>• <b>Active &amp; Public Transport:</b> Integrated transport hubs at Chatham, Strood and Ebbsfleet; future opportunities for AI-enabled mobility systems.</li> <li>• <b>Dartford:</b> The M25 runs north to south through the district, with the northern boundary along the River Thames and the southern area extending towards Sevenoaks. The North Kent rail line provides direct connections to London and Medway.</li> <li>• <b>Gravesham:</b> Watling Street serves as the main west–east route through the district, linking eventually to the M2. The Southeastern rail network connects Gravesham with Dartford and onward to London.</li> <li>• <b>Medway:</b> A key north–south route passes through the area and joins the M2, while the Southeastern rail line provides direct links to London.</li> </ul>
<b>West Kent</b>	<p>West Kent’s accessibility is underpinned by a network of strategic transport corridors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Road:</b> The M25 and M26 connect the district to London and national motorway networks; the M20 and A21 support cross-county movement between the coast, Maidstone and the capital.</li> <li>• <b>Rail:</b> The South Eastern Main Line and Hastings Line provide high-speed access to London, while the Medway Valley Line links Maidstone, Tonbridge and Strood. Stations such as Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and West Malling handle some of the highest passenger volumes in Kent.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Air and International:</b> The area has direct road and rail access to Gatwick Airport, underpinning employment and business links, while the M20 corridor provides routes to Channel ports and Eurotunnel via Ashford.</li> <li>• <b>Sevenoaks:</b> Well connected, with the M25 running in multiple directions through the area. The Southeastern main line provides direct rail links to London.</li> <li>• <b>Tunbridge Wells:</b> The district has no major highways running through it, though it benefits from good rail connections to London via the Southeastern line. A high proportion of residents work from home.</li> <li>• <b>Tonbridge &amp; Malling:</b> Strong transport links via the M20 and M26, which run east to west through the district. The Southeastern rail network connects Tonbridge and West Malling to London and surrounding areas.</li> </ul>
<b>East Kent</b>	<p>East Kent benefits from a multi-modal transport network that supports both local mobility and international connectivity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Road Network:</b> The A2/M2 corridor, A256 East Kent Access Road and M20/A20 corridor are the main arteries linking coastal towns with London and the Midlands. These routes provide direct access to the Port of Dover and Channel Tunnel, facilitating the movement of freight and workers across the sub-region. Planned upgrades at Brenley Corner, Dover TAP and junction improvements near Folkestone will enhance efficiency and reduce congestion.</li> <li>• <b>Rail:</b> The High Speed 1 (HS1) network connects Canterbury, Folkestone and Thanet directly to London St Pancras, while the Chatham Main Line, Ashford–Ramsgate Line, and Dover–Canterbury–London routes support strong intra-Kent links. Continued investment in station accessibility and service frequency is key to supporting growth in commuter and leisure travel.</li> <li>• <b>Ports and International Access:</b> The Port of Dover and Channel Tunnel handle the vast majority of UK–EU freight and significant passenger volumes. These assets also generate local employment and business-travel activity that radiates throughout East Kent’s economy.</li> <li>• <b>Active and Sustainable Transport:</b> The region is developing comprehensive walking and cycling networks, including the Coastal Path, Canterbury Green Loop, and Folkestone–Hythe–Dover Cycle Spine, complemented by expanded electric-vehicle infrastructure and zero-emission bus corridors.</li> <li>• <b>Canterbury:</b> The Thanet Way runs east to west through the district, linking to the M2. Rural areas have good road access into Canterbury, and the Southeastern rail line provides direct connections to London.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dover:</b> Most routes converge into Dover, though wider regional connectivity is more limited. The Southeastern and Chatham main lines offer direct rail services to London.</li> <li>• <b>Thanet:</b> Canterbury Road provides the main route into Ramsgate and other key towns. The area is served by the Southeastern rail network, which offers direct links to London and operates a major train depot connecting central, southern, and northern routes.</li> </ul>
<b>Mid Kent</b>	<p>Mid Kent benefits from some of Kent’s most important strategic transport infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>M20/A20 corridor</b> – the backbone of Kent’s motorway network linking London to the Channel Tunnel and the coast, supporting freight, logistics, and business investment.</li> <li>• <b>High Speed 1 (HS1)</b> – with stations at Ashford International and Maidstone West (via domestic links), connecting local residents to London St Pancras in under 40 minutes and to continental Europe via Eurostar.</li> <li>• <b>Ashford International Station</b> – a regional gateway for trade, commuting, and tourism, providing multimodal interchange and extensive development potential in surrounding zones. With the potential for further enhancement should European travel open from the station.</li> <li>• <b>Junction 8 (Maidstone) and Junction 10a (Ashford)</b> – recent upgrades improve access to key employment sites such as the Kent Medical Campus, Eclipse Park, and Ashford’s Commercial Quarter.</li> <li>• <b>South Eastern Mainline and Medway Valley Line</b> – enhancing internal Kent connectivity between Maidstone, Tonbridge, and Strood.</li> <li>• <b>Future infrastructure priorities</b> - include dualling of the A249, improved east–west connectivity between the A21 and A249 corridors, and digital infrastructure investment to enable smart mobility and business growth.</li> <li>• <b>Maidstone:</b> The M20 runs east to west through the district, but some regional areas remain less well connected. Three railway stations provide direct services to London</li> <li>• <b>Ashford:</b> The district is served by the M20 motorway and benefits from high-speed rail connections linking Kent with London and beyond.</li> </ul>

### Travel to work patterns across Kent

The figure below shows the distribution of workers across Kent, along with commuting flows into and out of these areas.



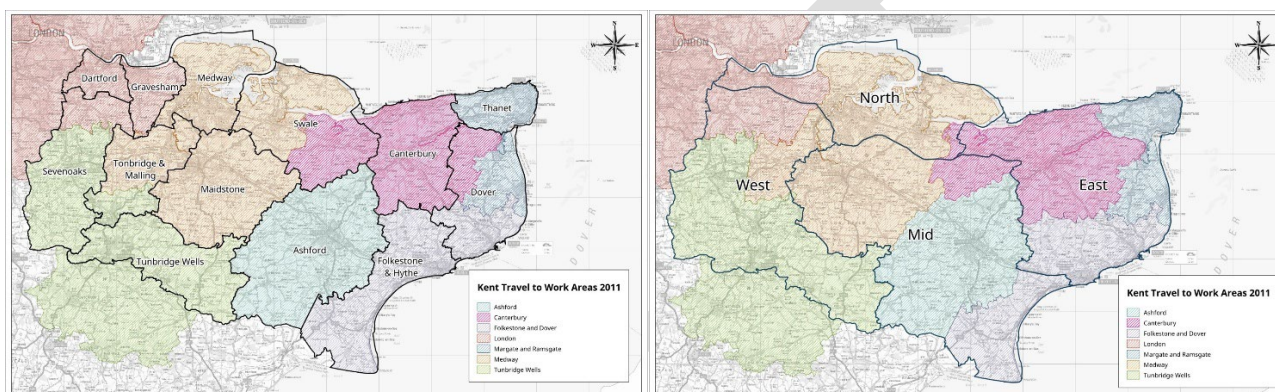
Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) are defined as geographic zones where at least 75% of residents work within the same area and at least 75% of workers also live there.

These areas represent self-contained local labour markets with boundaries statistically designed to reflect real-world commuting patterns.

The eastern Kent area has a greater local catchment of employees, with the majority of people working within 5km of their home.

In contrast, western Kent residents tend to travel, reflecting those who work locally in addition to those who travel slightly further to work in London.

**Figure 13: Map of travel to work areas against current council boundaries and Option 4D unitary boundaries**



### Functional geographies and travel to work areas

**North:** Residents in North Kent generally commute into London. Swanley, currently part of Sevenoaks, has stronger commuting and health-care ties with Dartford and Gravesham in North Kent.

**Mid:** The river Medway acts as a natural border, shaping how people travel. Movements around Faversham show a pattern that is eastward-towards Canterbury-rather than being oriented toward the North or Mid Kent districts.

**West:** While there is some commuting northwards into Medway, most work and services usage is more locally contained, especially centred on Tunbridge Wells and neighbouring districts.

**East:** This area reflects travel-to-work and service usage patterns that include Faversham being part of East Kent. Also, community and economic flows tie areas such as the Dover-Folkestone-Thanelt corridor together tightly.

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

Table 11: Overview of travel to work across unitary areas<sup>28</sup>

Proposed Council	Current council areas	Key travel patterns and alignment to travel to work data
<b>North Kent</b>	Medway (98%), Gravesham (87%), Swale (81%), Dartford (78%), small parts of Tonbridge and Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Kent, particularly Dartford and Gravesham, exhibits strong outward commuting flows to London and surrounding counties like Essex.</li> <li>• Dartford stands out as a key London commuter hub, with a significantly higher proportion of residents travelling to work by train compared to the wider Kent area. Gravesham also has a strong level of train use among its workforce, reflecting its close connection to London.</li> <li>• In contrast, Medway is more self-contained, with over half driving to work and only a marginal proportion commuting by train. Despite being well-connected, many Medway residents both live and work locally.</li> <li>• The future Lower Thames Crossing in Gravesham will further opportunities for inward and outward commuting between North Kent and Essex</li> </ul>
<b>West Kent</b>	Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling (61%), Dartford (22%), Gravesham (13%), Medway (2%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells show characteristics of a wealthier commuter belt, where over 42% of residents work mainly from home, significantly higher than the Kent average (31.1%) (note – this was from 2021 census data so COVID will impact figures).</li> <li>• Train usage is also relatively high: Sevenoaks has 5.4% train commuters and Tunbridge Wells around 3%.</li> </ul>
<b>East Kent</b>	Canterbury, Dover, Thanet, Folkestone and Hythe (64%), Swale (Faversham area 17%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-kent/economy-and-employment-data/kents-workforce>



		good connectivity between the main urban centres and out of town shopping centre in the district.
<b>Mid Kent</b>	Ashford, Maidstone (98%), Folkestone and Hythe (36%), Tonbridge and Malling (36%), Swale (3%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid Kent is marked by high car dependency, especially in Ashford (around half of residents). This reflects limited public transport access or jobs distributed across rural and suburban areas.</li> <li>• Ashford, however, benefits from HS1 rail links, which likely contribute to ~2.5% train usage. Folkestone &amp; Hythe shows similar patterns, although with more walking commuters, possibly linked to a denser urban core.</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Car use is substantial in Maidstone (around half of residents use cars to travel to work).</li> </ul>

### Why the four-council model delivers on housing and homelessness

**Local Government Reorganisation** presents an opportunity to think differently and take a more strategic, joined-up approach that looks beyond the constraints of existing district boundaries. It provides the chance to learn from areas with the strongest track records in delivery and to embed best practice across the new councils.

The four new councils will:

- Be ideally positioned to **coordinate spatial planning across wider geographies**, ensuring that growth is both deliverable and underpinned by the infrastructure residents expect.
- Offer a **stronger platform for integrated place-shaping and regional collaboration**, enabling a balanced distribution of housing and infrastructure investment across the area.
- **Reflect local housing markets** while maintaining sufficient scale to plan strategically and negotiate effectively with government, developers, and key partners to respond to distinct community needs.
- **Maintain focus and responsiveness**, avoiding the dilution that can occur within overly large geographies.
- **Prevent fragmentation risks** associated with a greater number of smaller councils that may lack the capacity to manage housing pipelines or respond effectively to homelessness.
- **Collaborate on shared delivery challenges**, such as nutrient neutrality, rather than consolidating all risks within a single larger authority.
- Ensure that **spatial planning constraints are distributed effectively** across the four areas, allowing current and future housing growth needs to be met sustainably

## Complementary housing profiles and challenges in the four-unitary model

**Table 12: Housing and homelessness metrics for 4 unitary model option**

Metric	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent
Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024) <sup>29</sup>	6	2	6	4
Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement (%) <sup>30</sup>	83%	68%	79%	120%

The 4D model provides a balanced and locally responsive framework for future housing and homelessness strategy. By aligning new councils with functional housing markets and infrastructure corridors, it enables better planning, delivery, and prevention, supported by stronger local accountability and economies of scale.

The four proposed councils mirror Kent's distinct housing market geographies, enabling evidence-based planning and delivery that reflects real patterns of need and demand:

- **North Kent** – urban regeneration and affordable housing linked to the Thames Gateway and Medway Towns, integrating brownfield reuse with major growth corridors.
- **Mid Kent** – balanced rural and urban markets (Maidstone, Ashford, Tonbridge) focused on sustainable extensions, new settlements, and unlocking land viability.
- **East Kent** – coastal regeneration and heritage towns (Canterbury, Dover, Thanet) prioritising quality, affordability, and renewal of ageing housing stock.
- **West Kent** – rural and commuter areas (Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells) addressing affordability and small-scale, high-quality developments.

These coherent housing market areas allow each authority to prepare a single Local Plan covering both strategic and local policies, while the four councils will coordinate county-wide supply and infrastructure through a pan-Kent framework.

Under the current two-tier system, housing policy and delivery are split between districts (planning and homelessness) and the county (infrastructure and social care). Option 4D integrates these responsibilities within a single authority, providing:

- Joined-up planning, housing, and social care functions, improving pathways for vulnerable residents and preventing homelessness.
- Stronger local delivery capacity, through unified housing, regeneration, and environmental services teams.
- Consistent application of policy tools (affordable housing quotas, Section 106, infrastructure funding) across coherent economic areas.

<sup>29</sup> [Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK](#)

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This integration removes duplication, accelerates decision-making, and ensures that housing and homelessness strategies are fully aligned with health, education, and transport planning. Each council will have the scale and resources to address both prevention and relief effectively, supported by partnerships with voluntary and faith organisations. The 4D model will allow:

- Early-intervention approaches that connect homelessness prevention with adult and children's social care, public health, and debt advice.
- Co-ordinated rough-sleeping strategies across Kent's towns and coastal areas, ensuring outreach and accommodation are not fragmented by district boundaries.
- Specialist housing pathways for care leavers, people fleeing domestic abuse, and those with complex health needs—linked to Integrated Care Board structures.
- Shared temporary and supported housing provision, allowing efficiencies through regional procurement and management across the four councils.

By bringing together housing supply, support, and prevention functions, the 4D model promotes a genuinely person-centred system that reduces crisis demand and supports independence.

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Each council will have a balanced portfolio of development sites, enabling delivery of both market and affordable housing at scale. Unified councils can better secure infrastructure funding (e.g. Housing Infrastructure Fund, Brownfield Land Release Fund) and coordinate investment with Homes England.

### **The Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP)**

The SHIP project seeks to increase the standards of support, accommodation and value for money in supported accommodation. This has been achieved so far through improved property inspections, reviews of support provided by services, additional scrutiny of new and existing Housing Benefits claims and joint working with commissioning teams to ensure value for money.

The SHIP team is a multi-disciplinary team set up to drive up the standards of Supported Accommodation and to find examples of best practice within the sector, as well as supporting providers of supported accommodation, to be ready ahead of incoming licencing regulations for supported housing schemes.

Medway SHIP currently covers the following areas:

- Medway
- Swale
- Maidstone
- Tunbridge Wells

The team focus on several core activities, including, but not limited to:

- Inspections of properties
- Reviews of the support provided to residents (including interviewing residents)
- Enhanced audit of Housing Benefit claims
- Triaging new provisions in the area

The team work closely with Welfare benefit teams, private sector housing, adult social care commissioning teams and housing options across the Medway and Mid Kent area. Key learning from this project has been presented nationally and will be used to shape implementation of the new Supported Housing Act This provides an example of where this could be scaled up across the County through the 4D Unitary model and through the opportunities presented through devolution.

### **Case Study: Sunrise Foyer – Medway Council, MHS Homes and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities**

MHS Homes owned and managed a former sheltered housing property in Luton, near Gillingham that was identified as no longer being fit for purpose. This resulted in existing residents being decanted to alternative social housing in Medway.

The building fell into disrepair and became a hotspot for local anti-social behaviour. Following a strategic review of young person's accommodation, the Sunrise Foyer project was born.

MHS Homes remodelled the scheme to create a 30 bed space foyer with two fully adapted studio flats. In October 2023 Medway Council applied to the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (**DLUHC**) for Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) funding to deliver a programme to support vulnerable young people (age 18-25) at risk of or experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping in Medway.

Medway Council were successful in their bid and awarded £851,771 towards the revenue expenditure of the project over four years (2024-2028). The revenue funding has been provided to MHS Homes (via a commissioning process) to run the Sunrise Foyer to accommodate 30 young people and support from six Support Officers.

Since January 2025, MHS have received over 80 referrals from Medway, and all bed spaces have been accepted into the scheme. Some people entered the scheme after spending time in Medway's Winter shelter, others as a result of joint working between the Housing Options Team and Medway's Transitions Team who support children who are transitioning from Children's social care to adult's social care.

The enhanced number of support officers mean that the scheme is able to work with young people who are often considered "too high needs" for other general needs supported Housing in Medway. Medway's Transitions team also work closely with Sunrise Foyer to provide additional support to shared residents who are now living at the foyer.

Local Government Reorganisation and specifically the 4D option provides an opportunity for greater integrated and partnership working in this space to deliver significant impact.

## Simplified and accountable governance through a single-tier structure

**Criteria 1d.** Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

**Option 4d's strategically aligned councils will streamline decision-making, clarify responsibilities, and strengthen democratic accountability. Consistent with the principle of placing residents the centre of local government, it prioritises democracy, equity and fairness through strong and even councillor-electorate ratios.**

### Current electoral arrangements

As set out in the table below there are currently a total of 658 councillors across Kent, including 81 county councillors, 518 district councillors and 59 unitary councillors in Medway.

Kent County Council is divided into 72 electoral divisions with 63 single-member divisions and nine two-member divisions.

Councillor to electorate ratios vary across Kent, but the combined ratio is 1:2,102.

Council	District/ unitary councillors	County councillors	Total councillors	Electorate	Electorate per councillor	Divisions	Wards
Medway	59	N/A	59	206,567	3,501*	N/A	24
Ashford	47	7	54	100,660	1,864	7	39
Canterbury	39	8	47	111,160	2,365	8	21
Dartford	42	6	48	86,560	1,803	6	20
Dover	32	7	39	88,820	2,277	5	17
Folkestone and Hythe	30	6	36	84,940	2,359	6	13
Gravesham	39	5	44	77,240	1,755	3	17
Maidstone	49	9	58	133,960	2,310	8	22
Sevenoaks	54	6	60	90,200	1,503	6	26
Swale	47	7	54	111,460	2,064	6	24
Thanet	56	7	63	104,500	1,659	5	23
Tonbridge and Malling	44	7	51	100,240	1,965	6	19
Tunbridge Wells	39	6	45	87,340	1,941	6	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>1,383,647</b>	<b>2,103</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>279</b>

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*\*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.

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### What we know about elections to new councils

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Between May 2027 and next elections in May 2032, there will be a review of electoral boundaries and new arrangements put in place.

We understand LGBCE's preference is to avoid significant changes in councillor numbers so arrangements for 2027 should align closely to expectations of councillor numbers from 2032 onwards.

### Reference points for councillor ratios

Set out below are some examples of councillor-to-electorate ratios for newly-formed unitary authorities in recent years, with a focus on larger authorities which are more relevant for comparison.

Council	Established	Councillors	Electorate	Electorate per councillor
Dorset	2019	82	297,726	3,631
Buckinghamshire	2020	97	420,610	4,336
North Northamptonshire	2021	68	263,915	3,881
West Northamptonshire	2021	76	307,611	4,048
Somerset	2023	110	446,698	4,061
North Yorkshire	2023	90	478,539	5,317



## Proposed councillor numbers for Option 4D

In calculating the proposed number of councillors for each new council, we have considered:

1. An appropriate electorate to councillor ratio in line with MHCLG guidance
2. Potential means of using current electoral boundaries for elections to shadow authorities in May 2027

Using the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance, Medway's approach has focused on three core areas:

1. **Strategic leadership** – creating strategic direction, managing the business of the council and making decisions effectively
2. **Accountability** – ensuring scrutiny, supporting the regulatory functions of the authority, and representation on outside bodies and partnerships
3. **Community leadership** – ensuring representation and engagement with local people and communities

### Strategic Leadership

A base of up to 12 members has been allocated to form the executive, providing strategic leadership and long-term direction for the authority. These members will manage the business of the council, oversee decision-making, and ensure governance of service provision. The executive structure supports clear accountability and aligns with LGBCE guidance on effective governance.

### Accountability

A further 40 members have been assigned to provide representation across up to four scrutiny committees, these may also cover regulatory functions (planning and licensing), and partnership engagement but there will be a wider scope of councillors who could deliver these functions. This ensures robust oversight and compliance with statutory responsibilities.

### Community leadership

Additional considerations are required to determine a sustainable level of community representation. From the base of 52 members, the individual characteristics of each of the four areas' needs have been considered. Using the overall electorate, levels of deprivation, and urban-rural mix. These measures are being used as proxies for caseload demand to ensure member workloads are manageable.

### *Electorate*

The electorate for the proposed councils was used to determine the spread of the electorate across the whole of Kent and Medway. Providing an indicator for the spread of councillors across the region.

### *Adjustments for Deprivation*

Additional weighting was applied to areas with higher levels of deprivation, recognising the increased casework and community engagement demands. North and East have the highest deprivation, Mid moderate, and West the lowest.

## Urban–Rural Mix

Consideration was given to the geographic characteristics of each area. North and East have higher urban concentrations, while Mid and West are more rural. This influences councillor workloads and support requirements.

**Table 13: Calculating proposed councillor numbers per council**

	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent	TOTAL
<b>Electorate*</b>	432,542	272,349	377,969	300,787	1,383,647
<b>Proposed number of councillors</b>	91	65	85	71	312
<b>Electorate to councillor ratio</b>	4,753	4,190	4,447	4,236	4,434 (average)

\* Electorate figures source: data provided by Kent County Council, based on governance petition verification number (February 2025) and Medway Council electorate (February 2025)

The proposed councillor numbers reflect a balanced approach, considering strategic leadership requirements, committee representation, electoral equality, socio-economic factors, and urban–rural dynamics. This ensures effective governance, accountability, and community engagement across all four councils.

### Caveats on proposed councillor numbers

Once the geographies are agreed, the constituent councils of each area will prepare and agree what is required for first elections to each council.

### Efficient and locally focused democratic arrangements

Option 4D establishes a new democratic framework designed to enhance local accountability and improve efficiency. By aligning functions within strategically defined councils, the model simplifies governance structures, reduces duplication, avoids long decision chains, and ensures decision-making powers are exercised at the most appropriate level to deliver effective and transparent leadership and prevent ‘organisational remoteness’.

Under this approach, each council will hold direct responsibility for all local services in its area. This clear line of accountability will enable residents to better understand how and where decisions are made, reinforcing trust and democratic legitimacy.

The 4D option promotes efficient, digitally enabled governance designed around transparency, accessibility, and value for money. Unified digital platforms will allow residents to access council information, participate in consultations, and complete transactions online. Consolidated scrutiny and audit functions will strengthen accountability while avoiding duplication. To strengthen neighbourhood and community engagement, local democratic structures such as parish and town councils, neighbourhood area committees, or other local forums can be established or enhanced. This ensures local communities continue to have a strong voice and direct influence in decision-making. Medway already has a citizens panel, rural liaison board and resident forums, however the 4D option will present greater opportunities to codesign services in consultation with residents and communities.

This model places democracy and fairness at its core, ensuring that governance arrangements remain resident-focused while delivering greater efficiency and value for money. By streamlining decision-making and clarifying responsibilities, Option 4D provides a clear, accountable, and sustainable foundation for local democratic leadership. Each local authority will have between 65 and 91 councillors, maintaining strong representation while achieving greater proportional efficiency an average ratio of roughly 1 councillor per 4,000–4,750 residents. This is consistent with national guidance from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. The 4D model will retain and enhance local representation through the following democratic arrangements:

- Neighbourhood Area Committees or Local Boards within each authority will make decisions on neighbourhood priorities—such as planning, public realm, and community investment—retaining local identity and responsiveness.
- Town and Parish Councils will have expanded roles in neighbourhood planning, service delivery, and local engagement.
- Community engagement frameworks will ensure that residents, businesses, and voluntary groups have direct input into local strategies and budget priorities.

This combination of strategic unitary governance and devolved community mechanisms ensures that decision-making is both locally anchored and strategically coherent.

## Criteria 2: Achieving efficiency, capacity, and financial resilience

<b>Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency</b>	<b>Criteria 2a and 2b</b>
<b>Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies</b>	<b>Criteria 2c</b>
<b>Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation</b>	<b>Criteria 2d</b>
<b>Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government</b>	<b>Criteria 2e</b>

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## Delivering scale to support operational resilience and efficiency

**Criteria 2a.** As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.

**Criteria 2b.** There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.

**Option 4D establishes four well-aligned unitaries, bringing together areas with similar economic strategies, service delivery needs, and local priorities to support long-term sustainability and efficiency gains. The unitary sizes support optimal operational efficiency, providing sufficient scale to realise economies of scale, establish robust tax bases, and ensure manageable administrative areas. This strategy adopts a forward-thinking approach, establishing a strong foundation for future growth and enabling integrated, effective service provision tailored to local needs. Population sizes provide room for growth, ensuring the stability, operational resilience, and efficient delivery of services for the people of Kent in the years ahead.**

### Government guidance on population size

Population size can be used as a proxy for the size and scale of councils.

Government has outlined a population size of 500,000 or more as a guiding principle, not a hard target.

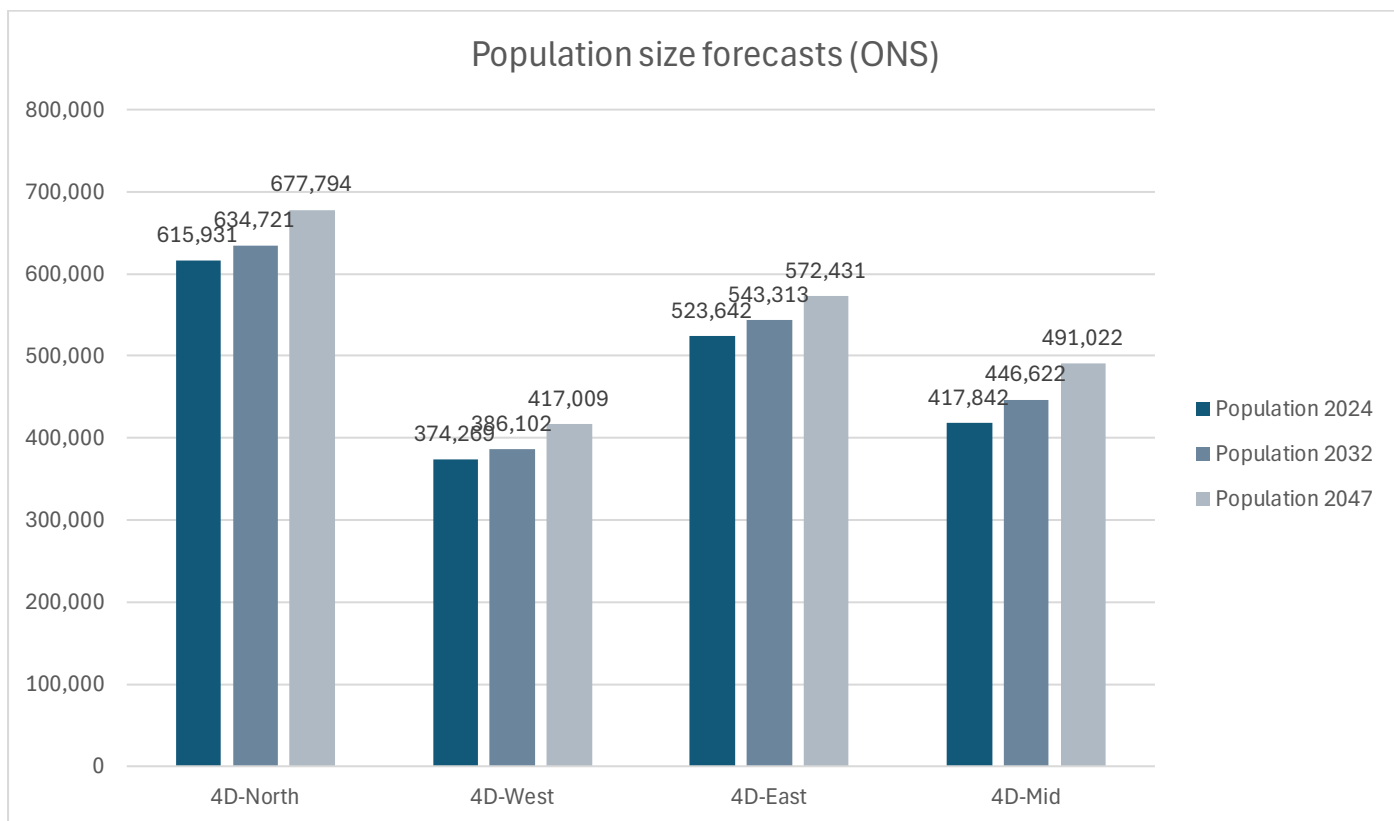
There is recognition there should be flexibility and all proposals, regardless of the population size being proposed, should set out the rationale clearly.

All councils across Kent agree that, given the implementation complexity of any LGR, new local government structures should be in place for generations to come.

As a result, projected future populations as well as current population sizes are considered for each proposed council.

### Populations and forward projections

Set out below are population numbers and growth projections for the four proposed councils under Option 4D.

**Figure 14: Population size forecasts**

### The argument for 4D: Balanced populations with room for growth

Under Option 4D, all four councils will have between 374k - 616k starting population.

Option 4D stands out for its balanced population densities and effective alignment with Kent's settlement patterns. It creates regions that combine suitable size, population distribution, and strong local provision in a community-focused framework. The councils are large enough to deliver services efficiently and withstand financial shock, yet remain firmly focused on local needs. [As per the 2025 National Audit Office report on Local Government financial sustainability](#), *“For reform to support sustainability, there must be clear local accountability for service and financial performance of each local authority”*. By departing from the status quo, option 4D offers the optimal solution for balancing size, meeting local requirements, and ensuring long term efficiency and managing future service demands and challenges.

This approach needs to ensure effective local accountability for the service and financial performance of each local authority

## Maximising value for money through financial efficiencies

**Criteria 2c.** Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.

**Option 4D takes a radical approach to achieve long term financial sustainability. Each authority has a robust tax base and economic capacity. Population and economic capacity are distributed in a manner that aligns with the local identities, economic strategies and existing partnerships, supporting effective and efficient delivery of core services and withstanding financial shocks.**

### Collaborative working on finance across Kent councils

All 14 S151 officers are members of the long-standing Kent Finance Officer Group (KFOG).

In relation to LGR, it has been responsible for the following key activities:

- developing working relationships and shared understanding of finances, which will be a key enabler of successful LGR;
- informing a shared financial baseline; and
- reviewing and collectively updating assumptions behind a base case model for inclusion in proposals to government.

### Approach to modelling the financial impact of LGR

Refer to **Appendix 2: Financial modelling** for more detailed description of assumptions, approach and results of the financial modelling.

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

The financial model aims to:

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

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

### Assumptions in financial modelling

While being fully supportive of the long-term benefits of LGR, all KFOG agrees LGR does not provide the solution combating the scale of the financial challenge being faced.

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

The KFOG has agreed the following position:

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The



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scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.

- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be paid for.
- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new councils may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new councils.

### Financial modelling results

The results of the financial modelling are shown below.

Option 4D will have one off implementation costs of £135.9m, recurring disaggregation costs of between £32.9m and £48.6m and recurring reorganisation savings of £67.5m. This suggests a phased payback period of between 7.9 and 14.5 years. However, there is no compelling evidence to support the model's assumption that disaggregating the upper tier county service into a number of councils has a material impact on the cost of care packages for adults and children in receipt of social care. Indeed, as the only existing unitary council in the Kent and Medway area, our experience demonstrates that commissioning care packages across a smaller geographical area and a population more aligned to the Government's view of the optimal population size for a unitary authority allows it to better work with the local care market and achieves greater efficiencies. If we were to take a prudent approach and assume neither an increase nor decrease in the cost of commissioned care packages, the payback period for Option 4D reduces to 7.9 years.

**Table 14:** Financial modelling summary results

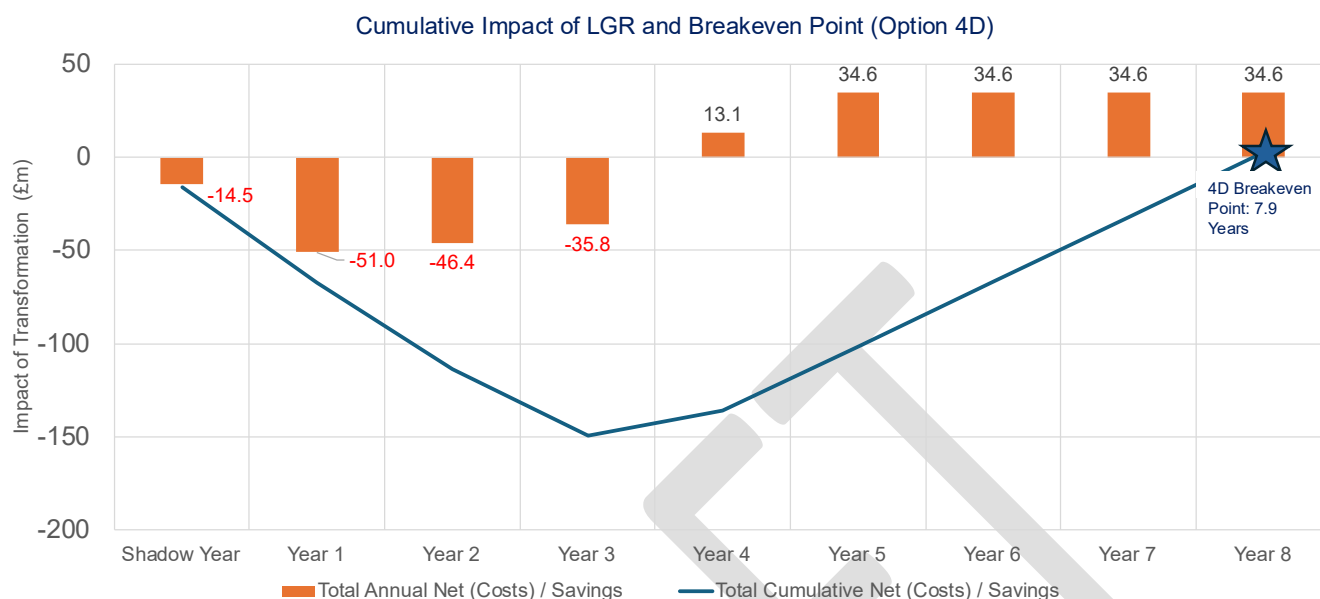
LGR option	Implementation costs (one-off) (£m)	Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m)	Disaggregation costs (£m)*	Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)**	Estimated payback period
Option 4D	(135.9)	67.5	(32.9) – (48.6)	34.6 – 18.9	7.9 – 14.5 years

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

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

**Payback period**

**Figure 15: Payback period**



\*Chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest end of the range

As shown in the chart above, if implemented well, Option 4D is estimated to pay back the early investment over 7.9 years. The profile of costs and benefits have been developed collaboratively across all LGR options.

**Savings and financial efficiency: the argument for Option 4D**

Transitioning from 14 to just four local councils, will inevitably deliver ongoing savings in terms of leaner management structures and other economies of scale. It is acknowledged that where there are currently only two upper tier authorities, under these proposals there would be an increase in the cost of managing social care and other upper tier functions, however national benchmarking has demonstrated that unitary authorities typically have lower per capita spend and lower average unit costs for both children’s and adult commissioned social care services. Medway Council is an example of this.

## Managing transition costs while enabling long-term transformation

**Criteria 2d.** Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets and from the flexible use of capital receipts to support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

**Although transition costs resulting from local government reorganisation may increase expenditure in the short term, the opportunity for radical public service reform in a four unitary model which meets the Government's optimum characteristics, means greater scope to achieve long term financial sustainability.**

### A complex transition regardless of the option selected

LGR is inherently complex, and the size and number of councils in Kent means the Kent LGR programme will be one of the most complex implementations nationally, regardless of the option selected.

This has the potential to impact public service delivery in the short term if transition is not managed effectively.

The 14 councils have made progress on transition planning, including considerations of quick wins and capturing of key joint actions. Refer to 'Section 6: Implementation Plan' for further details.

### Transition: the argument for option 4D

Medway Council and other unitary councils have demonstrated that commissioning and delivering services at a more local level, allows commissioners to better understand and work with the provider market to reduce unit costs and provide better services.

In most cases, the transition from 14 authorities to just four will deliver greater efficiencies in terms of strategic support services and in the management of lower tier services. Rationalisation of property and ICT systems should also deliver savings.

### Opportunities for transformation

All councils across Kent have taken steps to modernise, including more effective use of data and introducing digital approaches to service delivery.

This transformation activity has already improved outcomes and enabled cost savings.

However, all councils recognise LGR presents an opportunity to transform services and ways of working more fundamentally.

On 17 September 2025, Kent councils met to discuss the future vision for Kent.

As part of these discussions, the below key ambitions for service transformation were captured:

1. Clear focus for transformation on the needs of residents.
2. Establish a consistent, whole-council approach and culture across services, breaking down silos and joining up the experience for residents accessing multiple services.

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3. Digitise and automate resident journeys for more transactional services, while maintaining alternative routes for those who need them.
4. Increase focus on prevention and a more holistic person-centred approach, especially for those with more complex needs (see Criteria 3: Public service reform).

To enable this transformation the below enablers were discussed:

- continual focus on cultural change and effective communications;
- joining up key data sources across services to support seamless working across services, better understand resident needs and achieve better, more proactive decision-making;
- meaningful transformation strategies and wider approach to public service reform in advance of Day 1, informing meaningful corporate plans with clear ambitions and actions; and
- linking transformation to a shared Kent-wide approach to public service reform (see Criteria 3).

Specific transformation plans, including funding arrangements for investment will need to be agreed as part of the budget-setting process and Medium Term Financial Strategy for each new council.

Across Kent, capital receipts are expected to support this to some extent.

However, investment in transformation will be on the basis it delivers cost savings and is therefore self-funding over the medium to long term.

### **Transformation: the argument for 4D**

The well thought out geographies proposed in the 4D model align with existing communities and follow Kent's natural transport and travel routes. They will provide significant scope to transform service delivery and increased opportunities for service efficiencies. For example, they will allow for a more coherent approach to housing strategy across the region.

## Strengthening the financial sustainability of local government

**Criteria 2e.** For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.

### The Kent financial context

None of the 14 councils in Kent are in Best Value intervention or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support.

However, Medway Council has been granted a capitalisation direction under the government's Exceptional Financial Support.

There is collective concern regarding the financial sustainability of the current system, particularly given rising demand in adult social care and children's services, rising costs and increasing levels of debt.

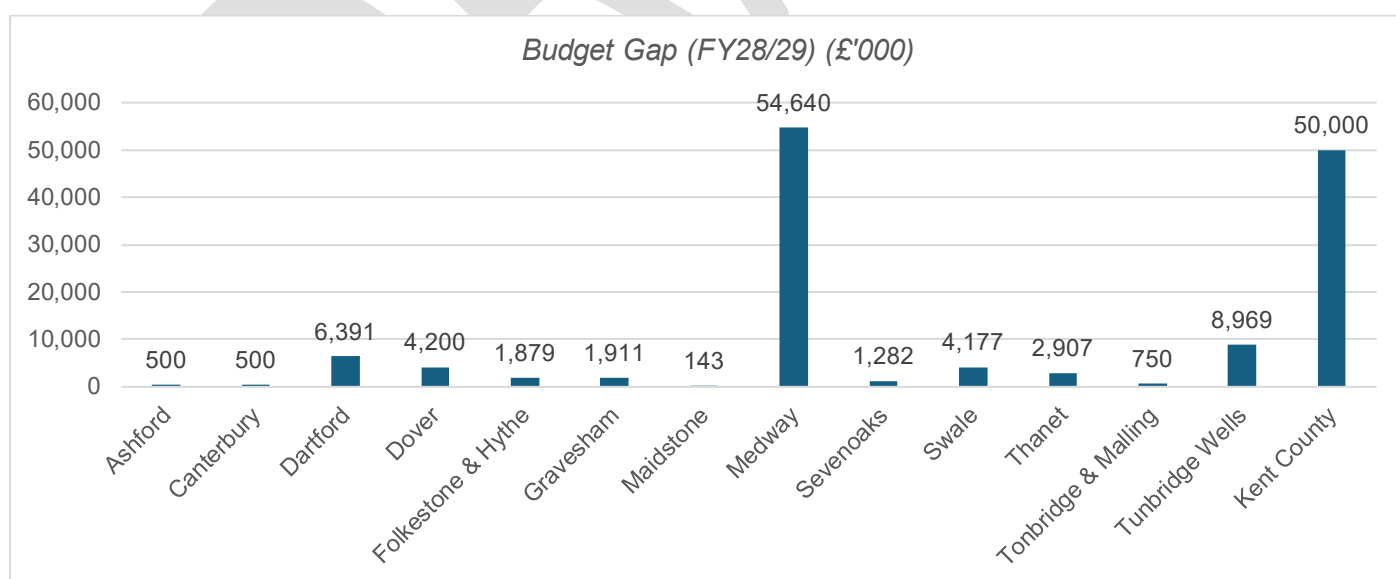
The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery across county and districts.

### Existing budget challenges

The forecast total gross budget gap, including assumed funding from reserves, for all councils by 2028/29 is £138.2m, which includes £54.6m within Medway and £50.0m within Kent County Council.

These figures exclude consideration of the impact of Fair Funding 2.0.

**Figure 16: Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£'000)**



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

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However, the starting point for all new councils is expected to be stretched, with ongoing need for savings to be identified.

**Table 15: Projected budget position for new councils under Option 4D**

Local Authority	Budget Gap (FY28/29) (£m)
North Kent	79.4
West Kent	23.3
East Kent	23.1
Mid Kent	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>138.2</b>

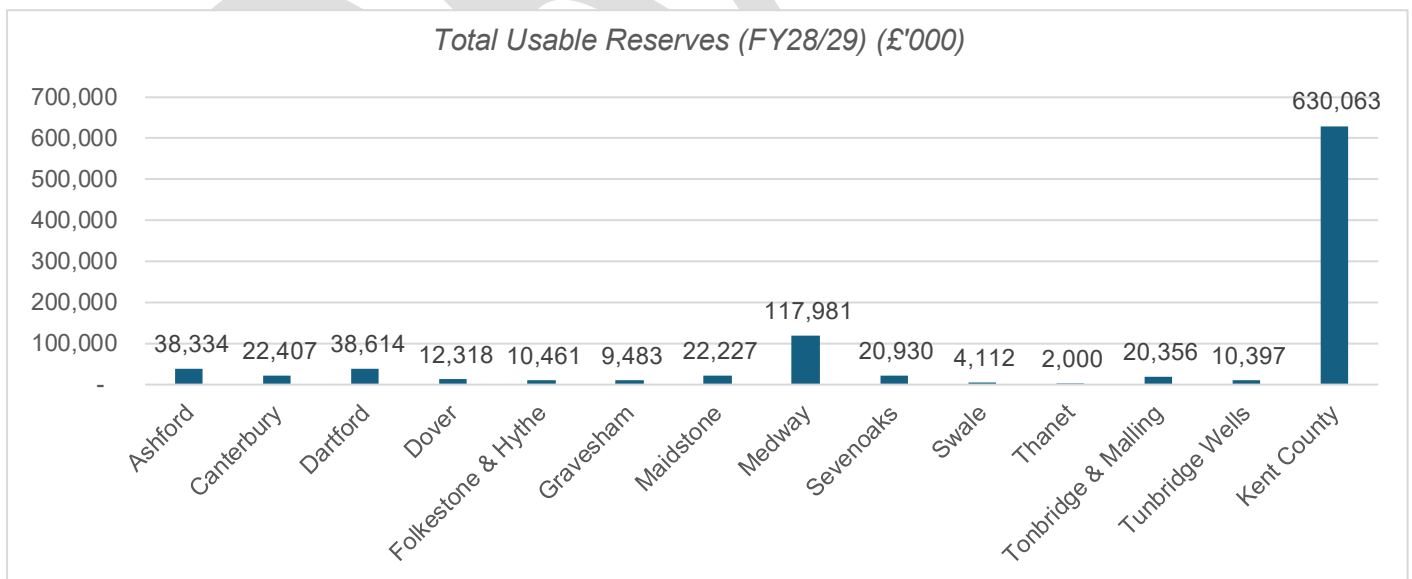
All councils report manageable budget gaps: Mid Kent demonstrates fiscal strength with a gap of £12.5m, while East and West Kent each have gaps of approximately £23m. North Kent faces a larger gap primarily due to Medway, which comprises 98% of the North unitary area. However, this is mitigated by Medway’s substantial usable reserves—£118m, equating to 6.7 times the average reserve level among districts (£17.6m). Also, the formation of a new, larger North Kent council would enhance financial resilience and provide access to a broader revenue base, improving North Kent’s capacity to absorb financial shocks at scale.

**Current reserves levels**

Across Kent councils, Total Usable Reserves are forecast to be £959.7m.

This includes the full value of the Kent County Council’s usable reserves of £630.1m.

**Figure 17: Total Usable Reserves**



*Note – for all districts, this amount related to General Fund balance, Earmarked Reserves, Capital Receipts Reserve and Capital Grants Unapplied.*

Further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for allocation of county reserves across the new councils post reorganisation.



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It will be the decision of each new council to determine how to use its resources to pay for the cost of reorganisation, which is likely to be through a mixture of use of reserves and capital receipts.

**Table 16: Projected reserves levels under Option 4D**

Local Authority	Total Usable Reserves (FY27/28) (£m)
North Kent	359.1
West Kent	178.2
East Kent	215.0
Mid Kent	207.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>959.7</b>

All councils have healthy reserves levels above £178m and are all moderately balanced, in the range of £178m to £359m. The North Unitary holds a substantial reserve of £359 million, largely due to Medway's disproportionately high level of reserves.

**Existing council debt**

The external debt position reported across all Kent councils is £1.7bn on a net revenue of £2.3bn with a total financing cost of £123.6m. 67% of the borrowing and 87% of net revenue and 87% of the financing cost is within Kent County Council and Medway.

The combined financing ratio across all Kent councils is 5.3%.

**Table 22: Borrowing and financing costs across Kent councils<sup>31</sup>**

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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,730,351</b>	<b>123,573</b>	<b>2,313,379</b>	<b>5.3% (Average)</b>

<sup>31</sup> Financial data return submitted by councils

## The projected debt position for new councils under Option 4D

The councils' borrowing costs, net financing costs and net revenue have been combined and the County costs have been apportioned based on population data.

**Table 17: Projected debt position for new councils**

Local Authority	General Fund Borrowing (External)	Financing cost	Net Revenue (26/27)	Financing ratio
North Kent	761.3	51.8	1,024.7	5.1%
West Kent	175.9	18.0	376.0	4.8%
East Kent	460.0	31.0	521.9	5.9%
Mid Kent	333.1	22.8	390.8	5.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,730.4</b>	<b>123.6</b>	<b>2,313.4</b>	<b>5.3%</b>

### Commentary on Balance

North Kent holds both the highest borrowing requirement (£761.3 million) and highest net revenue (£1,024.7 million). Its relatively low financing ratio of 5.1% reflects an efficient debt servicing capacity. West Kent has the smallest borrowing (£175.9 million) and net revenue (£376.0 million), alongside the most favourable financing ratio at 4.8%, indicating a comparatively minimal debt burden. East Kent and Mid Kent present higher financing ratios of 5.9% and 5.8% respectively, suggesting relatively constrained revenue positions or less optimal financing terms. Although these ratios exceed those of North and West Kent, the range remains narrow, less than 1.1%, demonstrating consistent debt servicing capacity across all authorities.

### Four councils driving long term financial sustainability

The establishment of four councils under Option 4D facilitates a more robust and efficient operational framework, enabling each council to address local priorities while achieving financial resilience. The sizes of the councils enable 4D to leverage economies of scale in shared services and procurement, while offering the flexibility for local service delivery.

Key financial indicators reflect a balanced distribution across the four councils:

- **Total GVA** spans from £12.4 billion to £16 billion, with West Kent recording the highest GVA per capita (£37,204), indicative of its strong economic base.
- **Council tax bases** are broadly similar, ranging between 151,000 and 197,000 Band D equivalents, with average Band D rates closely matched.
- **Retained business rates** and **general fund balances** vary. Notably, Mid Kent maintains the largest general fund balance (£73.9 million), providing a substantial safeguard against financial volatility.
- **Net revenue expenditure** ranges from £432 million to £748 million, with North Kent at the upper end, in keeping with its scale and economic activity.

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Collectively, these metrics indicate that Option 4D delivers a well-balanced approach to financial sustainability, integrating local adaptability with adequate scale to optimise resource management.

**Table 18: Key financial metrics for the 4D option**

Metric	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent
<b>Total GVA (£ million) (2023)<sup>32</sup></b>	16,011	13,924	12,634	12,396
<b>GVA per capita (£) (2023)<sup>33</sup></b>	25,995	37,204	24,127	29,666
<b>Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (2025-26)<sup>34</sup></b>	197,265	150,602	180,623	151,161
<b>Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes) (£) (2024-25)<sup>35</sup></b>	1,904	1,874	1,907	1,907
<b>Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)<sup>36</sup></b>	123	81	82	78
<b>General fund balance (£m)</b>	35.92	26.40	35.00	73.90
<b>Net revenue expenditure (£m)</b>	748.03	432.12	609.80	483.81

<sup>32</sup> [Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>34</sup> Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages

<sup>35</sup> Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages

<sup>36</sup> [National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

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

This section includes:

**Improving delivery of key services**

**Criteria 3a  
and 3c**

**Public service reform**

**Criteria 3b**

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## Improving delivery of key services

**Criteria 3a.** Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.

**Criteria 3c.** Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

**Ensuring the delivery of high-quality, sustainable services – particularly in areas such as adult social care, children's services, SEND, homelessness, and wider public safety – stands at the heart of the future vision for local government in Kent.**

### Working together on the future of services

As part of the Kent LGR programme, the 14 councils have collectively agreed key service areas to explore in more detail through workshops, supplemented by additional discussions and data gathering.

Workshops were held in five key service areas, bringing together representation from across the councils of Kent and Medway to ensure multiple perspectives were shared.

These services were:

- Adult Social Care;
- Children's Services including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC);
- Housing and Homelessness;
- Highways Services; and
- Waste Services.

During these sessions, attendees considered the following:

- current service challenges;
- existing good practice and collaboration;
- future improvement opportunities shared across all LGR options; and
- opportunities and challenges specific to individual options where a proposal is being submitted to government.

In addition to the sessions held, colleagues from a wide range of services across Kent have had the opportunity to input to collective thinking on service-specific impacts through online forms with in excess of 125 responses.

There were a number of emerging themes and these were aligned with workshop discussions where the same themes were consistently identified.

We are continuing to engage with colleagues across the councils.

**Challenges of two tier working**

**How single tier working can improve performance and customer outcomes**

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- **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:

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- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

There are also services and organisations that operate across Kent that our approach to LGR would not disrupt including Adoption Partnership South East, Safeguarding Adults Board, elements of commissioning, Attendance Alliance for Kent and Medway, Kent Housing Group and Kent Resources partnership.

While not tying future councils into service delivery model decisions, we are supportive of partnership arrangements and other approaches that enables strategic functions, services and operations to be delivered across Kent where it is in the best interests of residents to do so.

### **Adult Social Care and Children’s Services spend data**

During the Options Appraisal, analysis was carried out of the actual cost incurred by different councils for key county-wide services.

This was led by KCC and tested with finance officers across Kent.

It found:

- for all of the multi-council options being put forward there is significant misalignment between the costs of delivery and the funding provided for both adult social care and children’s services, with some areas at more of a disadvantage than others.
- the impact of the Fair Funding Review has been considered and is expected to have some impact on funding allocation, but based on analysis to date, misalignment between costs and funding is expected to continue for any multi-council model.
- this disparity is important for all councils across Kent to be aware of and to take appropriate mitigating steps in LGR planning. The potential to share funding appropriately based on actual demand and costs is an opportunity for discussion.

### **Funding and expenditure**

**Table 19: Total expenditure on Social Care**

<b>Total Expenditure</b> <i>(based on 23/24 spending)<sup>37</sup></i>	<b>North Kent</b>	<b>West Kent</b>	<b>East Kent</b>	<b>Mid Kent</b>
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<sup>37</sup> [Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2023 to 2024 individual local authority data - outturn - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2023-to-2024-individual-local-authority-data-outturn)



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<b>Children's Social Care (£m)</b>	140.27	31.21	82.28	44.33
<b>Adult Social Care (£m)</b>	185.64	109.14	214.76	124.46

## **Adult Social Care (ASC)**

### Overview of current ASC delivery

Kent County Council and Medway Council deliver adult social care as part of their existing responsibilities with some place-based partnerships in place across the existing councils to bring integrated teams together to understand the needs of the population, agree plans to meet those needs and implement solutions.

Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board oversees strategic planning and resource allocation for health and care services.

Delivery is planned and co-ordinated on the footprint of four health and care partnerships which bring together health providers, social care, public health, district councils and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Partnership for Better Health.

Kent County Council and Medway Council have a history of working together to great effect, with examples including:

- The Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board: a multi-agency partnership consisting of statutory and voluntary partner organisations, working together to keep adults at risk of abuse or neglect safe.
- The Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit (VRU): a partnership between the police, councils, health service providers and other key agencies to deliver a reduction in violence the county.

Evidence of shared posts demonstrates how working together across councils can build resilience, provide flexibility, offer value for money and deliver good outcomes.

### ***Case study – Joint Commissioning Post – Learning Disability and Autism***

The Kent and Medway Learning Disability and Autism Delivery Partnership was formed in January 2022.

It was established after a review of previous commissioning and alliance arrangements highlighted the need for a new whole-system approach.

This approach aims to improve health outcomes and maximise choice, control, independence and human rights for citizens with learning disabilities, autism or both.

In September 2023, NHS Kent and Medway and Kent County Council formed a legal partnership to jointly plan and commission services for neurodivergent citizens.

This Partnership for Neurodiversity Agreement allows for delegated functions under section 75 of the NHS Act (2006) if deemed necessary.

This agreement is further supported by a memorandum of understanding between Kent County Council, representing the partnership, and Medway Council, which aims to explore a tripartite

agreement and facilitate discussions on resources for neurodivergent individuals in Kent and Medway.

The System Programme Lead is a pivotal role established in August 2022, focusing on senior system leadership and comprehensive programme management.

This position is instrumental in fostering collaborative improvement, working with various partners to design and implement projects aimed at enhancing the health, wellbeing and life chances of individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people across Kent and Medway.

Effective and sustainable delivery of Kent and Medway's Learning Disability and Autism programme is ensured through collaboration and whole-system leadership, underpinned by securing commitment from essential stakeholders across health, social care and the third sector.

**LGR provides the opportunity to consider strategically how shared services and posts across the future councils can enhance delivery.**

### Key ASC delivery challenges

CQC inspections in 23/24 across Kent and Medway rated both as Requires Improvement.

The strengths and areas for improvement included:

- for Kent County Council strengths included co-production and lived experience, improved hospital discharge, high demand management and staff development. Areas of focus included communications and information, transitions, delays in support and staff morale.
- Medway Council strengths included positive staff interactions, person-centred support, effective transitions and partnership working. Areas of focus included accessibility of information waiting times, service gaps and staffing challenges.

Given the differences highlighted there is an opportunity for KCC and Medway ASC teams to share learning and areas of good practice in preparation for LGR.

Additional challenges include:

- **Demographic and geographical challenges:** more than one-fifth of Kent's residents are aged 65 and above (20.5%), a higher proportion than Medway's 17%, and this demographic is expected to grow considerably by 2040.
- Areas of deprivation exist across Kent, particularly in eastern Kent. Coastal regions face specific difficulties, including economic precarity, geographical remoteness, and the complexities of service provision.
- **Funding shortfalls and financial strain:** budgets are insufficient to meet the rising demand and complexity of care needs, leading to difficult decisions and financial pressure on the entire system.
- **Workforce crisis:** difficult to recruit and retain enough care staff with specific challenges in Kent due to geography (coastal) and competition from neighbouring councils, alongside shortages in specialist roles like Approved Mental Health Professionals.
- **Rising and complex demand:** an increasing number of older adults with multiple health conditions, plus more younger adults with complex disabilities, means services are stretched by growing and more intricate care needs.
- **Fragile care market:** the local market of care homes and home care providers is unstable and inconsistent.

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- **Fragmented health and social care:** despite efforts, integrating NHS health services with council social care remains difficult, causing disjointed care pathways, delayed hospital discharges, and gaps in support.
- **Poor data and system integration:** information sharing across different services and partners is complex and fragmented, hindering effective coordination, strategic planning and the ability to gain insights from data.
- **Policies:** differing local policies, procedures and ways of working across the area can lead to different cultures across localities resulting in inconsistent experiences for people accessing services.

### Future ASC delivery and opportunities through LGR

Regardless of the geographies of future councils, we are committed to transforming adult social care by:

- **Improved, innovative service delivery:** developing and implementing new models of delivery based on best practice.
- **Fostering collaborative partnerships:** strengthening meaningful collaborations across Kent to achieve improved outcomes for all residents.
- **Strategic housing integration:** adopting a unified, strategic approach to the planning and co-ordination with housing services across the wider footprint to achieve closer alignment of these services for the benefit of adults needing support, reduce inequalities and prevent escalating need.
- **Streamlining data and systems:** enhancing data sharing and analytics through integrated systems to drive insights and improve service delivery.
- **Building workforce resilience:** exploring shared service models and new approaches to strengthen the social care workforce and ensure its sustainability.
- **Optimising commissioning:** implementing a strategic, Kent-wide commissioning approach where appropriate to better shape and influence the market, delivering enhanced outcomes and improved value for money.
- **Localising care provision:** ensuring services are delivered closer to home, with a deeper understanding of communities and individual needs.

#### **Medway Intensive Support Team MIST**

The Medway Intensive Support Team (MIST) commenced operations on 2 June 2025. The team was established to provide proactive, specialist, and relationship-based support to individuals in Medway who are considered “hard to reach” or “seldom heard.” These individuals often experience multiple and complex needs that require a tailored, persistent, and multi-agency approach to achieve sustainable outcomes.

#### **Background and Rationale**

The creation of MIST was driven by a clear and pressing need to address the challenges faced by a cohort of adults in Medway who are not effectively supported by traditional service models. These individuals often live with:

- Long-term self-neglect

- Enduring mental health conditions
- Hoarding behaviours
- Learning disabilities and/or autism
- Experiences of coercion and control, including domestic abuse and financial exploitation

These challenges frequently result in poor life outcomes, including homelessness, deteriorating health, social isolation, and repeated safeguarding concerns. The impact on the wider health and social care system is significant, with high levels of emergency interventions, hospital admissions, and costly placements.

MIST was developed to provide a more effective response—one that is intensive, consistent, and rooted in building trust over time. The team works collaboratively with partners across health, housing, and community services to ensure individuals receive the right support at the right time.

Team members bring a diverse range of expertise, including mental health, learning disabilities, safeguarding, housing, substance misuse, and outreach. The team is led by the Principal Social Worker and operates an allocated model, receiving referrals from across Adult Social Care.

Two of the Social Care Officer roles are funded through Public Health via the Drugs and Alcohol Treatment Recovery and Improvement Grant, originally allocated to the Medway Multi Disadvantage Network (MMDN). This integration has enabled a more joined-up, multidisciplinary approach to supporting individuals with multiple disadvantages.

Discussions are ongoing with Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust (KMPT) to embed mental health expertise within the team, further enhancing its capacity to respond to complex needs.

### **Impact and Early Outcomes**

Since its launch, MIST has begun working with individuals who were previously disengaged from services or at risk of serious harm. Early casework has demonstrated the value of the team's approach:

- Individuals experiencing severe self-neglect have been supported into safe environments and appropriate treatment
- Rough sleepers have been engaged and supported into temporary accommodation, avoiding long-term placements
- High-cost care packages have been reviewed and, in some cases, replaced with more sustainable, independent living arrangements

These outcomes not only improve the lives of individuals but also reduce pressure on the Adult Social Care budget and other public services.

### **Strategic Alignment and System Benefits**

MIST contributes directly to several strategic priorities across the Council and its partners, including:

- Reducing homelessness (Housing)
- Improving health outcomes (Public Health)
- Supporting families and preventing breakdown (Children's Services)
- Delivering the Prevention Agenda (Adult Social Care)

The team also supports broader system goals by:

- Reducing safeguarding referrals and serious case reviews
- Increasing capacity within ASC by reducing repeat demand
- Avoiding high-cost emergency and long-term interventions
- Enhancing Medway Council's reputation as a responsive, innovative, and compassionate authority

### Adult Social Care delivery under Option 4D

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the four proposed councils making up Option 4D.

**Table 20: Adult Social Care Metrics**

Metrics	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent
<b>Total Population Size (mid 2024)</b>	615,931	374,269	523,642	417,842
People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing short term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25)	16	14	47	28
People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year, rate per 100,000 population (2024-25)	266	196	366	262
People accessing short term support during the year, rate per 10,000 population (18-64) (2024-25)	19	6	61	38
People accessing short term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 (2024-25)	334	329	409	353
People accessing long term support during the year (18-64), rate per 100,000 population (2024/25)	57	41	73	55
People accessing long term support during the year (65+), rate per 100,000 population (2024/25)	438	331	395	359
Safeguarding Concerns Received, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25)	1,411	1,325	2,117	1,581
Safeguarding Concerns Commenced, rate per 100,000 population (2024/25)	456	492	757	504

## Key points in relation to the data:

The data seeks to identify at a high level the indicative demand on the system. This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

- People with learning disabilities for both short-term and long-term support is significantly higher in East Kent.
- Demand for all services is consistently higher in East Kent. This is a known area of higher deprivation. In addition, there are a greater number of residential homes in the coastal areas and therefore a greater proportion of provision. This impact for East Kent is mitigated by the boundary change of Folkstone and Hythe, splitting the district between East and Mid.
- Safeguarding concerns received were the second highest in Mid Kent in terms of received and commenced.
- North Kent received more safeguarding concerns than West Kent however more safeguarding concerns commenced in West Kent.

## Opportunities for Adult Social Care delivery under Option 4D

The 4D model for Kent and Medway creates a stronger, more balanced platform for adult social care by aligning services with community needs, health boundaries, and local capacity. It combines strategic resilience with local accountability, allowing care to be delivered closer to residents while maintaining the specialist scale needed for quality and sustainability.

There are currently one in four residents in Kent that report a disability or long-term health condition. Kent has an aging population with significant increases in the elderly by 2036. According to the CQC there are projected to be over 30,000 people aged 85+ in Kent, nearly double the number in 2018, increasing the demand for care and support<sup>38</sup>.

The 4D model allows for **Place-Based Care and Early Intervention**. Smaller councils are better able to design place-based care systems, tailoring services to the demographic and geographic characteristics of their populations, for example:

- East Kent could focus on coastal health inequalities and hospital discharge pressures.
- Mid Kent could build integrated rural and market-town models around community nursing and reablement.
- North Kent could strengthen urban and industrial workforce wellbeing services.
- West Kent could expand community prevention and ageing-well initiatives.

Furthermore, integration of public health (already in place in Medway), social care and housing functions within each authority will allow earlier identification of risk and intervention before crisis. This, along with an increased focus in place and neighbourhoods will further extend the use of community-based assets such as local organisations, carers, and volunteers, which will support independence and reduce long-term care costs. A study by *People Too* entitled "Local Government Reform – An Adult and Children's Services Lens" (2025), identified that all average unit costs across ASC and Children's Services are lower in councils and metropolitans" and concluded "that there is no evidence that county councils are achieving lower unit costs because of greater buying power in the market".

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.cqc.org.uk/press-release/cqc-rates-kent-county-council-adult-social-care-provision-requires-improvement>



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The four proposed councils are aligned with the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System (ICS) footprint, supporting full integration of health, care and prevention. Each authority will operate within a Health and Care Partnership (HCP) area—North & Medway, East, Mid and West – mirroring NHS and public health boundaries. The 4D model will allow **greater integration with health and community partners** thus enabling:

- Joint commissioning and shared outcomes frameworks with the NHS and voluntary sector.
- Streamlined discharge pathways, reducing delayed transfers of care.
- Co-located community hubs combining social care, primary care and wellbeing services.
- Strengthened local leadership within the ICS, ensuring that social care is an equal partner in system decisions.

The 4D model allows each council to build a stable, **locally focused care workforce, reducing reliance** on high-cost agency staffing. Shared workforce planning across four balanced councils will allow:

- Joint recruitment campaigns and local training pipelines with FE colleges and NHS partners.
- Common standards, pay frameworks and career development routes across the county.
- Targeted retention programmes in hard-to-recruit areas such as coastal Kent.
- Stronger provider markets will help stabilise home-care and residential-care availability.
- The proposal also creates specific (hyperlocal) opportunities such as carefully managing the coastal deprivation and impact on service demand by splitting Folkestone & Hythe, and enhancing the alignment of urban and coastal communities support more strategic decision making to meet population needs.
- Integrating county and district-level functions into one organisation per area eliminates duplication in commissioning, contracts, and back-office functions, creating **greater financial sustainability**. An enhanced focus on early intervention and prevention can be applied in those areas of greater and escalating need.

Each council will manage its own end-to-end care pathways, allowing local control of budgets and better alignment between prevention, care delivery and outcomes. Four councils which are small enough to understand all the local challenges and opportunities, harnessing a strengths based approach to develop service provision whilst also mitigating risk.

The proposed scale of 400,000–600,000 residents per council will ensure sufficient critical mass for efficiency while allowing responsive local oversight. Future **devolution powers** could also create greater integrated funding and workforce arrangements, funding and innovation opportunities.

## Children's Social Care

### [Overview of Children's Social Care current delivery](#)

Kent County Council and Medway Council currently deliver children's social care services with positive Ofsted recognition.

The current delivery of services is an excellent foundation for LGR and provides the opportunity to learn from each other.

Kent County Council, covering a large and diverse region, achieved an Outstanding rating from Ofsted in November 2021.



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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

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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.

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By engaging with partners across the system, fostering a culture of shared responsibility, and holding providers to account, Medway has moved from a £24 million deficit to a balanced budget.

This strategic financial management, coupled with a high-trust-high-challenge mantra for providers, has enabled the development of more local provision and a transparent funding model, ensuring resources are effectively directed to where they are most needed.

Core to this success lies in an embedded cultural change, uniting stakeholders and particularly bringing schools around the table to address issues and problem-solve together. This approach has fostered a powerful sense of collective responsibility, resulting in a system where schools actively challenge each other, develop new initiatives and have significantly increased the proportion of EHCPs managed within mainstream settings from 26.4% to 35%.

This cultural shift is further reinforced by robust quality assurance, ensuring all provision meets high standards and is responsive to children's needs.

The size of Medway has proven to be a distinct advantage, enabling rapid change and full oversight of the entire SEND system.

This agility allows for the co-production of teams, personalised responses for complex cases and a deep understanding of families and social workers within the community.

With strong parent/carer involvement, locality-focused initiatives and a commitment to embedding accessibility policies, Medway has not only achieved significant financial stability but has also cultivated a happier, more integrated team and a highly responsive, accountable and inclusive SEND service that truly knows and supports its children.

**The proposed options are in relation to smaller scale, multiple councils where this approach and learning could be applied.**

Children's Social Care delivery under Option 4D

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the four proposed councils making up Option 4D.

**Table 21: Children's Social Care**

Metrics	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent
Active Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) by School District, rate per 10,000) (Oct 2025)	1,249	902	1,797	993
Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Y12&13, rate per 10,000 (2024)	385	237	404	335
Child in Need (CiN) Plans, rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025)	93	62	103	85
Child Protection Plans (CPP) Rate per 10,000 (Mar 2025)	37	22	42	31

Looked After Children (LAC) by placement address, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025)	38	4	14	7
Other Local Authority (OLA) Looked After Children placed in Kent & Medway, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025)	49	19	49	25
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Looked After, rate per 10,000 population (Mar 2025)	7	3	14	7

### Key points in relation to the data:

The data seeks to identify at a high level the indicative demand on the system. This will enable further service delivery planning in the future to manage more effectively the peaks across the system.

- **High needs (SEND):** Data highlights that East and North Kent is managing a larger proportion of the provision. This is likely a combination of factors including higher demand and more suitable provision available to meet need.
- **NEET:** The rate is highest in East Kent, which is likely influenced by the region's geographical location, its impact on job availability, and wider economic factors. North Kent has the second highest levels.
- **Children's services:** The data shows that while CiN and CPP numbers follow a similar trend – higher in East and lowest in the West. The rate of LAC is much higher in North Kent and this is driven by the available provision. Similarly the rate of OLA is high in North Kent, however this is balanced across East Kent. This is as a result of both sufficiency and the cost of provision with children often needing to be placed in East Kent.

### Opportunities for Children's Social Care delivery under Option 4D

The 4D option offers a major opportunity to transform children's social care across Kent and Medway by creating four balanced, place-based councils aligned with community identity, health partnerships, and education systems. It combines the benefits of local knowledge and relationship-based practice with the scale and stability needed to sustain quality, workforce, and innovation.

Under the 4D model, each new Unitary Authority will take full responsibility for children's services bringing together education, early help, safeguarding, and family support under one democratically accountable organisation. This creates a single line of accountability for outcomes, resources and leadership within each geography,

Each of the four proposed councils reflect a coherent children's population profile and set of local challenges that is equitable and can be effectively resourced and managed aligned to local geographies and needs, for example:

- **North Kent:** High demand for safeguarding, child protection and adolescent services linked to deprivation and population density. Opportunities to strengthen edge-of-care support, reduce residential placements, and expand youth mentoring and family hubs in Chatham, Gillingham and Gravesend.



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- **East Kent:** Significant coastal deprivation and high levels of need among families affected by poverty, housing instability, and poor mental health. The unitary can integrate school inclusion, family support and early years services to tackle entrenched disadvantage and improve educational attainment.
- **Mid Kent:** Rapid housing growth, family mobility and mixed rural-urban communities create opportunities to design locally responsive early help and youth services, integrating family hubs with schools and health visitors.
- **West Kent:** Lower deprivation but rising complex needs and children with disabilities populations; opportunities to strengthen inclusion and short-break provision through closer integration with health and SEN services.

This alignment ensures that children's social care delivery is designed around community identity and real patterns of need rather than administrative legacy boundaries. The 4D model will enable earlier intervention. With education and social care within each council, decisions about SEND provision, attendance and safeguarding can be made holistically. The integration of housing, youth services and public health in one organisation will also strengthen support for vulnerable adolescents and care leavers. While localised delivery enables responsiveness, the four new councils will collaborate through the [Kent & Medway Children's Safeguarding Partnership](#), ensuring shared quality standards and joint innovation on matters such as:

- County-wide frameworks for safeguarding, corporate parenting and quality assurance maintain consistency and resilience.
- Joint commissioning for residential and specialist placements allows scale purchasing, reducing costs and reliance on out-of-county provision.
- Shared digital, legal and commissioning functions free local teams to focus on direct practice.
- Collective oversight supports cross-boundary issues such as child exploitation, missing children, and youth offending.
- Embracing the opportunity to do things differently e.g. family hubs, with closer alignment to health, education and housing.
- Nuanced planning to manage demand across the area with an enhanced early intervention and prevention model to reduce long term demand.
- A holistic, system wide approach delivering services which fits future children's service needs.
- Stronger sense of ownership and engagement from families and schools where boundaries match local identities, enabling a greater community-led approach.

In short, the 4D model creates the conditions for earlier help, stronger families, and better life outcomes, ensuring that every child and young person in Kent and Medway can be safe, thrive and achieve their potential.

## Housing and homelessness

### [Overview of current housing and homelessness delivery](#)

Operating within the structures of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and national housing targets, councils are pivotal in delivering housing and homelessness services.

The provision and key responsibilities vary across the type of local authority.

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- **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.



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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

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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

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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

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- purchasing affordable homes that have been secured under a s106 agreement which Registered Providers are unable or unwilling to deliver and package deals where land is purchased and the properties paid for during the construction process.

The HRA is also used buy properties on the open market and taking them into council ownership and use.

A majority of these properties are former council homes that were sold via the Right to Buy.

The strategic focus is on larger homes that can be adapted for people with physical disabilities to help them live independently.

This ambitious programme aims to significantly address housing needs and improve the quality of life for residents across the borough.

**A scalable best practice approach which can replicate positive outcomes.**

### **Case study: Canterbury City Council – resettlement support**

Canterbury City Council took the decision to deliver resettlement support in house rather than using the KCC provision, supporting those arriving on resettlement schemes since 2015.

The work expanded rapidly in 2021 when the council supported the opening of two hotels to accommodate Afghan nationals within the district.

The wraparound support work includes successful integration into communities, access to services, one-to-one and group support, money management, entering into employment/skills/training and longer-term housing solutions.

The experienced team consistently deliver excellent integration outcomes for families.

A key strength of the Canterbury approach is partnership working with voluntary and statutory sector partners to deliver joined up and innovative services such as the Welcome Hub – a jobs, English language and drop-in advice service.

**This initiative was praised by the Ministry of Defence as a model of good practice and work is already underway to replicate this approach in other areas of Kent.**

### Housing and Homelessness under Option 4D

All Kent LGR proposals are based on a common dataset which supports understanding of current delivery, cost and demand pressures across key services.

The table below shows key data, modelled for the four proposed councils making up Option 4D.

**Table 22: Housing and homelessness metrics for four unitary model option**

Metric	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent
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Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024) <sup>39</sup>	6	2	6	4
Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement (%) <sup>40</sup>	83%	68%	79%	120%

As shown West Kent has the lowest rate of homelessness and Mid Kent is delivering beyond targets for Housing Delivery.

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### Opportunities for Housing and homelessness under Option 4D

Devolution will be a key enabler to help accelerate delivery of the future ambition through strategic joined up planning and delivery across the area.

This model will have four strong unitary voices that are able to represent the area and provide a 'local feel' while working collaboratively through Kent forums to deliver strategically across the area. The good alignment means that the councils are well placed to share learning and innovation while delivering for local people.

The 4D option creates four balanced, integrated councils with full responsibility for housing, planning, homelessness, and social care within a single tier of governance. This consolidation ends the current fragmentation between county and district functions, enabling joined-up housing delivery, targeted prevention, and more responsive support for vulnerable residents.

Under the current two-tier system, housing and homelessness are managed by districts while adult and children's social services sit at county level creating barriers in prevention, resettlement, and joint commissioning. Emulating the strong work of Medway Council in this area, the 4D model

<sup>39</sup> [Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>40</sup> [Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK](#)

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would support **greater integration and joint working**, centring it around holistic well-being and independence through:

- Unified local housing strategy connecting planning, economic growth, and care needs.
- Integrated housing and social care teams enabling rapid response for rough sleepers, care leavers, and adults with complex needs.
- Coordinated discharge-to-settle programmes linking hospital discharge with suitable accommodation.
- Alignment of Local Plans, homelessness strategies, and health priorities across coherent housing market areas.

Each new council will have the scale and flexibility to deliver **stronger, proactive, prevention-led homelessness services**, reducing reliance on costly temporary accommodation, and creating a more coherent, person-centred system, reducing duplication and improving outcomes for vulnerable residents. Key opportunities include:

- Integrated early-help systems where social workers, housing officers and welfare teams share data and triage households before crisis.
- Coordinated financial inclusion and debt support, helping families at risk of eviction maintain tenancies.
- Housing pathways for care leavers, survivors of domestic abuse and hospital discharge patients, avoiding repeat homelessness.
- Joint commissioning of supported and transitional housing, with social care and health partners.
- Place-based multi-agency hubs, embedding homelessness prevention within family and community support centres.

The 4D option aligns perfectly with Kent's key housing and infrastructure corridors, ensuring new development is strategically planned and locally accountable. Each unitary authority will manage housing delivery along its major transport and economic corridors:

- **North Kent:** brownfield regeneration and waterfront growth along the Thames Gateway;
- **Mid Kent:** garden-community developments and rural expansion around Ashford, Maidstone and Tonbridge;
- **East Kent:** coastal renewal and affordable housing tied to regeneration in Dover, Thanet and Canterbury;
- **West Kent:** smaller, sustainable schemes reflecting rural and commuter housing needs.

Each authority will produce a single Local Plan combining planning, housing supply and infrastructure delivery, develop stronger partnerships with Homes England and private developers through larger, financially sustainable councils with the aim of securing long-term infrastructure



funding (e.g. Housing Infrastructure Fund, Levelling Up Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund) tied to housing delivery.

### **Case Study: Medway Council and the Peel Group Ltd Chatham Waters Development**

The Chatham Waters scheme is a partnership between Medway Council and Peel Group. It provides a strong example of strategic brown-field waterfront regeneration, where public and private sectors align around a vision of mixed-use, jobs, homes and public realm. The council provided the enabling policy, infrastructure and planning framework; Peel group brought the necessary investment, development expertise and implementation. The significant benefits to date include jobs, homes, activated waterfront, and the scheme's phased, long-term nature points to sustained impact. Key success factors include clear shared objectives, local benefit orientation, integrated planning, and developer commitment.

The partnership exemplifies the kind of public-private collaboration the 4D model seeks to embed across Kent. It demonstrates how a single, locally accountable authority can align planning, infrastructure and regeneration policy with private investment to deliver lasting local benefits.

There are significant **place based opportunities for housing provision and tackling homelessness**. The 4D model creates four councils that align with Kent's functional housing markets, economic corridors, and social geographies. Each area faces distinct housing pressures ranging from urban regeneration and coastal deprivation to rural affordability and the model allows targeted local strategies within a coherent county-wide framework including:

#### **North Kent**

The housing market is dominated by brownfield regeneration, high demand, and pockets of acute deprivation. Homelessness rates and temporary accommodation use are among the highest in the county. Opportunities include:

- Integrated regeneration and housing strategy along the Thames Gateway, aligning Medway's waterfront developments with growth in Ebbsfleet, Gravesend and Sittingbourne.
- Expansion of affordable and mixed-tenure housing within major brownfield regeneration sites, embedding supported and extra-care housing within new communities.
- Coordinated homelessness prevention network linking housing, social care, and voluntary sector partners.
- Rapid rehousing pathways for rough sleepers and families in temporary accommodation, supported by joint commissioning with health and mental-health services.
- Active partnership with Homes England and private developers to accelerate delivery of sustainable homes linked to the Lower Thames Crossing and HS1 corridor.
- Innovation in modular and move-on housing, repurposing vacant commercial units for emergency or transitional accommodation.

#### **East Kent**

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The area faces long-term housing quality issues and a high proportion of residents in private rented and temporary accommodation. Opportunities include:

- Coastal housing renewal and regeneration programme, improving poor-quality private rented housing and converting empty homes.
- Affordable coastal housing initiative, partnering with housing associations to deliver energy-efficient homes that reduce fuel poverty.
- Integrated homelessness and health model, linking outreach, GP services, and mental health support for rough sleepers and vulnerable families.
- Targeted prevention approach to address eviction and tenancy loss in coastal private rentals through early-warning systems.
- Specialist supported accommodation for care leavers, ex-offenders, and people with complex needs, located close to employment and transport links.
- Place-based partnerships with universities and FE colleges to support young people and reduce hidden homelessness.

### Mid Kent

The area combines expanding market towns and rural villages with strong transport corridors (M20, HS1) and significant new housing growth areas. Opportunities include:

- Integrated planning and housing growth strategy linking Local Plans to major infrastructure and garden-community developments (e.g. Heathlands, Chilmington Green).
- Housing-with-care schemes to meet the needs of older and disabled residents, delivered through joint commissioning with adult social care.
- Early intervention and homelessness prevention services embedded in family and community hubs.
- Expansion of affordable housing supply through joint ventures with developers and community land trusts in rural areas.
- Creation of “Smart Growth” hubs – digital housing and energy efficiency programmes supporting net-zero goals and cost-of-living resilience.
- Temporary accommodation and resettlement partnerships across Mid and East Kent to manage demand and maintain quality standards.

### West Kent

The area has some of the highest housing costs in the county and limited affordable provision. Hidden homelessness, sofa-surfing and rural isolation are common. Opportunities include:

- Affordable rural housing programme delivered through parish and community partnerships, enabling small-scale, sustainable developments.

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- Shared-ownership and key-worker housing initiatives supporting the local workforce in education, health and emergency services.
- Rural homelessness prevention service, focusing on early advice, tenancy sustainment and community-based mediation.
- Supported housing for vulnerable young people and families, co-located with training and employment support.
- Use of public land and small brownfield sites to create locally-led affordable homes while protecting the rural environment.
- Low-carbon retrofit and housing decarbonisation programme, tackling fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency in older housing stock.

Each council will have **direct democratic accountability** for housing, planning and homelessness, replacing the fragmented responsibilities of the current system. This improves transparency and public engagement by enabling community involvement in Local Plan consultation, neighbourhood planning, and housing design, embedding neighbourhood representation through area committees and parish partnerships, empowering local councillors to influence planning, housing design and regeneration priorities, and supporting co-production with people who have lived experience of homelessness or care needs.

### Case Study: Rochester Riverside

Rochester Riverside is Medway Council's flagship regeneration project, transforming a 32-hectare brownfield site between Rochester Station and the River Medway into a vibrant, mixed-use community. Developed in partnership with Homes England, Countryside Properties (now Vistry), and Hyde Housing, the scheme reconnects the historic town centre with the waterfront.

Partnership working between the Council, Network Rail and partners enabled the station to be moved to the centre of the town. This improved accessibility, facilitated longer trains supporting HS1 and allowed 36 minute journeys into St Pancras. The scheme aims to provide 1,400 homes, including 25% affordable housing, 2.5km of river walk, a new school, significant public realm improvements and the provision of an extra care housing scheme for older people, Bellerophon House (see below). Rochester Riverside delivers a genuinely mixed-use development that provides 108,000sq ft of commercial space including shops, hotels and cafés.

Bellerophon House is in Doust Way, Rochester and has 41 spacious apartments available for rent. The house is designed for residents to live in complete comfort and apartments are self-contained with a full wet room, fitted kitchen and large lounge. Residents also have access to a care team that are on site 24 hours a day to provide care (as part of a planned package of care) and respond to emergencies.

LGR and the proposed 4d model will provide a mechanism for more of these important partnership housing projects to be realised across Kent improving outcomes across communities and intrinsically linking health, social care, housing and regeneration.

## Transport and highways system function

### Overview of current transport and highways delivery

The transport and highways system function encompasses a broad range of activities from strategic transport planning and policy development to the delivery of highways programmes, planned and reactive maintenance and network management including coordination with utility works.

Highways services in Kent and Medway are managed by three primary authorities: National Highways, Kent County Council, and Medway Council.

Each holds distinct responsibilities for different parts of the road network, ensuring comprehensive coverage across the region.

While these three are the designated highway authorities, district councils also play a vital supporting role, acting as key intermediaries and advisors in local highway-related matters and securing developer financial contributions.

- **Department for Transport:** defines national policy for transport planning and systems including public transport and highways. This includes its vision for the future of the English strategic road network and a Roads Investment Strategy.
- **National Highways:** manages and improves the strategic road network including motorways and major A-roads (trunk roads) within Kent and Medway.
- **Kent County Council (KCC):** is the transport planning authority for Kent and the highway authority for the majority of Kent, overseeing the production of transport and infrastructure strategy and the management, maintenance and improvement of local roads, pavements, cycleways and associated infrastructure.
- **Medway Council:** as a unitary authority, it is the transport planning and highway authority for all local roads and highways within its specific Medway unitary boundary.
- **District councils:** provide crucial local input and advice on planning applications impacting transport and highways. While Kent County Council (KCC) acts as a statutory consultee on planning applications, providing advice, identifying conditions, and managing Section 278 agreements, district councils also act as public liaisons for community concerns and manage local amenities.

Examples of collaboration include district council engagement with KCC and National Highways to bring forward local improvements on the strategic network.

#### ***Case study - Ebbsfleet Garden City***

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation EDC was announced in 2015 to facilitate the delivery of up to 15,000 homes and create a 21st-century Garden City in Ebbsfleet, north Kent.

The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation is the planning authority for development management.

However, Dartford Borough 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.

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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

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maintenance backlog, exacerbated by rising material costs and climate impacts, continues to challenge network resilience.

- **Operational, workforce and coordination challenges:** persistent workforce shortages and skills gaps across engineering, planning and operational roles affect both authorities. Coordination with utility companies and developers for roadworks and infrastructure upgrades remains complex and disruptive, often prolonging project delivery times and reducing public satisfaction.
- **Governance, geography and strategic balance:** Medway Council, as a unitary authority, has direct responsibility for all local transport functions within a dense urban area, requiring a fine balance between supporting growth and improving sustainable transport options. Kent County Council, overseeing a much larger and more rural network, faces distinct challenges in ensuring equitable access and consistent service standards across varied geographies.

### Future transport and highways delivery and opportunities through LGR

Future delivery of transport and highways services relies on ongoing collaboration and a strategic approach to deliver for the people of Kent.

In the future we are committed to:

- **Integrated strategic planning:** significantly streamlining the current 12 Local Plans, this approach fosters a more cohesive and joined-up strategic planning framework across the area, particularly for transport and highways infrastructure, with improved integration of land planning and transport planning.
- **Equitable influence:** the creation of evenly-sized unitary authorities ensures each entity possesses a balanced voice, enabling effective influence over strategic decision-making for the entire transport network.
- **Service harmonisation:** standardising service provision and associated fees and charges across the entire area will simplify processes and enhance consistency for residents across all transport-related services.
- **Balanced local governance:** this model establishes unitary authorities that are sufficiently large for strategic decision-making yet remain agile enough to deeply understand and respond to local impacts and needs across the transport system.
- **Enabling devolution:** this option directly supports the ambition for establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority, facilitating greater local control and accountability over transport and highways.
- **Innovative service delivery:** exploring and implementing shared service models and pioneering approaches to enhance organisational resilience and service effectiveness which can support future devolution plans.
- **Optimised commissioning:** implementing a strategic, integrated commissioning approach where appropriate, to effectively shape and influence the market, driving better outcomes and value.
- **Resilience:** if there is poor delivery in one unitary authority, the delivery in the remaining unitary authorities is unaffected.

### Opportunities for Highways delivery under Option 4D

As outlined, devolution will be a key enabler for accelerating our ambition in relation to strategic and joined up highways delivery.



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The 4D model offers a clear opportunity to create a modern, integrated and locally responsive highways service, by unifying strategic transport, local highways maintenance and planning functions within four balanced councils. This removes the split between county and district responsibilities, improving efficiency, accountability, and connectivity across Kent and Medway's strategic corridors

Across the majority of Kent, Kent County Council manages highways and transport strategy while district councils handle parking, planning, and environmental management. Like in Medway, under the 4D model, these functions will be consolidated within each council, creating a single, end-to-end highways and transport service. This presents several opportunities including integrated planning and delivery such as aligning highway maintenance, street works, and transport planning with housing and economic development, and unified and improved planning and coordination of works.

Each new council will have the necessary scale to manage a modern highway network while remaining close to community needs. Local priorities such as rural access in West Kent or coastal resilience in East Kent can be embedded in annual maintenance and investment programmes.

The 4D model aligns directly with Kent's major transport corridors (M2/A2, M20/A20, A21, HS1 and coastal routes), supporting more joined-up infrastructure planning. Each authority can lead on corridor-based investment while coordinating through the future Combined County Authority (CCA), ensuring that investment decisions reflect both local priorities and regional economic impact for example:

- **North Kent** – can focus on Thames Gateway connectivity, the Lower Thames Crossing, and A2/M2 resilience.
- **Mid Kent** – lead on M20/HS1 corridor planning, freight management, and rural junction improvements.
- **East Kent** – prioritise A256/A299 upgrades and coastal route resilience for port access.
- **West Kent** – focus on A21 corridor safety, rural access, and integration with commuter rail services.

The 4D model strengthens engagement with National Highways, Network Rail, Transport for the South East (TfSE) and Homes England through a clear four-authority structure. Each council can secure direct devolved transport funding under a future CCA, reducing dependence on central bidding cycles this will also lead to greater opportunities to align infrastructure and housing delivery, making a stronger case for government and developer contributions, and provides scope to develop regional design standards and share specialist engineering expertise across Kent and Medway.

This partnership approach positions Kent for greater influence in regional transport and investment programmes.

The 4D model allows each council to manage its own highways and transport network within a coherent county-wide system, strengthening local responsiveness while ensuring strategic coordination across Kent's major economic and transport corridors, for example:

**North Kent** - contains key international gateways, including the Port of Sheerness, and is directly impacted by the Lower Thames Crossing and M2/A2 corridors with opportunities to coordinate and

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lead on local access, traffic management, and mitigation schemes, active travel schemes and freight management.

**East Kent** - the coastal areas have high visitor traffic, strategic ports (Dover and Ramsgate), and constrained transport access. There are opportunities to have unified leadership for the East Kent coastal route, coordinated coastal resilience and flood-adaptation schemes as well as targeted visitor and tourism infrastructure.

**Mid Kent** - this area forms Kent's east–west transport spine, hosting the M20, A20 and HS1 corridors and key freight and logistics hubs. There are opportunities linked to improved rural road maintenance, the expansion of rural bus routes to support model shift, and leading the management of the M20 and HS1 transport corridor.

**West Kent** - this area has significant cross-boundary travel to London and strong environmental constraints. There are opportunities around rural accessibility and demand responsive transport, sustainable commuting, and strategic management and investment in the A21 and A26 corridor.

## Waste services

### Overview of current waste delivery

As a unitary authority, Medway Council is the Waste Collection Authority (WCA) and Waste Disposal Authority (WDA). Contracts are in place with Medway Norse, Countrystyle and Veolia with lengthy terms up to 2040.

Waste arises in Medway of 117kt per annum of which 38% is recycled, reused or composted

Kent County Council acts as the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), contracting with third parties like FCC and CSKL until 2030 to manage waste disposal infrastructure.

This includes Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), Waste Transfer Stations (WTS), Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) and Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities at Allington.

The 12 district councils serve as Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs), collecting household waste and delivering it to KCC-managed disposal outlets.

Waste arises in Kent of 650kt per annum of which 42.1% recycled, reused or composted

Kent and the districts work closely through partnerships including Mid Kent Partnership, South West Kent partnerships and the Kent Waste Partnership.

### ***Case study – Kent Waste Partnership***

The Kent Resource Partnership brings together staff from Kent County Council and the 12 district councils.

Together, they manage waste collection and disposal, street cleaning and enforcement services across the region.

A dedicated strategic lead guides all partnership activities including how they are run, how they communicate, and what projects they work on.

The lead also builds relationships with other groups and looks for new opportunities and funding.

The Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, developed through the partnership provides the framework for collaborative delivery with a strong focus on developing and delivering services to be efficient, effective and sustainable while navigating significant change in waste policy.

All partners contribute money each year to cover staff costs, for the lead and an analyst, and to pay for agreed projects.

A recent campaign to recycle food waste increased the average amount collected and recycled across seven areas by 20%.

**This collaborative approach and shared strategy have been crucial in driving alignment, maintaining a shared focus and ultimately achieving positive outcomes.**

### Key waste delivery challenges

- **Aging infrastructure:** maintaining and upgrading existing waste management infrastructure to ensure continued operational efficiency and reliability.
- **Infrastructure capacity:** strategic planning and investment are required to meet future infrastructure demands, particularly in response to significant housing growth.
- **Divergent delivery approaches and policies:** inconsistencies in collection methodologies and varying resident expectations across different areas hinder the establishment of a unified and efficient waste management system.
- **Waste and collection strategy misalignment:** the two-tier delivery structure often leads to a disconnect between waste strategies and budgetary allocations, potentially resulting in isolated decision-making and collection approaches that do not adequately consider disposal costs.
- **Limited funding transparency:** a lack of clear information regarding the flow of funding from central government to local waste services.
- **Complex contractual landscape:** the presence of multiple long-term contracts across Kent, including one currently under dispute, complicates operational management and strategic planning.
- **Public engagement and behaviour change:** challenges in encouraging effective resident participation in recycling schemes, waste reduction and sustainable waste practices including addressing contamination issues.
- **Regulatory compliance and evolving legislation:** the ongoing demand to adapt to and comply with changes in national and international waste management regulations, environmental standards and targets.
- **Workforce recruitment and retention:** difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled personnel across all levels of waste management operations.
- **Technological adoption and innovation:** the complexities and costs associated with integrating new technologies for waste sorting, treatment, energy recovery and data management.
- **Illegal dumping and fly tipping:** addressing the persistent issue of illegal waste disposal and its associated costs and environmental consequences.

### Future waste delivery and opportunities through LGR

In the future we are committed to:

- **Learning from success:** we will take what has worked well across Kent, like our Waste Liaison Officers, and build on those successes to make things even better.
- **Working together:** we will strengthen our relationships across Kent, adapting our partnerships as needed to deliver on our regional waste plans.

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- **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**

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Canterbury Council established a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) called Canterbury Environment Company (Canenco) to take over household waste collection services from a commercial contractor.

This decision was made after an options appraisal due to dissatisfaction with the previous service.

Canenco's board consists of three council officers and a managing director with extensive waste management experience was recruited.

Staff from the former contractor were transferred to Canenco and the council bought the necessary vehicles.

The council maintains oversight of the client function and waste collection strategy.

This change has resulted in a more responsive company for waste collection and street cleansing.

The council and Canenco teams work closely, leading to efforts to reduce contamination in dry recycling bins.

**Following the successful transfer of waste collection and street cleansing in February 2021, grounds maintenance services were transferred in December 2021 and public toilet cleansing and maintenance in June 2024.**

### Opportunities for Waste delivery under Option 4D

The 4D proposal creates a single-tier structure in which each of the four new Unitary Authorities - North Kent, East Kent, Mid Kent and West Kent - will take full responsibility for waste collection, disposal, recycling, and environmental services within their boundaries. This integration ends the fragmentation between district waste collection and county waste disposal, allowing joined-up planning, consistent service standards, and better environmental outcomes across Kent and Medway.

- **Integrated working** - integrated budgeting enables single-stream decision-making on vehicle fleets, treatment contracts and recycling infrastructure, improving value for money. Based on the proven efficiency of Medway's existing single-tier service, this model is expected to generate savings on contract and operational costs through shared procurement, joint depot use, and harmonised service standards.
- **Environmental standards** - each council will be responsible for achieving local net-zero and waste-reduction targets aligned to Kent's county-wide climate strategy. Harmonised policies across the four councils will support consistent recycling collections, contamination controls, and food-waste treatment, making services simpler for residents and more cost-effective for contractors. Shared data systems across the four councils will enable transparent reporting of waste performance and carbon reduction.
- **Customer experience** - residents will have a single point of contact for all waste, street cleansing and recycling queries, improving customer satisfaction and responsiveness. There are also opportunities to run hyper local campaigns that can drive behaviour change and increase recycling participation. Local control allows each unitary to design services reflecting their nuanced geographies, for example:
  - North Kent: urban waste optimisation and riverside recycling logistics.

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- East Kent: coastal litter management and tourism-related waste strategies.
- Mid Kent: rural route rationalisation and community composting.
- West Kent: green-waste and recycling services tailored to rural and commuter communities.
- **Partnerships and investment** - the 4D proposal will enhance partnership working with Kent Resource Partnership (KRP), DEFRA, and private-sector waste operators through simplified governance. Each council will be able to lead or co-invest in regional waste infrastructure, such as materials recovery facilities, transfer stations and low-carbon fleet depots. Joint procurement across the four authorities will attract stronger bids, secure economies of scale, and stimulate innovation in waste technology. Collaboration with universities and FE colleges (e.g. Medway's Institute of Sustainable Futures, Canterbury Christ Church University) will support research into waste reduction, recycling behaviour and green skills.
- **Social value** - integrated contracts will include local employment, apprenticeships, and reuse initiatives, replicating Medway's successful social-value approach in highways and waste. Each authority can partner with local voluntary organisations and social enterprises to expand reuse, repair and community recycling centres. The 4D model creates opportunities to link waste policy with climate, housing and transport planning, enabling low-carbon logistics and circular-economy clusters along major corridors such as the Thames Gateway and M20.



## Public service reform

**Criteria 3b.** Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money

**At the core of any successful public service organisation is the desire to do the best for those who need those services most. Kent, as an area, starts from a high base but there is an obvious desire to push further and faster for the citizens of Kent. LGR provides the platform to meet the moment and drive for fundamental change. There is a clear desire to be ambitious and to change public services. There is an underpinning set of shared principles focused around shifting the system to a preventative model. Public services cannot just keep meeting demand. They must move from being responsive to being proactive. LGR can be a catalyst to this change. Kent will drive the reform of public services, ensuring they are rooted in their communities with outcomes at the centre of decision making.**

### What is public service reform (PSR) and why is it needed?

Public service reform will be the core to the transformation of any new configuration of local government in Kent.

LGR offers an opportunity to rethink how people and communities are supported, moving from a fragmented, reactive system to one that is proactive, integrated and designed around the needs and strengths of Kent's residents.

There will be the opportunity to root this in reform of public services in the community and people of Kent.

Public service reform will seek to change the way public service professionals work together and ensure residents feel the positive benefits of that work, fundamentally changing the way services are configured and delivered.

Too often services are organised around institutional and professional boundaries rather than people.

In the latest Spending Review, the government outlined three principles to its approach to PSR:

- to integrate services so they are organised around people's lives;
- to improve long-term outcomes for people through a focus on prevention, relying less on expensive crisis management; and
- to devolve power to local areas that understand the needs of their communities best, with services that are designed with and for people, in partnership with civil society and the impact economy.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring together services and improve outcomes.

A move from a demand-led model to a preventative model will allow for greater focus on outcomes and using precious resources in a more effective way.

### Demand and prevention

Nationally and across Kent, public services face growing pressures.

The system is struggling to meet the demand for key services that are vital to the health and wellbeing of the community.

Services, such as adult social care and children's social care, are being stretched to breaking point. The system is broken for those who need it most.

### **Cuts to non-statutory services**

Failure to see the connection between prevention and demand, and to join the dots across the silos between service providers, means statutory services are protected from deep root-and-branch transformation.

This leads to cuts in non-statutory services which are often preventative services.

Cutting preventative services only increases demand in the more expensive acute part of the system, resulting in increased costs and increased pressure on statutory services.

### **The 'front door' and thresholds**

At the 'front door' of these statutory services, more and more expensive specialist staff are being deployed to triage and assess.

This means that these specialist staff are using their time on assessment rather than treatment.

Furthermore, given the cuts to services, and their lower capacity to deal with demand, eligibility thresholds for support are rising further, leading to gatekeeping and meaning help is only available at the point of crisis.

As a result, the most pressing demand - those in crisis - continues to grow, creating a cycle where services intervene too late and at greater cost.

### **Assessments and siloes**

Given this increase in pressure, services often refer cases on to one another in attempt to control in-service demand and residents are frequently required to repeat their stories to multiple agencies, undergoing assessment after assessment.

Services have slipped into an 'assessment mindset' where practitioners and leaders have been siloed into their respective organisations.

This not only causes frustration but also erodes public trust and confidence in local services.

### **Outcomes**

These mounting pressures are leading to poorer outcomes for residents.

The danger is this provides a negative loop where demand keeps growing and preventative services cannot be prioritised as resources are used to address the immediate challenge.

### **Fiscal control**

## **Fiscal control**

At the same time as outcomes are declining and there is less preventative focus, public service leaders, trying to counteract growing financial risks, are increasingly reliant on salami slicing - incremental cuts to service budgets.

These cuts are a way to demonstrate better financial control but ultimately mean that services fail to address underlying demand and associated costs.

## **The urgency of now**

The continued cutting of services will not resolve these challenges.

As crisis response consumes a larger share of resources, the underlying problems persist and intensify.

The system becomes reactive rather than proactive, focusing on managing emergencies rather than preventing them.

This approach is unsustainable, both financially and in terms of outcomes for residents.

A focus on prevention and early intervention needs to be prioritised before services hit breaking point. Now is the time to act.

Public services in Kent need to be fit for purpose and fit for the future.

Public service sustainability cannot be addressed without PSR.

Without reform, councils will be forced to make ever deeper cuts, further reducing the quality and accessibility of services and undermining the support available in communities.

LGR offers an opportunity to embrace change and deliver a different form of support that will serve communities in a way that works for them.

## **PSR: a new approach**

Kent leaders are fully aware of the need to act and are ambitious to embrace PSR.

On 17th September 2025, leaders and chief executives from county, unitary, and district councils came together to outline and agree the opportunities presented by the LGR process. PSR was a central theme of the day, with stakeholders discussing and agreeing a vision for the region.

To achieve these ambitions for Kent and to break this cycle of growing costs and poor resident outcomes, the focus must shift to public services being more community based and preventative. This means focussing on outcomes, managing demand more effectively, and supporting people before their needs escalate.

Through the discussions between Leaders and Chief Executive, five PSR principles have been defined.

- 1 Community first
- 2 Outcomes focussed

- 3 Prevention and early intervention
- 4 Collaborative partnership working

<p><b>Community first</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• By working closely with residents and local groups, services can better understand what matters most and tailor their offer accordingly.</li> <li>• Residents should feel that their voice is being listened to, and the subsequent service design reflects their input.</li> <li>• Services should be reshaped to reflect the needs of local people in flexible, community-focused provision.</li> <li>• By designing support around the lived experience of residents, Kent can deliver more effective, efficient, and equitable outcomes.</li> <li>• Leadership at all levels should mirror the diversity of Kent’s communities, ensuring that a broad range of voices and experiences shape decision-making.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcomes focussed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An outcomes focussed approach should drive the reform of public services.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• A relational approach should be applied, where public servants focus a person, rather than just dispensing the services of their organisation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Prevention and early intervention</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Collaborative partnership working</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LGR presents a unique opportunity to reset and strengthen relationships across the public sector in Kent.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• While there are excellent examples of joint working, these are often isolated and not yet embedded as the norm across the system.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

<b>Digital mindset</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li><li>• 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.</li><li>• 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.</li></ul>
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### **Case study – development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams**

In eastern Kent, the health and care partnership is working with four Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) as Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) early adopter sites.

They are looking at tools to identify those most at risk of needing social care or who are likely to experience worsening health outcomes.

This is known as risk stratification and will help identify those people who will benefit from remote monitoring and early identification of deterioration to provide additional support.

This is a formal programme working alongside John Hopkins University and will be invaluable in informing how INTs develop across the county of Kent.

This integrated approach is emerging across western Kent too as they prepare for INTs. This includes examples such as, but is not limited to:

- the core frailty team with shared case management and shared system use working well in Tonbridge PCN area.
- a mental health multi-disciplinary team dealing with complex mental health needs working well in Weald.
- Maidstone PCNs have worked together on a joint service provided by the VCS for people with complex mental health-related needs across all their PCNs.
- the Sevenoaks area has established a health and wellbeing huddle approach to link in with the core primary care networks/Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.

The development in INTs with health, social care, the VCS and other key organisations working together are a foundation of good practice to build off when adopting the PSR principle of partnership working.

### **Enablers of PSR**

To realise the full potential of PSR, partners must work together to embrace its core tenets.

This means moving beyond organisational boundaries and focusing collectively on the needs of the person.

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It requires a cultural shift. One where engagement is purposeful, open and rooted in a shared ambition for Kent as a whole.

Several enablers are critical to making this collaborative approach a reality:

- 1 **More permeable boundaries between partners and services:** services must become more open and flexible, allowing for the free flow of information, resources and expertise. When one partner's actions benefit another's budget or outcomes, this should be recognised and the benefit shared.
- 2 **Shared benefits and budgets:** a move towards shared benefits naturally lends itself to the possibility of shared budgets. By pooling resources, partners can take a joined-up approach to tackling key issues, ensuring investment is targeted where it will have the greatest impact.
- 3 **Co-location of services:** Bringing services and organisations together physically - whether in community hubs, shared offices, or integrated teams - can drive a more joined-up way of working, break down silos and make it easier for residents to access the support they need.
- 4 **Inclusive partnership:** No partner should be left out of this process. Every organisation, whether statutory, voluntary or community-based, must feel a sense of purpose and importance in helping the people of Kent. Organisations should embody a shared learning culture, recognising that they have something to learn from someone else round the table.

Achieving this vision will require organisations to work together differently.

It means moving away from transactional relationships and towards a model where partners are engaged as equals, united by a common purpose.

It means recognising the challenges facing communities cannot be solved by any one organisation alone.

### The next steps for PSR:

There is broad agreement among Kent Leaders they want to:

- **Refresh working arrangements between organisations:** updating governance structures and shared forums between Chief Executives to enable more effective joint working. This will result in better alignment and a collective approach to PSR.
- **Establish shared learning culture:** councils and partners actively sharing key learning, where best practice is actively sought and embedded.
- **Purposeful and reassuring staff communication:** ambition for reform must be communicated clearly and confidently to staff, providing reassurance about their future and a sense of shared purpose.
- **Prepare for a seamless transition:** LGR should a seamless handover between services with support that feels joined up and easy to navigate. Residents should feel well informed about the changes from LGR, what to expect and the positive impacts that will be driven.
- **More voices are required and welcomed.** There is also an ambition to engage with voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to understand excellent practice that drives resident outcomes currently. To achieve more community-centred, outcome focused service delivery, collaborating with the VCSE, who are at the heart of communities and places, will be pivotal.



### **Case Study – Dover SmART project**

Dover SmART Project is a charity founded in 2013 to support disadvantaged children, especially young carers, through creative activities to improve their wellbeing and boost their confidence.

It runs creative groups to boost children's aspirations and as a safe space away from other responsibilities.

The charity has evolved to support other age groups now, such as supporting older people who may be isolated in the community or have conditions like dementia.

Dover SmART project is funded by a variety of fundraising efforts including the private sector and the district council.

In 2025, the Dover SmART Project was named a winner at the Kent Mental Health Wellbeing Awards.

The SmART project demonstrates the impact the VCS can have on the community.

**There is an opportunity for voluntary and community sector projects to use their expertise and knowledge to support statutory services in supporting vulnerable people, acting as partners where there are opportunities for a holistic approach.**

### **PSR under Option 4D**

Option 4D creates the optimum framework to deliver that ambition by unifying governance, integrating services, and embedding the five PSR principles agreed by Leaders on 17 September 2025. Under Option 4D, each council will be large enough to deliver efficiently yet close enough to communities to understand local priorities, through:

- Neighbourhood-based service design: local hubs combining housing, health, social care, employment and advice services.
- Stronger community engagement: residents directly shaping priorities through area committees and digital participation platforms.
- Cultural alignment: leadership structures reflecting the diversity and identity of local communities.

These three activities will help deliver value-for-money through early engagement and co-production reducing duplication, targeting resources more accurately, and improving overall resident satisfaction, for example, in health and social care evidence nationally shows that early-intervention programmes yield savings of £2–£4 for every £1 invested through reduced acute demand and better targeted support.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> [Investing in preventative support can save more than £3 for every pound spent](#)

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

This section includes:

**Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design**

**Criteria 4a and 4c**

**Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance**

**Criteria 4b**

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## Incorporating public and stakeholder engagement in model design

**Criteria 4a.** It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.

**Criteria 4c.** Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

### **Overview of the approach taken to engage the community and stakeholders:**

Kent's approach to LGR has been firmly rooted in the principles of transparency, inclusion and shared ownership.

Kent's 14 councils have worked together to formulate a set of joint proposals and have a coordinated, county-wide programme of public and stakeholder engagement.

We ran a resident survey in September and October 2025, have met with key partners and have engaged with communities through our usual engagement routes to ensure the voices of local people and organisations are central to business case development.

Reflecting local identity and fostering a shared vision across the county requires meaningful engagement with residents, businesses and key stakeholder groups at every stage of the process.

This engagement activity aligns with the political commitment across Kent to meaningfully involve communities in shaping their future governance while exceeding what is required under MHCLG guidance.

While MHCLG has not prescribed the extent of engagement, Kent's Leaders chose to pursue a proactive and inclusive approach.

The process has been informed by best practice from previous LGR areas, advice from the cross-Kent communications group and feedback from council Chiefs Executives and Leaders.

We gathered the views of more than 2,000 stakeholders to understand reflections, including:

- Kent residents
- businesses
- community groups
- councillors and officers
- Members of Parliament
- strategic partners across housing, health, emergency services, social care and safeguarding, education and skills, economic development, government, public sector and volunteering

### **Overview of engagement activities:**

- A) Standardised resident survey
- B) Stakeholder engagement programme

The feedback from the public survey and stakeholder engagement has been analysed by the Canterbury City Council Policy and Communications team, which led the communications and engagement workstream. The findings are reflected below and throughout this proposal.

A) Standardised resident survey

A standardised resident survey, agreed across all Kent councils, was launched during the engagement period.

This consistency ensures data comparability across districts and enables the creation of both Kent-wide and locally-specific insights.

The survey aimed to capture residents' views on their local identity, service expectations and priorities for the future shape of local government.

These insights have informed the business cases and local decision-making processes within each council.

The survey received 2,107 responses, which includes written responses and survey responses.

B) Stakeholder engagement programme

In addition, a joint stakeholder engagement programme has been developed, via a coordinated letter sent on behalf of all Kent councils to a wide-ranging list of county-level stakeholders.

Each council has also engaged with its own networks including parish and town councils, voluntary and community organisations, businesses and sector-specific partnerships.

Councils were encouraged to host meetings and discussions to ensure stakeholders could explore the implications of different governance models and offer their perspectives on how local identity and service delivery can be best preserved and enhanced.

Across all Kent councils, priority strategic partners\* have been engaged in dedicated workshops to understand key reflections, including:

- challenges that can be addressed through reorganisation
- opportunities to be realised through reorganisation
- issues that may arise through reorganisation that need to be mitigated

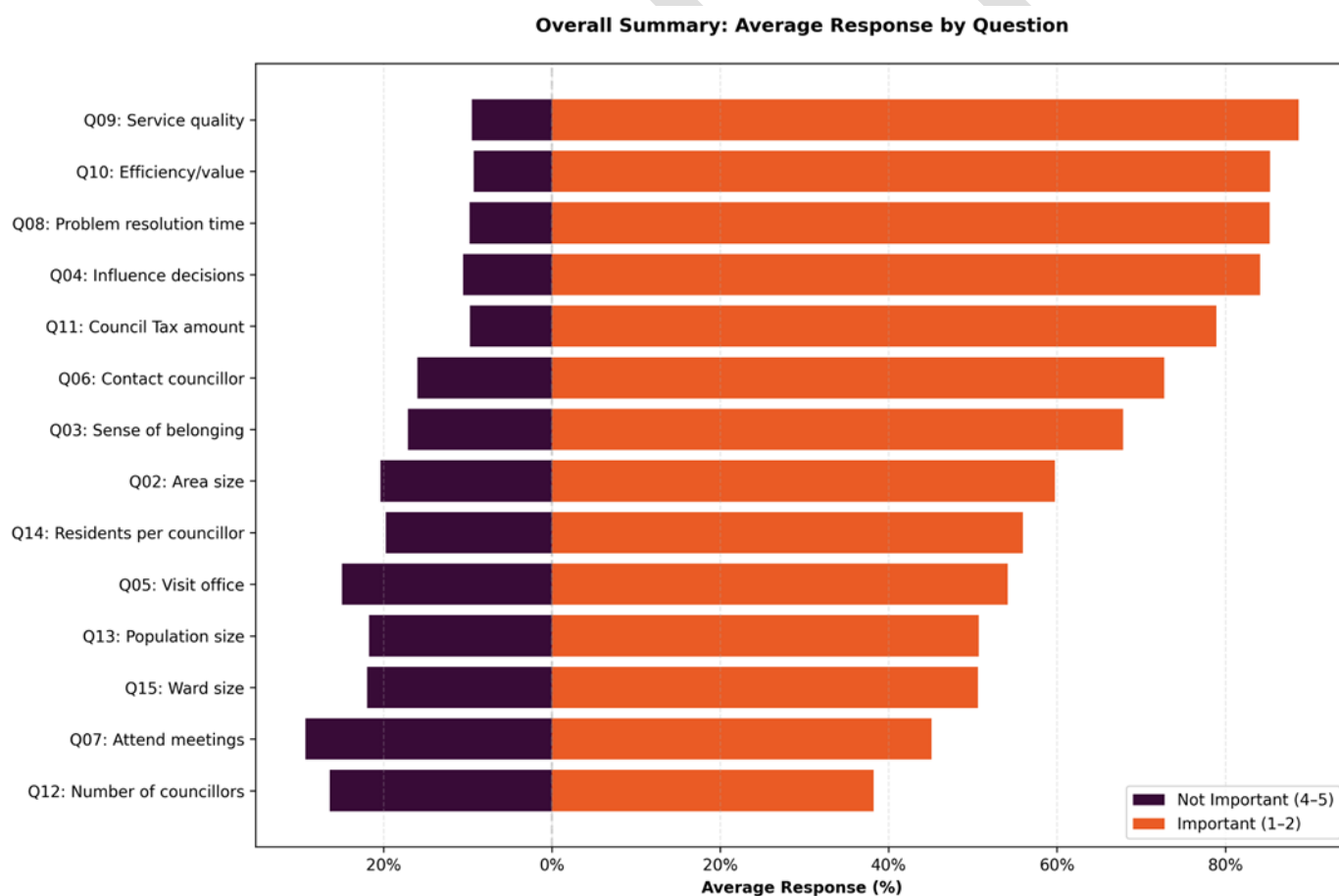
**Table 29: \*Priority key strategic partners:**

<b>Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB)</li> <li>• Kent Integrated Care Alliance</li> <li>• NHS Provider Trusts                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust</li> <li>○ Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust</li> <li>○ Medway NHS Foundation Trust</li> <li>○ Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust</li> <li>○ Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Emergency services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kent Police</li> <li>• Kent Police and Crime Commissioner</li> <li>• South East Coast Ambulance Service</li> </ul>
<b>Social care and safeguarding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairs of Safeguarding Boards – Adults and Children’s</li> <li>• Chairs of any Partnership Board</li> <li>• Chair of Kent and Medway Resilience Forum</li> </ul>

<b>Education and skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Kent</li> <li>• Canterbury Christ Church University</li> <li>• University of Greenwich</li> <li>• University for the Creative Arts</li> <li>• FE colleges</li> </ul>
<b>Economic development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Federation of Small Businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Government and Public Sector Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)</li> <li>• National Highways</li> <li>• Port health authorities</li> <li>• Housing associations</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VCSE sector representation</li> </ul>

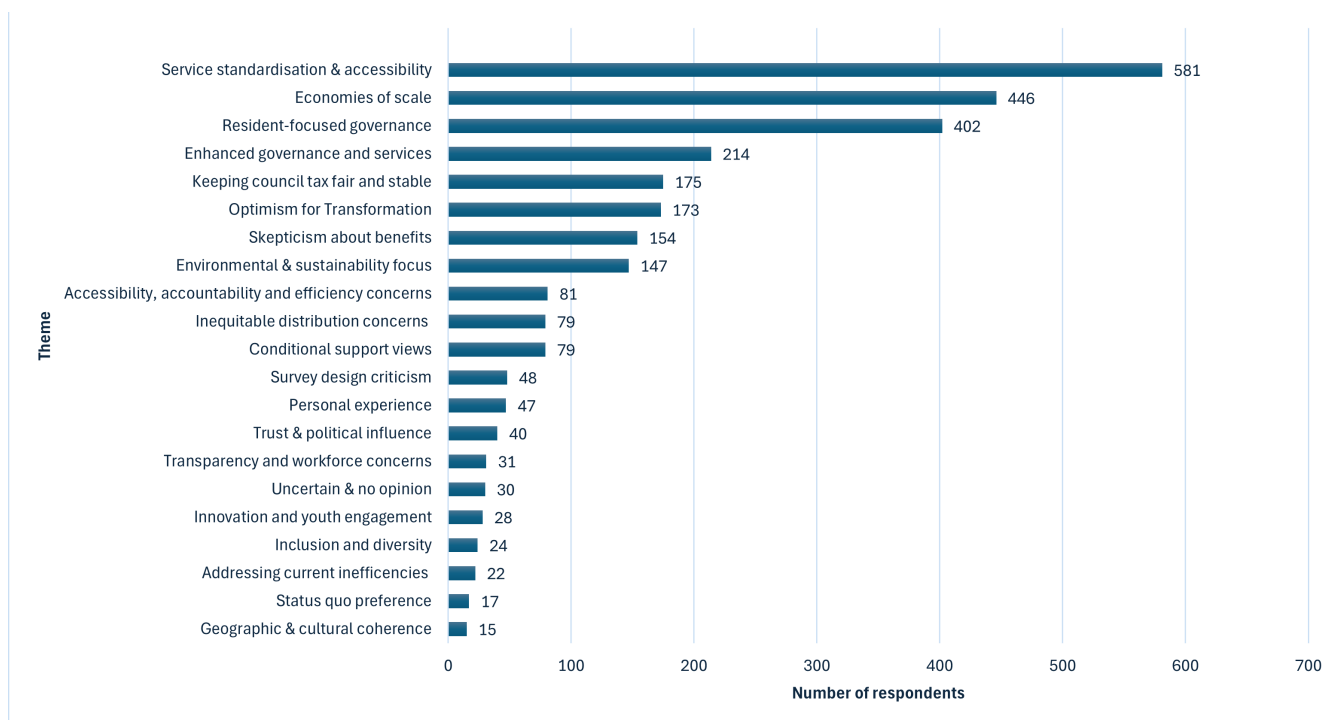
### The perspective of Kent residents

Figure 18: What Kent residents value most about their local council:



Overall, the highest-rated aspects were service quality, efficiency and value, problem resolution time, decision-making influence and council tax amount.

**Figure 19: Opportunities identified by Kent residents from local government reorganisation:**



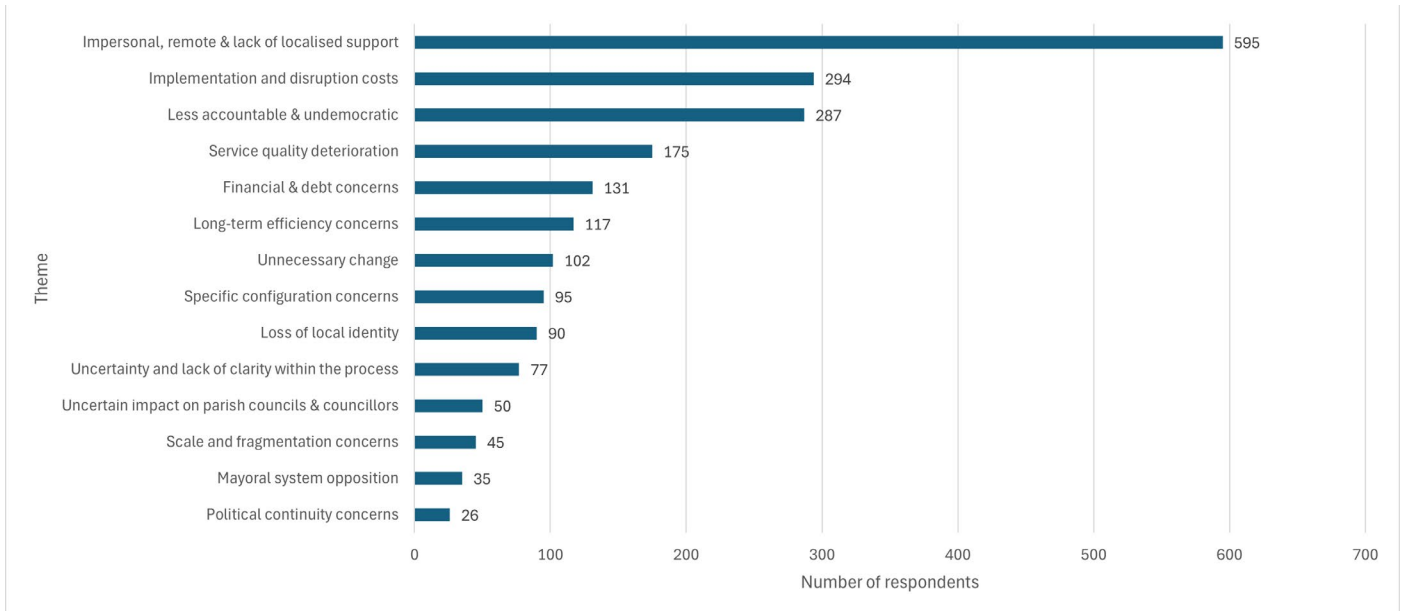
Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Participants identified economies of scale as another key opportunity of reorganisation, seeing it as a means to streamline operations, reduce bureaucracy and deliver better value and a fairer balance of power across areas.

*“This is a generational opportunity, use it wisely or it will slip away like the last one... this is a chance to make a council work in new and innovative ways delivering services fit for 2025 not 1980.” – Kent resident*

**Figure 20: Kent residents’ concerns about local government reorganisation:**





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

Participants questioned whether the promised efficiencies would outweigh the significant costs of restructuring and expressed concern about potential service disruption.

There was some concern that reorganisation will undermine local democracy and some fears that larger councils could weaken local accountability, reduce democratic representation and limit residents' ability to influence decisions that affect their communities.

*"[I am concerned by] loss of local connection, information and knowledge... Impersonal services due to number of residents, vulnerable residents suffering and likely to be left behind. Reduced opportunities for employment locally with risk of redundancies and increasing levels of unemployment. Potential increase in levels of vulnerabilities and failings of individuals, households and families mental health, safeguarding and domestic abuse."* – Kent resident

### Overview of key themes that emerged from the resident research:

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

Service quality ranked as residents' top priority with 81.4% rating it very important and a further 7.5% as important, underlining the need to maintain reliable everyday services through LGR.

Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisations, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.

Overall, there is an expectation for high quality, reliable and effective council services.

Residents want services to be responsible to community needs and to support local economies.

There was a strong desire to see improvements in coordination of local services, particularly those that impact daily life such as waste collection, highways, social care and community safety.

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*“My main priority is to have big enough bins that are emptied on a weekly basis. This is very important to me and my family due to the amount of medical waste we have as a result of chronic illness.” – Kent resident*

Some residents expressed concern LGR will result in a decline in service quality across the board, driven primarily by cost cutting measures rather than genuine efficiency improvements.

There is some anxiety essential services including social care, special educational, needs, waste collection and community facilities will suffer as budgets are spread thinner across large populations and competing priorities.

Many respondents noted any short-term financial savings from reorganisation will be offset by transition costs and the loss of established relationships and local expertise, ultimately leaving residents paying more through increased council tax while receiving demonstrated demonstrably worse services.

*“I work in education in Medway, we also have pupils who reside in Kent. From my experience, current services for education (especially SEND) and social care provision are poor and do not meet need” - Kent resident*

2. Service quality and input into decision-making is of particular importance for residents with disabilities

Residents with disabilities and those with long-term health conditions prioritised both service quality and having meaningful influence over decisions, reflecting a desire for responsive, inclusive services and concerns about accessibility, loss of voice and potential disruption to existing support.

While service quality remains priority for people who consider themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition, they also put a strong emphasis on influencing decisions.

This may suggest disabled residents value both swift service resolution and meaningful say in decisions affecting them, possibly reflecting experiences of services sometimes being designed without adequate input from people with disabilities.

When asked to outline their concerns about local government reorganisation, one of the respondents who considered themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition said:

*“Ability to be heard and to influence decision making in a much larger council area; The loss of a local Council making decisions for local people; The possibility of the Council offices being located somewhere that I can't get to (I don't drive); The possibility of losing services currently provided.” - Kent resident*

Residents with disabilities want to ensure their voices are included in the redesign process to ensure their perspectives can shape services and meaningfully influence decision-making.

*“As a disabled resident who is passionate about shaping policy, I believe local government reorganisation presents a vital opportunity to build a more inclusive and accessible system... I hope any new council structure prioritises digital accessibility, transparent decision-making, and proactive outreach to underrepresented voices. It's essential that disabled people can contact councillors easily, attend meetings remotely, and have their concerns heard without barriers. Efficiency and value for money are important, but so is ensuring that no one is left behind. I urge decision-makers to design councils that reflect the diversity of their residents—not just in services,*

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*but in how they engage and empower us. This reorganisation is also a chance to improve accountability.” - Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 3 for further detail on the option-specific support high quality and sustainable service delivery.

3. Residents want to protect local identity, connection to community and democratic representation

Kent residents feel connected to their respective towns, villages and districts and want this to be reflected in new council arrangements.

67% of residents said a sense of belonging to their council area was important.

However, participants had concerns LGR will erode the distinct identities and characters of individual areas, towns and communities across Kent.

Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote.

Residents were worried councillors representing significantly larger populations will lack local knowledge and understanding of area-specific issues, making it harder for residents to reach their representatives and have their voices heard.

Some comments highlight fears that some areas, particularly rural and coastal communities, will be forgotten and abandoned in favour of larger urban areas.

*“Living in a rural area I consider that at larger authority including larger populated areas will mean our needs and wants are ignored.” - Kent resident*

There is a desire for strong local representation.

Residents want to feel connected to their councillors and have confidence their voices will be heard and can shape their neighbourhoods.

68% of residents rated the ability to influence local decisions as very important.

Clear access to decision-makers and accountability in council actions was also highly valued by residents.

Residents emphasised the importance of maintaining a clear local voice in decision making and expressed concerns that larger councils may become distant and disconnected from the communities they serve.

*“If authorities are too large then councillors will have insufficient knowledge about the people they are representing and not be seen as part of their local community.” - Kent resident*

Many expressed anxiety about the ability of a remote council to address everyday local concerns, with some noting that they already struggle to contact their current MPs due to large electorates and fear this problem will worsen.

There was concern amongst some residents that council offices may become physically inaccessible and that service quality may decline as decision-making becomes centralised among people unfamiliar with local needs and contexts.

*“Residents will have less representation and therefore local concerns or issues will not be sufficiently represented or addressed.” - Kent Resident*

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Notably, the ability to visit a council office, population size, ward size, attendance at council meetings and number of councillors were considered least important to residents when compared to other factors like service quality.

See Section 4: Criteria 1 for further detail on the model defines functional and coherent geographies and Section 4: Criteria 4 for further detail on how the model maintains local identity.

#### 4. Residents view local government reorganisation as an opportunity to deliver better economies of scale value for money, but many are concerned with the cost to transition

Efficiency and value for money was the second highest priority among residents, with 74.3% rating it very important and 12.3% as important and residents expressing anxiety about costs and desire that promised savings materialise in practice.

*“The chance to simplify structures, reduce duplication, and make better use of resources across Kent and Medway. Clearer accountability for residents, with one council responsible for all services rather than multiple tiers... [as well as] efficiency and savings.” - Kent resident*

Many participants viewed the reorganisation process as an opportunity to deliver more efficient, streamlined local government services that ultimately deliver better value for money for residents.

There was an expectation that reorganisation should bring economies of scale, reduce bureaucracy and ensure fairer balance of power across areas.

*“A single, unified authority could make it easier for people to understand who to turn to, and ensure that concerns are addressed without being passed between layers of bureaucracy.” - Kent resident*

While many residents are hopeful about the potential benefits of reorganisation, some are concerned about the financial and operational cost of reorganisation, with many questioning whether the promised savings will ever materialise.

Participants were sceptical about transition costs, redundancies and systemic integration outweighing any efficiency gains, ultimately resulting in higher council tax for residents without any service improvements.

Comments highlight substantial anticipated expenses including restructuring, retaining and redundancy packages, IT system migrations, rebranding, new office infrastructure and external consultant fees.

*“My concerns relate to time and cost and how and the cost to Council Tax payers. With any reorganisation the short-term risk is always upheaval, delays in each council dealing with Business as unusual.” - Kent resident*

See Section 4: Criteria 2 for further detail on how the model supports resilient and efficient finances.

### **The perspective of Kent partners and organisations**

There were shared perspectives across partner organisations and businesses:

1. There is genuine recognition among many stakeholders that reorganisation could unlock efficiencies.

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Pooling resources, efficiency savings, reduced duplication, improved integration, stronger local voice, improved collaboration, joined-up policy making and clearer accountability were all highly referenced by stakeholders as potential benefits of reorganisation.

In particular, participants saw potential for improved mechanisms for communities to be heard, through co-production, forums or strengthened parish/town councils.

Economies of scale were also highly referenced. Participants acknowledged larger councils could enable efficiencies in back-office services, contracts and procurement, as well as recruitment and retention of specialist staff.

*“What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why? Duplication of services and confusion about which tier of local government is responsible for certain functions could be reduced. Larger councils may be able to pool resources to tackle county-wide issues such as major infrastructure or environmental challenges.” - Kent partner*

**2. Many stakeholders were concerned that reorganisation could exacerbate inequalities**

Many stakeholders warned of risks relating to reduced local representation, loss of community identity, widening inequality, unresolved financial pressures and disruption to housing and estate management during transition.

Canterbury Foodbank raised concerns that reorganisation could worsen east/west inequality by separating poorer coastal areas from wealthier western districts.

They highlight new unitary authorities need strong, well-funded regional support to address inequalities.

*“There is a strong risk that unitary reorganisation will divide richer and poorer areas, so that the potential to cross-subsidise between areas of high social need (located mainly in the existing Thanet, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe and Swale districts) and richer areas (Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells) is lost. At the same time opportunities to create high value-added employment in the poorer areas, whose economies currently rest on low-paid services (tourism, hospitality, social care) and primary sector agriculture will not exist.” - Kent partner*

A concern of equality was also raised by a councillor who questions financial sustainability for the East Kent council, which concentrates the poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income.

There are concerns about resource allocation precision avoiding overlooked small, deprived areas and emphasis that local access points are essential for digitally-excluded residents.

**Table 30: Nuanced feedback from stakeholders**

Grouping	Key reflections from LGR	Verbatims
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>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.</li></ul>	<i>“...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.”</i>



**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

*“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*



	area can manage valuations accurately, maintain estates or prevent loss of land through statutory rights.	<i>their priority for social housing...</i>
<b>Education and skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further education leaders highlighted possibilities for coherent county-wide skills strategies and apprenticeship coordination that could better serve small-sized medium enterprises across Kent.</li> <li>• However, among other things, they also highlighted that the reorganisation may have implications for learners with high needs.</li> </ul>	<i>“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.”</i>

## Support from residents and partner organisations for a 4-unitary model

### Residents

There were several common themes that emerged through the resident research, such as service standardisation and accessibility (581 mentions), economies of scale (446 mentions), and resident-focused governance (402 mentions), which are all core themes that both reflect and support the proposed 4D model:

- **Service Quality**

Residents wanted consistent, reliable frontline services such as waste, highways, and social care delivered in a joined-up way. The 4d model addresses this by removing the current split between county and district responsibilities, and integrating responsibility for key services (e.g. waste, highways, housing and social care) within sensible boundaries and geographies, enabling services to be designed and delivered aligned to local demand and needs.

- **Efficiency and Value for Money**

There is public expectation for simplification and tangible savings. Respondents supported reducing duplication and delivering “one council per place,” aligning strongly a four unitary single-tier model. As a small unitary, Medway has consistently demonstrated value for money for its residents charging the lowest council tax rates in Kent, receiving a “Good rating” for its Children’s Services, being the only council in Kent providing weekly full waste collections and receiving a C2 rating for our Housing Landlord Service.

- **Local Identity and Belonging**

Residents emphasised that new structures must preserve local identity. The 4D model creates four balanced unitaries built around real communities (North, East, Mid, and West Kent) preserving local identity while creating viable population sizes of 375k–625k, directly reflecting the feedback. Likewise, just under 60% feel that the size of the area covered by their council was important or very important.

- **Influence and Accountability**

Residents told us they valued clear lines of accountability and wanted to know “who to contact.” The 4d model provides one locally focused council for each geography, with

strengthened ward representation and community engagement mechanisms, and simplified governance structures.

As part of the engagement process, residents also provided feedback on specific council services:

- **Waste and Recycling**

Featured prominently in both quantitative rankings and open-text responses as one of the top three services most valued by residents. Over 78% of respondents described waste and recycling as “essential to local quality of life,” and 64% identified it as a service they interact with most frequently. Comments reflected frustration at “inconsistent collection standards between districts” and confusion about “who is responsible for waste disposal versus collection.” Many respondents supported having “one council responsible for the whole service” to simplify accountability and ensure consistency. Option 4d meets this expectation by tailoring local waste management plans to local need alongside an integrated waste management function. | **Council Tax and Financial Efficiency**

Council tax levels and perceived fairness were repeatedly cited as a key concern. 72% of respondents stated that “keeping council tax low and delivering value for money” was a very important priority with comments frequently referenced duplication of management and administration across tiers as a driver of inefficiency and higher council tax bills.

Respondents expressed support for “streamlined councils that reduce duplication and pass on savings through council tax stability.” The 4d option consolidates

management and back-office costs, creating scope to stabilise or slow growth in council tax without reducing frontline services.

- **Highways and Street Maintenance**

In questions about improvement priorities, road maintenance, pothole repair and street cleanliness were among the most frequently mentioned issues. Many residents expressed confusion about responsibility for highways (“I never know whether it’s the county or the district I need to contact”) — a consistent theme supporting the simplification goal of LGR more widely. Respondents favoured local control of highways and street scene services, stating these are “the most visible test of council performance.” The

4d model gives each Unitary Authority full control of highways, transport and public realm services, reducing confusion and enabling quicker, more accountable responses to local maintenance issues.

- **Housing, Planning and Social Care**

Around 62% of respondents prioritised “better joined-up planning between housing and infrastructure” and 58% highlighted “improving adult social care and support for older people.” Qualitative feedback linked housing, social care and health integration as areas where the current two-tier split “creates gaps and delays.” Residents see a clear need for more integrated delivery across housing, planning, and care — functions currently divided between county and district councils. The 4d model unifies these within each new authority, addressing those service-level concerns directly and at more cohesive, neighbourhood level.

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Stakeholder workshops and written submissions from over 40 organisations - including the NHS Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue, universities, chambers of commerce, and VCSE networks – has similar reflections:

- **Health and Social Care**

They emphasised the importance of coterminous boundaries with the four Health and Care Partnerships, and a focus more on prevention and population health. The 4d geographies mirror the 4 HCP's, enabling joint commissioning, shared data systems, and prevention-focused services.

- **Emergency Services**

They called for clearer accountability, simpler coordination and better real-time data-sharing during incidents. Option 4D provides four coterminous councils aligned with police and resilience-forum geographies, strengthening emergency planning and resilience.

- **Education and Skills Providers**

They favoured devolved, place-based partnerships aligned with labour-market areas - precisely how the 4d model distributes functions across North, East, Mid and West Kent.

- **Education and Skills partners**

They desired closer collaboration between councils, schools, FE and HE providers. They favoured devolved, place-based partnerships aligned with labour market areas – precisely how the proposed 4d option would distribute functions across North, East, Mid and West Kent.

- **Business and Economic Stakeholders**

They sought a single, predictable planning and licensing regime. The 4d model provides that consistency within each area while retaining a Kent-wide strategic framework through the proposed Combined County Authority, giving investors and employers a single local point of contact/access.

- **Voluntary and Community Sector (VCSE) organisations**

They favoured locally led commissioning, engagement and co-production. The 4d model maintains place-based partnerships while simplifying funding routes and opening opportunities for co-design.

Both residents and partners clearly showed a desire for 'one council per place', and not a remote authority for the whole county. This reflects a report by the [District Council's Network – Bigger is not better \(2020\)](#) which stated that residents value accessibility, identity and local responsiveness, with large units risking losing these and weakening trust in local government.

## Preserving local identity, culture and historical significance

**Criteria 4b.** Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance

### Maintaining local identity across Kent

Kent is a large and diverse region with a rich history, strong civic traditions and distinct local identities.

From coastal towns and rural villages to historic market centres and modern urban hubs, the geography and culture of Kent have shaped how communities live, work and relate to their local institutions.

We know from engagement with our residents they associate their identity with their local town and not their local council.

They do not live their lives according to administrative boundaries.

Their daily experience is shaped by functional geographies – commuting patterns, access to hospitals, schools, and community services – that often extend beyond council borders.

The lived reality is that every road, bus route, and service network crosses boundaries.

New councils must recognise this and work together to create coherent, strategic plans that reflect how people move and access services.

This includes transport, health and preventative care, which are most effective when delivered through local, community-based interventions.

New councils must support both strategic coordination and planning across council boundaries and local responsiveness.

*Placeholder for collage showing geographical identity of Kent*

### Four councils with clear identities

**Table 31:** Identity and culture for each council area

<b>North Kent:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Medway (98%),</li><li>• Gravesham (87%)</li></ul>	<b>A place shaped by rivers, industry and resilience: North Kent's identity has always been forged by its geography and its people. Stretching from Dartford and Gravesham through Medway and into the northern reaches of Swale, it sits where the Thames meets the Medway — a landscape of estuary light, dockyard cranes and centuries of trade, craftsmanship and civic pride. It is both gateway and frontier: the place</b>
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- Swale (81%)
- Dartford (78%)
- Small parts of Tonbridge and Malling (3%)
- Maidstone (2%)

## where England looks out to Europe and where London's energy begins to meet Kent's coast and countryside.

The shipwrights, engineers, dockworkers and artisans of Chatham and Sheerness built vessels that carried Britain's navy and its trade. The same rivers and railways that once moved timber, coal and munitions now move ideas, data and people. The great industrial waterfronts are being reimaged as creative campuses, university quarters and centres of innovation, but they still carry the imprint of the areas working heritage.

Local pride in towns like Rochester, Strood and Gillingham reflects a distinct urban identity that is separate from, yet complementary to, Kent's rural heartlands.

**Historic foundations:** The towns and villages of North Kent have deep historical roots. Rochester's castle and cathedral still dominate the skyline, reminders of its role as one of England's oldest bishoprics and a seat of power since Norman times. Gravesend and Dartford grew as market towns and maritime gateways. Sheerness and the Medway Towns became synonymous with naval power and shipbuilding excellence. Dickens drew literary inspiration from these streets and marshes, capturing a landscape of endurance and change that still resonates.

**A culture of creativity and craftsmanship:** Today, North Kent's culture is expressed through reinvention. The University Quarter in Chatham and the Historic Dockyard are vibrant anchors for the creative economy, home to artists, film-makers, designers and digital start-ups who have found inspiration in its industrial heritage. The Dockyard itself, a UNESCO World Heritage contender, has become one of Britain's best-preserved maritime sites and a symbol of how heritage can drive regeneration.

The areas cultural calendar is equally diverse: Rochester Sweeps Festival and Dickens Festival celebrate folklore and literature; the Fuse Festival and Paint the Town bring contemporary performance and digital art to public spaces; and Sheerness, Gravesend and Sittingbourne sustain a long-standing music and community arts scene rooted in local stories and traditions. From jazz on the riverfront to poetry in Medway cafés, this is a culture that values participation and reinvention over spectacle.

**Communities and place:** North Kent's population is one of the youngest and most diverse in the county. Its communities include long-established families with dockyard and military heritage, new international residents drawn by proximity to London, and creative professionals relocating for affordable living and studio space. This mix of tradition and change gives the area its edge: confident, straight-talking, entrepreneurial and outward-looking. It is also a place of contrasts maritime towns and rural hinterlands, new housing and medieval high streets, industrial estates and protected marshland. Yet these differences coexist within a strong sense of shared belonging. Whether through local football clubs, community festivals, volunteer networks or parish councils, civic pride runs deep.

**Modern identity and emerging story:** The area's identity is being reshaped around innovation, creativity and inclusion. The universities, new business parks and cultural institutions are redefining the economy, while the waterfront developments at Chatham, Rochester Riverside and Strood symbolise a wider renewal. This is a place that embraces its working-class heritage while



	<p>imagining new futures; a community that has adapted to change for centuries and continues to do so with resilience and ambition. From the estuary mudflats to the high-speed rail links, North Kent’s culture is one of transformation and innovation with a strong sense of place.</p>
<p><b>West Kent:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sevenoaks</li> <li>• Tunbridge Wells</li> <li>• Tonbridge and Malling (61%)</li> <li>• Dartford (22%)</li> <li>• Gravesham (13%)</li> <li>• Medway (2%)</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<p><b>West Kent’s identity is rooted in its position as both a rural heartland and a prosperous commuter region bridging London and the wider South East. The landscape – marked by the wooded ridges of the High Weald and the chalk escarpments of the North Downs has long shaped settlement, trade and character. Historic market towns and villages grew from medieval manors and coaching routes, many still defined by Georgian and Victorian architecture and their proximity to country estates.</b></p> <p><b>History:</b> West Kent’s history has been one of continuity and adaptation. Its fertile soils and ancient woodland supported early agriculture and iron production, while its rivers – notably the Medway and Darent – powered mills and trade from medieval times onwards. The area’s turnpike roads and coaching inns made it a key route between London and the coast, a legacy still visible in settlements such as Tonbridge and Sevenoaks. The 19th century brought prosperity through railways and commuter expansion, creating new suburbs and villas for London professionals. Tunbridge Wells, designated a Royal spa town in 1909, became a byword for genteel refinement and civic pride. These influences fostered a distinctive blend of affluence, civic engagement and cultural life that continues to define the area today.</p> <p><b>Cultural Life and Community Identity:</b> West Kent’s cultural identity reflects a balance between tradition and creativity. The area is home to a strong arts and heritage scene – from The Amelia Scott in Tunbridge Wells and the Sevenoaks Kaleidoscope Gallery to annual festivals such as the Tonbridge Music Weekend and Wealden Literary Festival. Historic houses and gardens like Knole, Penshurst Place, Ightham Mote and Hever Castle anchor a sense of continuity and attract international visitors, while smaller villages sustain rich networks of local societies, choirs, and theatre groups. The area’s communities value civic participation, education and environmental stewardship. Green space, conservation, and quality of life remain central to local pride and identity.</p> <p><b>Sense of Place:</b> Landscape remains central to West Kent’s sense of place. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and North Downs frame the region’s identity, shaping its architecture, leisure and economy. Villages like Chiddingstone, Groombridge, and Plaxtol typify the Kent as well as the timber-framed houses, oast roofs and greens surrounded by orchards and hop gardens. Today, West Kent has some of the highest educational attainment and wellbeing indicators in Kent, underpinned by a strong voluntary and cultural sector. The region identifies as both outward-looking connected to global London and protective of its rural and historic character.</p>
<p><b>East Kent:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canterbury</li> <li>• Dover</li> <li>• Thanet</li> </ul>	<p><b>East Kent has one of the richest and most distinctive identities in England – a place shaped by its coastline, its proximity to Europe, and centuries of exchange, migration, and resilience. The area’s character is a product of both its geography and its people: an enduring maritime</b></p>



- Folkestone and Hythe (64%)
- Swale (Faversham area 17%)

**landscape that has long served as the nation's frontier, and a network of communities that blend historic pride with creative reinvention.**

**A Historic Gateway and Cultural Crossroads:** For over a thousand years, East Kent has been England's meeting point with continental Europe. The ports of Dover and Sandwich, and later Folkestone and Ramsgate, have connected Britain to the world – as trading posts, embarkation points, and front lines of defence. From the arrival of the Romans and St Augustine's mission at Canterbury in 597 AD, to the modern Channel Tunnel at Folkestone, this eastern corner has been a literal and symbolic gateway between nations.

This international orientation continues to shape East Kent's identity. The cultural confidence of Canterbury England's spiritual capital and UNESCO World Heritage Site coexists with the cosmopolitan energy of coastal towns such as Margate and Folkestone, whose fortunes have risen on creativity, tourism and reinvention. The coast has always been porous to ideas, influences and enterprise, giving East Kent a personality that is outward-looking yet deeply rooted.

**Sense of Place:** East Kent's geography defines its sense of belonging. The chalk cliffs of Dover, and the fertile Stour valley all form part of a landscape that has inspired artists, writers and campaigners for centuries. From Turner's seascapes to the writings of Dickens and Conrad, the light and openness of the coastline have long shaped the area's artistic imagination.

Each community has its own distinct story. Canterbury is defined by learning, pilgrimage and continuity; Dover by courage, resilience and service; Folkestone by reinvention and creative endeavour; Thanet by independence and seaside vitality; Faversham by industry, craftsmanship and civic pride. Together these identities form a connected whole – diverse, self-confident and bound by a shared coastal narrative.

**Culture, Creativity and Enterprise:** Cultural regeneration has been central to East Kent's modern identity. Turner Contemporary in Margate, the Creative Quarter in Folkestone, and the Marlowe Theatre and Cathedral Precincts in Canterbury are cornerstones of a flourishing creative economy. Festivals such as Folkestone Book Festival, Canterbury Festival, and Ramsgate Festival of Sound celebrate the region's artistic spirit, while community heritage projects keep local histories alive – from maritime museums to Roman and medieval archaeology.

These assets are not only economic drivers but expressions of East Kent's social fabric: open, inventive, and collaborative. They provide the foundation for inclusive place-making and for an identity that values heritage while embracing change.

**Continuity, Resilience and Renewal:** Across centuries of invasion, industrial decline and renewal, East Kent has demonstrated an extraordinary capacity to adapt. Naval history, agriculture, fishing, and tourism have each risen and transformed with the times. The decommissioning of the Dover and Richborough power stations, the redevelopment of the port estates, and the rise of renewable energy and creative industries all mark a region able to reinvent itself without losing its sense of purpose.

**Mid Kent:**

- Ashford
- Maidstone (98%)
- Folkestone and Hythe (36%)
- Tonbridge and Malling (36%)
- Swale (3%)

Mid Kent occupies the historic heart of the county, defined by its market towns, rural landscapes and long-standing role as the crossroads of Kent. It is an area where the county's agricultural heritage, medieval trade routes and civic traditions meet the modern dynamism of transport, enterprise, and innovation but where the "Garden of England" remains a lived reality.

**Historic Development:** The area's settlements trace their roots to early Saxon and medieval origins, when Maidstone, Ashford and Tonbridge grew as market towns and river crossings on the Medway and Stour. Medieval Maidstone, with its Archbishop's Palace and All Saints Church, served as a key ecclesiastical and trading centre. Ashford's prominence rose through agriculture and later through the arrival of the railways, becoming a major railway works town and now a strategic rail gateway to Europe. Tonbridge and Malling's history is anchored in Norman fortifications and market life, while the surrounding Weald communities developed through hop growing, orchards and milling industries that defined Kent's rural economy for centuries.

Hythe's western parishes, forming part of Mid Kent's geography, add a coastal dimension shaped by military and maritime history from the Royal Military Canal to the defences of the Napoleonic wars. Hythe and the areas to the west retain a distinctive rural coastal identity linked to the Romney Marsh hinterland and the Kent Downs. Together these layers of history give Mid Kent a strong sense of continuity, with historic landscapes and architecture woven into its modern settlements.

**Sense of Place:** Mid Kent's identity is both rooted and connected. The rolling Weald, hop gardens and Oast houses remain symbols of the county's pastoral heritage, while the M20 and High Speed 1 have turned Ashford and Maidstone into commuter and commercial hubs linking Kent with London and Europe. The result is a hybrid identity — a region that retains a strong rural sense of place while serving as a vital economic bridge between Kent's coastal regeneration areas and its metropolitan north and west. Distinctive local identities endure within this shared geography:

- Maidstone is the county town and civic heart of Kent, known for its river setting, heritage architecture, and administrative and cultural role.
- Ashford represents modern Kent — ambitious, connected, and forward-looking, blending heritage with contemporary urban development.
- The western (Folkestone) and Hythe parishes retain a distinctive rural coastal identity linked to the Romney Marsh hinterland and the Kent Downs.

**Cultural Assets:** Cultural assets in Mid Kent are diverse and accessible. The Maidstone Museum and Bentlif Art Gallery, Hazlitt Theatre, and Ashford's Revelation St Mary's provide established centres for art, performance and heritage, while new creative venues such as Ashford's Elwick Place reflect growing investment in leisure and culture. The area's festivals from the Maidstone River Festival to Ashford's Create Festival celebrate community, music and local craftsmanship.

The Kent Downs National Landscape, Len Valley, and Wealden countryside inspire strong place-based identity and tourism, while traditional crafts such

as brewing, fruit growing and viticulture have been revitalised through new rural enterprises and local produce markets. The area's creative and artisan industries increasingly align with sustainability and place-branding initiatives that link culture to economic growth.

**Modern Identity and Future Outlook:** Today Mid Kent's culture and history inform a confident, connected, and adaptable identity. It is a region proud of its agricultural past yet defined by its modern role as Kent's central engine of growth. The coexistence of medieval market towns, garden communities, and international transport hubs captures the essence of Mid Kent's story a place where heritage and innovation co-exist, and where the idea of "Kentishness" continues to evolve.

### Why Option 4D will retain and grow cultural identity

The 4D option provides the best balance between local identity, scale, and service sustainability across Kent and Medway. It creates four coherent Unitary Authorities North, East, Mid, and West Kent each aligned with natural communities, transport corridors, and health and economic partnerships.

The 4D proposal is explicitly designed to strengthen, not dilute, Kent's unique local identities. Option 4D aligns administrative boundaries with the county's historic communities, economic geographies and cultural heritage, ensuring that decision-making remains close to the people and places it serves.

As a founding design principle, boundaries have been drawn around recognisable communities and place, following natural, cultural and economic geographies such as the Thames Gateway, Weald, and East Kent coast. Each new council combines towns and rural areas that already share historic ties, travel-to-work patterns and civic institutions, preserving community cohesion.

The model maintains and empowers existing town and parish councils, encouraging greater devolution of local decision-making and protecting the distinct character of villages and market towns. Local heritage identities such as "City of Canterbury," "Royal Tunbridge Wells," "Historic Rochester," and "Garden of England" will be retained and celebrated within each new council's civic identity.

Kent's culture and heritage are integral to its sense of place. Option 4D embeds cultural and heritage leadership within each authority, ensuring continuity and local stewardship:

- **North Kent** – Safeguards the rich naval and industrial heritage of Chatham Dockyard, Rochester Cathedral, and Gravesend's riverfront, integrating them into regeneration and tourism strategies.
- **East Kent** – Unites Canterbury's UNESCO World Heritage Site with Dover Castle and Thanet's coastal heritage, enabling a coherent cultural tourism plan across the coastal belt.
- **Mid Kent** – Protects the rural and market-town heritage of Maidstone, Ashford and the Weald, supporting agricultural, craft and festival traditions central to Kent's identity.

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- **West Kent** – Sustains the historic and cultural character of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Royal Tunbridge Wells, maintaining their strong civic and architectural heritage.

Preserving heritage is also about ensuring it contributes to the future prosperity and wellbeing of communities. Heritage-led regeneration (e.g. Chatham Dockyard, Canterbury Cathedral Quarter, Dover Waterfront) will be central to local growth strategies. Cultural investment plans will link creative industries with historic sites, sustaining tourism and local employment. Education partnerships with universities and cultural institutions (e.g. University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church, University for the Creative Arts) will embed arts and heritage in civic development. Community volunteering and stewardship will be supported through local heritage trusts and civic societies, ensuring residents remain guardians of place.

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## Criteria 5: Supporting strategic devolution and regional priorities

This section includes:

**Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent**

**Criteria 5a**

**Equal representation from all four corners of Kent**

**Criteria 5c**

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## Unlocking the devolution vision in Kent

**Criteria 5a.** Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.

**Criteria 5b.** Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.

**All of Kent's councils recognise the critical need to devolve powers to a strategic authority to unlock public sector reform and empower decisions about Kent to be made in Kent. The vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport, and the benefits it would bring across Kent in terms of accelerating public service reform, cannot be underestimated. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve life chances for the residents and businesses of Kent and Medway.**

### A devolution deal for Kent

We were disappointed to not be accepted onto the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and have been pressing the case with ministers and MHCLG to understand the path towards devolution in Kent.

This is particularly important in light of the critical role Kent plays in national infrastructure and border management, and the opportunities that arise from a strategic county-wide approach being taken on economic growth, education and skills.

### Partner support

Key local public sector partners - the Chief Executives and Chairs of the ICB, health and care partnerships and acute trusts, the Chancellors/Vice Chancellors of the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and Greenwich University which has a campus within Kent, the Chairs of the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, Business Advisory Board and Kent Invicta Chamber, the Chief Executives of Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover and the Chairs of the Kent Housing Group and Kent Developers Group - all share our concerns that reorganisation in Kent without devolution would result in a piecemeal approach and sub-optimal transformation.

### Timelines that work for both priorities

Aligning the timeline for the creation of a strategic authority is key to avoiding a double reorganisation by which we establish unitary authorities in April 2028 and either have to operate hosted services through localised arrangements only to reaggregate services into a strategic authority shortly after.

This two-stage piecemeal approach would generate additional cost, complexity and create further disruption to staff and services as well as weaken public clarity on the nature and role of local government in delivering national objectives and policies.



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Kent's district and borough councils and Medway strongly support establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority at the first available opportunity in April 2028 to operate alongside the new unitary authorities.

Government support and agreement for devolution to be aligned with local government reorganisation in Kent will enable effective transition planning of key services resulting in a seamless transition, enabling synergies in programme management and leadership capacity while providing clarity to residents and partners regarding how local government and devolution opportunities will be embraced in Kent.

Clarity for partners is critical given our deep ambitions regarding public service reform at the earliest opportunity.

This requires consistency, developed relationships and focus on service delivery rather than ongoing structural change that is not focused on achieving outcomes.

Kent is a natural fit for devolution as critical partners already work coterminously with the footprint of the strategic authority including Kent Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the integrated care board and many voluntary and community service organisations.

A failure to bring forward devolution simultaneously alongside reorganisation in Kent represents a significant additional cost pressure through missed opportunities, delay, disruption and duplication of effort.

The proposals for LGR in Kent and Medway directly address the rationale given by MHCLG for excluding Kent and Medway from the DPP, namely addressing population disparity imbalance between the area of Kent and the unitary authority of Medway.

We urge ministers to accelerate devolution in Kent to meet the timescale we have proposed as this will deliver the greatest opportunity for successful public sector reform.

**All of Kent's councils recognise the critical need to devolve powers to a strategic authority to unlock public sector reform and empower decisions about Kent to be made in Kent. The vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport, and the benefits it would bring across Kent in terms of accelerating public service reform, cannot be underestimated. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve life chances for the residents and businesses of Kent and Medway. All of Kent's councils recognise the critical need to devolve powers to a strategic authority to unlock public sector reform and empower decisions about Kent to be made in Kent. The vital difference that devolution would make to economic growth, housing delivery, education and skills and transport, and the benefits it would bring across Kent in terms of accelerating public service reform, cannot be underestimated. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve life chances for the residents and businesses of Kent and Medway. Timelines that work for both priorities Enabling strategic leadership through a regional governance model**

A strategic authority across Kent and Medway provides a real opportunity to strengthen Kent as a whole and to focus the role of unitary authorities on their delivery role.

The strategic authority will take a strategic role across Kent including:

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- transport and infrastructure, including the Local Transport Plan and management of critical national infrastructure including the port at Dover and Eurotunnel at Folkestone;
- economic development and regeneration, including the Local Growth Plan;
- housing and strategic planning, including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- adult education, skills and job support;
- the environment and net zero;
- health including the ICB, wellbeing and public service reform; and
- the Police and Crime Commissioner and fire and rescue functions.

A Mayor for Kent will provide a clear single voice for the region, support inward investment and ensure the county punches its weight on the national and international stages.

Kent requires a voice on the Council of the Nations and Regions, not only for its size but also for the critical role it plays in national infrastructure, travel and borders.

This high-profile leadership role with government will support growth in Kent and, through the national role, address a gap that would otherwise be apparent in addressing national priorities.

The future councils will be balanced and powerful constituent authorities on the strategic authority, alongside the mayor, and will provide the voice for their distinct economic areas.

We know from existing combined authorities that a single strategic approach does not mean that one size fits all.

A Kent strategic authority will also enable the councils to focus on effective local delivery and deep public service reform on an appropriate footprint.

The councils will have different strengths and needs, local partnerships and communities they represent.

A strategic authority will provide clear overall direction and coherence, enabling councils to focus delivery in their local area which will mean they can become more agile through a place-based approach within a larger strategic framework.

### **Progress towards devolution**

Despite not being on the DPP, we have continued to develop our approach to devolution in Kent to enable us to rapidly take advantage of the opportunity when provided.

We have started work to agree our vision and strategic intent regarding devolution and the role and purpose of the strategic authority in delivering it, and the most effective relationship required with the constituent councils.

We are refreshing our shared priorities by identifying critical strategic challenges and opportunities requiring a strategic and Kent-wide approach.

Following MHCLG support for our devolution approach, we will finalise the preferred structure and identify the processes and resources required to integrate into the combined LGR and devolution implementation programme.

This will enable us to prepare the ground for the Mayoral Strategic Authority, develop the early investment programme and begin development of the statutory policy framework.

This will set robust foundations for the mayoral election and strategic authority to vest in April 2028.

Option 4D presents a compelling governance model for Kent, structured around four councils designed to advance strategic devolution and regional priorities. This configuration ensures balanced representation by aligning population sizes across the councils and fostering equitable participation in county-wide decision-making. This is essential for cultivating strong, collaborative relationships within any future strategic authority. The 4D configuration ensures all four councils are balanced in population and fiscal strength (approx. 375,000–625,000 residents), giving parity of influence and shared governance within a CCA model.

The Government's English Devolution Framework (2022) sets out that strong, stable, and strategically coherent local governance is a prerequisite for devolved powers. Option 4D directly meets this test by:

- Creating four resilient councils with clear accountability for place-based delivery;
- Enabling a Kent & Medway Combined County Authority (CCA) or Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) to act at regional scale;
- Providing strategic coherence across transport, skills, housing and net-zero while maintaining local flexibility;
- Embedding community identity and democratic legitimacy through direct representation and local accountability.

Importantly, this structure mirrors successful devolved regions such as Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, combining local responsiveness with regional capability.

The four unitary model will have streamlined governance which will enhance leadership clarity and simplify administrative processes, positioning Kent to engage more effectively with central government and regional stakeholders. Thus, Kent will be able to strengthen its strategic voice and influence over the region, through presenting a unified stance on critical issues such as infrastructure, housing, and economic growth.

The proposal aligns unitary boundaries with natural geographic landmarks, functional economic areas and transport corridors, thereby improving coordination and reducing inefficiencies. This alignment supports the effective delivery of devolved functions and ensures that governance structures reflect the county's operational realities.

These councils are designed to be sufficiently large to deliver services efficiently, yet remain closely connected to their communities. This balance enables responsive, locally tailored services whilst also balancing with the delivery of broader strategic ambitions.

Option 4D offers a governance framework capable of delivering strategic devolution through fair representation, simplified leadership, collaborative engagement, and locally attuned decision-making. It aligns Kent's geography with its economic and environmental realities, equipping the county to manage planning, infrastructure, and sustainability priorities with confidence and cohesion.

## Population sizes that support devolution

**Criteria 5c.** Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

**The four-unitary model for Kent meets government criteria by creating balanced and sufficiently large authorities. Each council is large enough to manage complex, devolved responsibilities yet each remains small enough to sustain strong local identity and meaningful democratic representation. It supports effective devolution by enabling strong collaboration with a Mayoral Strategic Authority and promotes equitable, efficient local governance**

### Devolution governance: the argument for Option 4D

The 4D model proposes the creation of four balanced Unitary Authorities, each with a population between approximately 375,000 and 625,000 residents. These population ranges fall squarely within the optimal scale for councils recommended by MCHLG typically 300,000 to 700,000 residents which balances strategic capacity, financial resilience and local accountability.

Each council is large enough to manage complex, devolved responsibilities such as housing growth, transport infrastructure, skills planning and public health. Yet each remains small enough to sustain strong local identity and meaningful democratic representation. This creates a structure that mirrors successful devolved regions such as Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, and the West Midlands, where individual constituent authorities typically range between 350,000 and 700,000 residents. Balanced population sizes ensure parity between partners, preventing dominance by a single large authority and allowing equal voice within a future Kent & Medway Combined County Authority (CCA).

## **Criteria 6: Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment**

This section includes:

**Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent**

**Criteria 6a, 6b**

**Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)**

**Criteria 6a, 6b**

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## Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment across Kent

**Criteria 6a:** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

**Criteria 6b:** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

**Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment are central to achieving our LGR objectives in Kent. Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) represent a powerful opportunity to transform how communities take part in local decision-making.**

**Through LGR in Kent, communities will have a stronger voice within their new councils and with partners. We will ensure local insights shape discussions between unitary authorities and service providers, while building on and strengthening existing approaches that are already working well.**

Effective local government is a function of the relationships between elected members, service provision, residents and communities.

Empowered, engaged communities know who they are and what they need.

They know what services are available in their area and they expect to co-design and shape those services.

They see and know their councillors and local service providers.

And they are not afraid to share their perspectives and they are confident they will be heard.

Councils at all levels across Kent and Medway have longstanding commitments to community engagement via county-wide initiatives such as Crowdfund Kent, district and borough forums like the Thanet Youth Council and direct grants for local organisations from parish and town councils like Faversham.

At the heart of this commitment lies a requirement to use LGR as an opportunity to work differently by tempering the tension between the economies and resilience that come with delivering at scale and the granular responsiveness and relevance that thrives on close working with each community.

Having fewer, single-tier councils offers greater opportunities for scaled models, consistent investment of resources and potentially smoother co-operation with statutory partners.

Conversely, a larger number of smaller councils provides a stronger basis to co-design locally-specific services that adapt to communities' distinct needs and priorities.

Regardless of the model selected by government, councils will deliver stronger community engagement and enable genuine neighbourhood empowerment, bringing decisions closer to communities and ensuring services are relevant, joined-up and efficient.

To do this, Kent recognises it requires a new vehicle for community engagement that is at once locally rooted and strategically impactful.



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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'<sup>42</sup> through LGR.

Led by ward councillors, NACs are seen as maximising the structural efficiencies brought about by LGR and strengthening localism and community participation across all areas.

Our approach takes advantage of this opportunity to realise these benefits in ways that meet our distinctive Kent context.

This approach has been the prevailing view amongst Kent Leaders and officers during recent engagement with stakeholders

Kent's NACs will be a central hub for local partnership working, connecting residents and communities with services and their council.

Each NAC will identify its initial priorities, which may be specific local issues with significant opportunity to flex new powers and responsibilities around new solutions.

Over time, we anticipate NACs will gravitate towards more strategic arrangements between partners across their areas of responsibility.

NACs will be able to take on different levels of responsibility and decision-making in response to the size and ambition of their area.

Some may begin as largely advisory and consultative, acting as an effective platform to communicate local perspectives to strategic forums in the new unitary authority and other statutory partners.

Others may request and receive devolved responsibility and budget from their unitary authority.

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<sup>42</sup> 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>

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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.

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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 <sup>43</sup>
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>317</b>

### Creating the conditions for community empowerment

NACs can be a powerful structure to drive community and neighbourhood empowerment in Kent, but success depends on three key conditions for success:

- 1) inclusive community engagement
- 2) being rooted in communities and existing structures
- 3) the ability to drive strategic impact

<sup>43</sup> Borough, District, and Unitary Authority websites

Conditions for success	How this can be achieved in Kent
<b>1. Inclusive community engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Embed openness, inclusion, and co-production</b> 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.</li> <li>• <b>Resource communities to shape their NAC’s scope and priorities:</b> 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.</li> <li>• <b>Poor transport links and digital isolation may hamper participation in rural or deprived communities.</b> And some places will have less past experience of collective action and deliberation. NACs will need support to work through these questions.</li> <li>• <b>Confusion or cynicism borne of past restructures may demotivate communities</b> 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.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Drive strategic impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unitary authorities will need a <b>sustained commitment to gather and listen to NAC feedback</b> 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.</li> <li>• NACs will need to be supported and empowered in ways that acknowledge historic inequalities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 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.</li> <li>○ Unitary authorities will need to be willing to listen closely to quieter voices from less well-resourced communities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>3. Rooted in communities and existing groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible, skilled, and informed unitary and town/parish councillors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NACs will need <b>councillors who are skilled at local convening, mediating, and building coalitions for action</b>, sometimes in new ways. To support this, future councils will invest in updated councillor development programmes that include community leadership and co-production methods.</li> <li>○ <b>Councillors will need access to local intelligence and data</b>, ensuring they can respond with insight and evidence to residents’ concerns.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Councillor remuneration and practical support</b> will need to be reviewed where new expectations on councillors' time exceed current commitments.</li><li>• A sustainable ecosystem of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Strong and resilient VCSE partners are essential</b> 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<sup>44</sup>.</li><li>○ Unitary authorities will <b>build on existing work to strengthen local VCSEs</b>, and NACs will have an important role to play in amplifying VCSE insights and supporting the commissioning of smaller organisations.</li></ul></li><li>• Boundaries that promote local engagement and strategic influence</li><li>• Unitary authorities will need to <b>develop boundaries that balance competing requirements</b> 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.</li></ul>
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<sup>44</sup> 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](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/61718/Kent-voluntary-sector.pdf)



## Section 6: Implementation plan

This section includes:

**Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)**

**Programme governance and workstreams**

**Summary risks and mitigations**

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## **Phased approach to implementation (preparation, transition, transformation)**

### **Joint implementation planning across Kent**

We are operating a shared programme across all Kent authorities including a Steering Group, Programme Board and have a mature programme team with shared funding operating across all councils.

We have a long history of working across councils which is a very strong foundation to start our LGR journey from.

We bring significant momentum, shared understanding and common purpose that we will maintain into the future phases of the work.

We have worked extensively with colleagues from previous LGR programmes to discuss their approach and lessons that we can take into our implementation approach for Kent.

Our approach is guided by prudence regarding the scale and complexity of Kent but also ambition regarding public service reform and the role that an effective and efficient reorganisation can play in it.

Our approach is designed to implement reorganisation alongside devolution and the establishment of a Strategic Authority across Kent (see Criteria 5 for more detail).

There are significant synergies from operating a combined devolution and LGR programme where they can be done in parallel.

### **Implementation principles for LGR in Kent**

We have established principles to guide our approach to implementation and to ensure it is aligned with our wider public service reform ambitions. We will:

- 1) maintain and enhance our collaborative approach
- 2) ensure LGR decisions enable the bigger picture of devolution and public service reform
- 3) plan ahead and communicate
- 4) engage and co-create with partners and residents
- 5) support staff and partners on the journey
- 6) minimise disruption to staff and residents
- 7) establish governance to ensure delivery
- 8) transparent decision-making
- 9) be ambitious in what we can achieve beyond safe and legal
- 10) Keep provision of services to residents at the forefront of decision-making

### **The phases of LGR**

We understand the distinct phases that an LGR programme requires, the relative governance, priorities and resourcing required to make them a success.

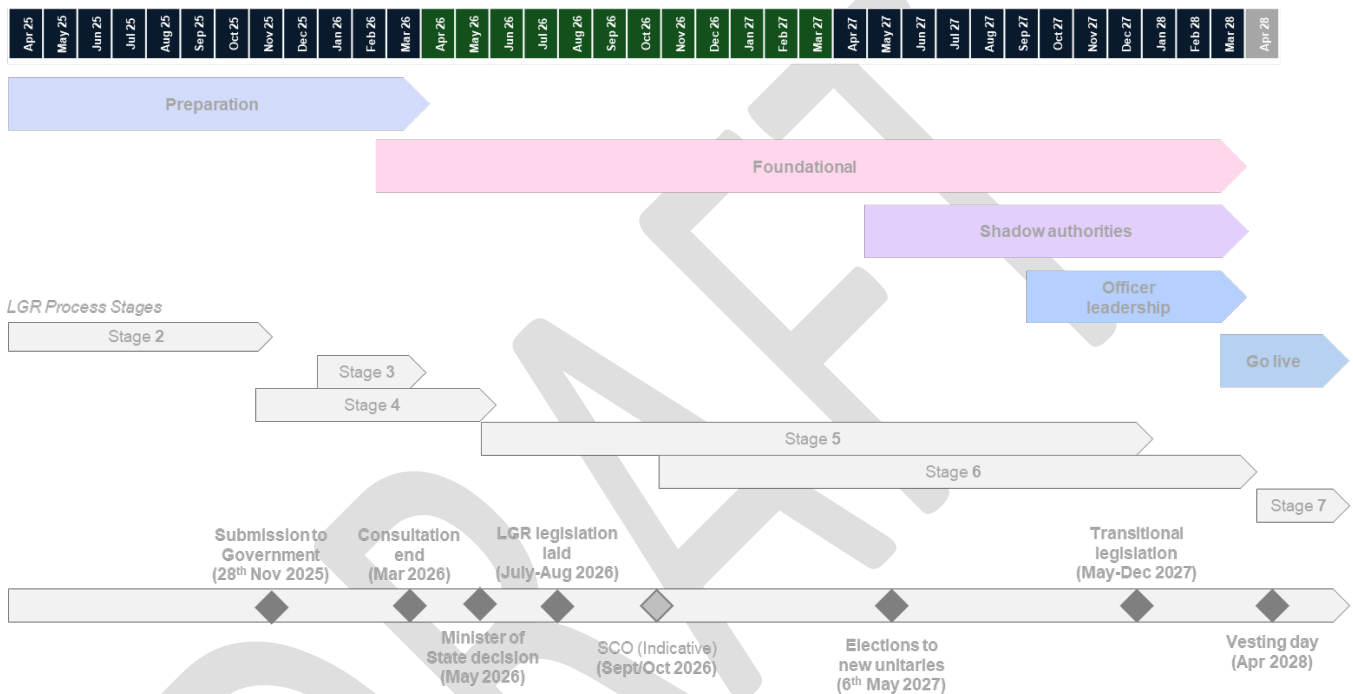
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Through working with colleagues who have delivered LGR and MHCLG officials we have developed a timeline for reorganisation which maps our phases onto the stages outlined by MHCLG.

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.

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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
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborative service working – identifying opportunities, risks and shared understanding</li><li>• Set up the programme (governance, workstreams and finance)</li><li>• Recruit Strategic Partner(s)</li><li>• Agree target position for Day One and scenario planning</li><li>• Set up the plan, timeline and critical path including provisional Day One requirements and milestones</li><li>• Set up a data hub - gather and maintain consistent programme data</li><li>• Define and agree scope of LGR-related decisions with sovereign councils</li></ul>
<b>Foundational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adapting programme to specific milestones</li><li>• Commencing Day One programme plan (what is in appropriate scope of the programme e.g. ICT infrastructure, treatment of systems and contracts)</li><li>• Service alignment and transformation including reconfiguring existing area based working arrangements to match boundaries of new councils</li><li>• Options appraisals and preparing for key decisions</li><li>• Elections</li><li>• Compliance with Structural Changes Order and legal checks and assurance</li><li>• Project plan for safely winding down sovereign authorities</li></ul>
<b>Shadow authorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continuing delivery of Day One programme plan</li><li>• Appointing Chief Executives and statutory and leadership roles</li><li>• Member inductions and service briefings</li><li>• Key decision timetable</li><li>• TUPE transfer arrangements</li></ul>
<b>Officer leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tier 2 and Tier 3 Leadership Recruitment</li><li>• Service planning</li><li>• Development of council plan, budget MTFP</li><li>• Key policies and strategies (strategic priorities and corporate plans, unitary strategic risk register, constitution)</li><li>• Operating model and staffing allocations</li></ul>

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- Preparing for Day One and alignment with Day One vision and change (particularly for vulnerable people and those reliant on services for health and wellbeing).

**Go-live**

- Stability and seamless experience
- Improvement and post-LGR transformation planning

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## Programme governance and workstreams

We will operate an LGR Programme Board across Kent and Medway which will report to the existing Leaders group, though acknowledging it does not have decision-making powers, and in due course into Joint Committees.

This Board will include the Chief Executives and Programme Director and will oversee the programme and address strategic issues and risks.

We will establish a Day One Board to focus on managing delivery of the programme plan following the ministerial decision.

This will include tracking progress against milestones and completion of Day One requirements.

We have set up workstreams with Chief Executive sponsors and agreed engagement principles regarding representation from authorities as service leads and on workstreams.

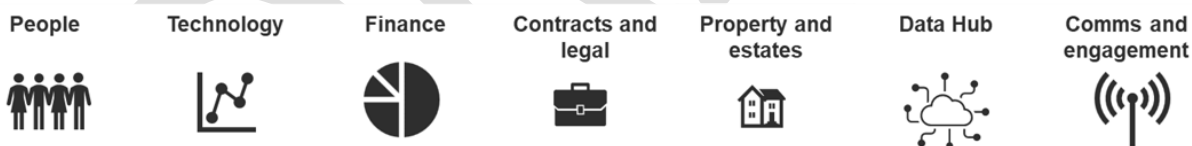
We will set up unitary delivery groups to focus on issues specific to each new council including elections, council plan, member induction, policies and culture.

These groups will increase in importance when working to shadow authorities and when interim heads of paid service are appointed but by starting early, we are setting the councils up for success.

### Our workstreams

We know the importance of operating a single programme across Kent to drive consistency, efficiency and to address challenges where possible.

Our workstreams will cover services and the following key themes:



We will establish Unitary Delivery Groups to focus on preparations for the new councils.

These are collaborative by definition and will be agile to take advantage of opportunities that may arise but relate to one of the new councils individually.

These workstreams will evolve and governance structures will develop to support the Shadow Authorities and establish the new authorities when permanent officers are appointed.

### Stakeholder engagement

We know we need to work closely with partners, staff and residents to avoid LGR having negative impacts on the quality or resilience of services in Kent.



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We know we need to communicate early, clearly and transparently with partners and provide opportunities for co-creation and innovation to improve how we work and set the right foundations for public service reform.

We are liaising with stakeholders and are developing an engagement plan to ensure proactive, timely and constructive conversation with stakeholders.

### **Our ambition for Day One**

To deliver a seamless transition from the perspective of our residents where those who rely on public services for their health or wellbeing continue to be protected.

We will lay the foundations for improved collaboration across the public sector and harnessing the benefits of transformation.

### **Our progress on implementation**

From our experience of reorganisation, we know the value of starting early.

We have a head start as we already work closely together and have a number of shared services, roles and contracts aligned with the new unitary structures.

To build upon this we are working collaboratively to:

- map our ICT infrastructure and enterprise architecture
- set up unitary delivery groups to identify and take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities such as shared roles or where contracts or licenses are expiring
- map our contracts to inform integration opportunities
- bring our service leads together to compare policies and processes and to identify opportunities
- clean up and standardise data across Kent
- establish a Project Management Office
- identify skills and capacity requirements to deliver the programme
- consider further shared roles and skills sharing across councils
- develop a datahub to drive forward the LGR process
- agree how sovereign councils in Kent will operate prior to vesting day
- maintain and transition our LGR programme Board and tools to power the programme
- stakeholder and resident engagement and a significant communications programme

## Summary risks and mitigations

We understand the risks LGR presents and are already working to mitigate them through our programme structure and approach:

- **Disaggregation** – we understand the challenge and risk of disaggregating key services and that this will take up significant programme capacity. We are planning early regarding Day One requirements and supporting services with significant capacity from workstreams to enable them to focus on their specific requirements.
- **Aggregation** – aggregating services requires alignment of policies, processes and systems in addition to fundamentals like organisational culture and ICT infrastructure. These can take time but are critical to achieving the benefits of local government reorganisation.
- **ICT capacity** – ICT is a key service, workstream and enabler of all services and elements of the programme and is a risk to the safe and legal function of the new councils.
- **Collaboration** – LGR requires collaboration across councils, tiers of local government, across political parties and with partners. We are mitigating this through:
  - Building on existing close working arrangements;
  - Developing ‘no regrets activities’ – a set of actions and decisions that we can deliver across Kent that will benefit the programme regardless of future decision;
  - Discussing protocols for how we will approach LGR.

We know the value of ‘good endings and safe beginnings’ and will setup the programme efficiently to maintain focus on service delivery in sovereign councils while setting up the future councils for success.

# Appendix 1: Options appraisal

This section includes:

**1a. Options appraisal approach**

**1b. Options appraisal results**

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## Options appraisal process

This appendix outlines the approach taken to appraise potential unitary options for Kent by the 14 local authorities. The appraisal was designed to ensure a robust, consistent and evidence-based assessment to support local decision-making on which options should progress to full business case development.

The options appraisal approach was rooted in government guidance, with alignment to the six local government reorganisation (LGR) criteria set out in the Secretary of State's letter dated 6th February 2025 and further clarified in June 2025.

The appraisal did not produce a ranked list of options or identify a preferred option.

Councils drew on the shared evidence base, alongside resident and stakeholder views, to inform their conclusions.

### Overview of the approach

The appraisal process followed five key stages:

#### **Step 1: Selection of options for appraisal**

The process began with the development of a longlist of 10 potential unitary options.

This longlist was informed by previous work carried out by local authorities, submissions to central government and extensive input from stakeholders, including council officers and Leaders.

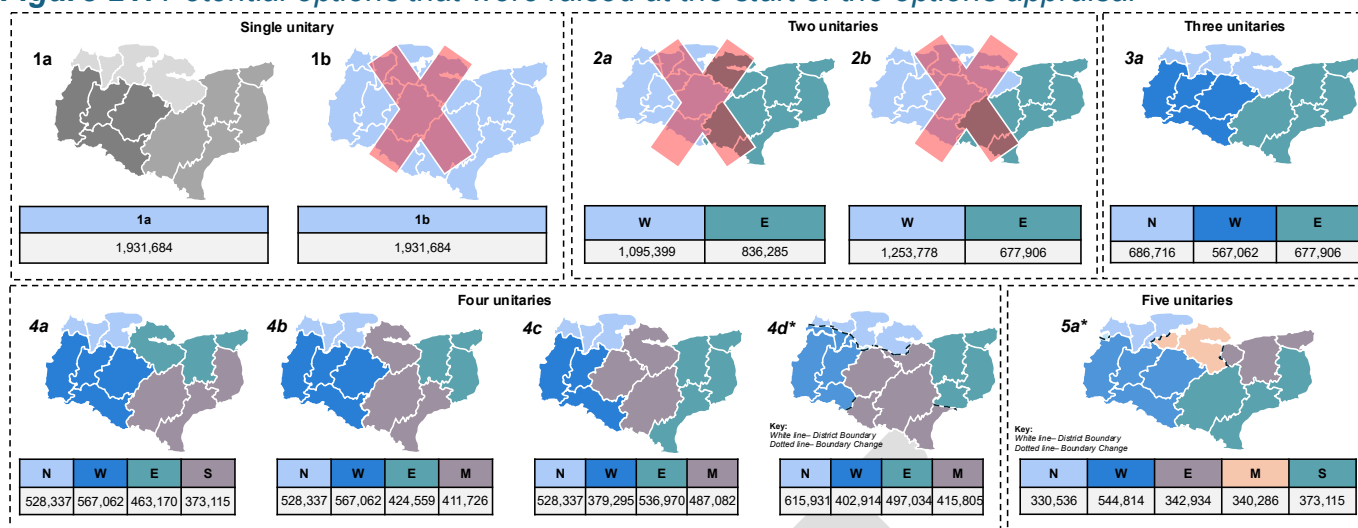
These options encompassed all permutations raised in prior discussions, including suggestions made during initial interviews and strategic workshops.

Following this initial development, a series of engagement sessions were held with Leaders from all 14 authorities.

Through these discussions, three options were jointly agreed to be out of scope for full appraisal, resulting in a refined shortlist of seven options to be taken forward for comprehensive evaluation.

This agreement marked a critical stage in the process, reinforcing the joint ownership of the appraisal exercise.

Figure 21: Potential options that were raised at the start of the options appraisal



\*To match the current total population of 1,931,684, we applied a proportional multiplier to the original figures for options with boundary changes. This preserves the relative population distribution across the four areas while ensuring the total aligns with up-to-date data.

## Step 2: Data collection and modelling

To assess each option, a comprehensive dataset was compiled using both publicly-available data sources and specific submissions from individual councils.

This ensured that the appraisal drew from a consistent and authoritative evidence base. Data was initially collected for each existing local authority and then aggregated or modelled to create a coherent picture of each potential new unitary configuration.

For options that involved redrawing boundaries, most notably options 4D and 5A, additional modelling was required.

This included the use of Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)-level population estimates to produce reliable approximations of how existing data would translate to proposed future geographies.

Where appropriate, other datasets not available at LSOA level, were looked at on a pro-rata basis and were based on population estimates to align with the proposed unitary boundaries.

The methodology applied population-weighted approaches and, where possible, consistent assumptions across datasets.

This modelling ensured the integrity and comparability of data across all options.

Figure 22: Example metrics

Example metrics gathered across all current authorities

Metric	Medway (unitary)	District councils											Kent County Council	Total / Average	
		Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone and Hythe	Gravesham	Maidstone	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge and Malling			Tunbridge Wells
Population (mid-2024)	292,655	140,936	162,100	125,011	119,768	112,411	110,671	187,767	122,748	158,379	142,691	136,853	119,694	1,639,029	1,931,684
Geographic area (sq km) (2024)	194	581	309	73	315	357	99	393	370	373	104	240	331	3,545	3,739
Population density (people per sq km) (2024)	1,509	243	525	1,712	380	315	1,118	478	332	425	1,372	570	362	462	517
Total GVA (£m) (2023)	7,657	3,939	4,352	4,343	3,277	2,802	2,206	5,550	5,098	3,633	2,588	5,406	4,114	47,308	54,965
GVA per capita (£) (2023)	26,164	27,949	26,848	34,741	27,361	24,926	19,933	29,558	41,532	22,939	18,137	39,502	34,371	28,863	28,454

Metrics consolidated by potential future unitary authority for options in scope

Metric	Option 1A	Option 3A (example)				Option 4A (example)				Option 5A (example)				
		N	W	E		N	W	E	S	N	W	E	M	S
Population (mid-2024)	1,931,684	686,716	567,062	677,906	528,337	567,062	463,170	373,115	330,536	544,814	342,934	340,286	373,115	
Geographic area (sq km) (2024)	3,739	739	1,334	1,666	366	1,334	786	1,253	287	1,267	503	429	1,253	
Population density (people per sq km) (2024)	517	929	425	407	1,444	425	589	298	1,151	430	682	793	298	
Total GVA (£m) (2023)	54,965	17,839	20,168	16,958	14,206	20,168	10,573	10,018	9,373	19,244	7,815	8,515	10,018	
GVA per capita (£) (2023)	28,454	25,977	35,566	25,015	26,888	35,566	22,827	26,850	28,356	35,322	22,788	25,024	26,850	

Step 3: Development of evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'

The appraisal was structured around fourteen evaluation criteria, developed directly in reference to the government’s six tests for LGR, as outlined in its correspondence dated 6 February 2025 and subsequent guidance issued in June 2025.

These criteria reflect key considerations such as efficiency, local identity, capacity to deliver sustainable services and readiness for devolution.

For each of the 14 evaluation criteria, a set of specific metrics was identified to enable detailed assessment.

Alongside each metric, a definition of 'what good looks like' was agreed to provide a consistent standard against which all options were evaluated.

While some elements of government guidance were treated as threshold requirements, e.g. minimum standards for all options, others were differentiating factors and thus formed part of the comparative framework.

Figure 23: Evaluation criteria and definition of 'what good looks like'

Evaluation criteria defined to structure options analysis

Headline Government Criteria	Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance
1. Establishing a single tier of local government	1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base
	1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs
	1.3 Single tier governance structures
2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks	2.1 Appropriate population size
	2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money
	2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities
	2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing
3. High quality and sustainable public services	3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation
	3.2 Public service reform and better value for money
	3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children’s services, SEND and homelessness
4. Working together to understand and meet local needs	4.1 Local identity, culture and historical importance
	4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns
5. Supporting devolution arrangements	5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority
6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	6.1 Enabling strong community engagement

Example of metrics to be assessed

1.1: Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base	
Metrics/factors	What does good look like?
Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita (2023) (£)	Balanced GVA per capita between unitaries, suggesting balanced levels of productivity and positive implications for the distribution of economic prosperity among residents
Total Gross Value Added (GVA) (2023) (£m)	Each unitary has a sufficient GVA to generate tax and there is balance between unitaries, meaning good long-term prospects for all future authorities
Council tax base (number of properties at Band D equivalent)	All authorities with a sufficient number and profile of properties to provide a council tax base which can sustainably support services, with a reasonable balance between authorities
Council Tax harmonisation / difference in Band D rates	District areas within a unitary have low to no difference between council tax rates. The least difference between councils within a unitary would provide minimal administrative and resident disruption in harmonising rates
Alignment to major Kent industries	Unitaries demonstrate alignment to one or more of the key industries



#### **Step 4: Assessment parameters and scoring methodology**

Each metric was assessed using a standard three-point scale: high, medium or low.

For most metrics, this scoring was determined through statistical balance analysis i.e. evaluating the degree of variation in outcomes across the proposed unitary authorities under each option.

The underlying principle was that a more balanced distribution of characteristics-, e.g. population size, financial resilience, service demand- across new authorities would indicate greater equity and resilience.

The scoring process followed a clear sequence:

1. Identify the range of values between councils under each option for each metric.
2. Determine percentile thresholds for categorising those ranges:
  - High = below 33rd percentile (most balanced)
  - Medium = 33rd to 66th percentile
  - Low = above 66th percentile (least balanced)
3. Assign scores for each option accordingly.

In cases where balance was not a relevant concept, i.e. for county-wide service considerations or unique single-unitary configurations such as Option 1A, bespoke scoring definitions were applied.

Additionally, to allow for further nuance in interpretation, intermediate scores such as Medium/High or Medium/Low were used where appropriate.

No weighting was applied to either the criteria or the metrics. Each was treated as equally important for the purposes of the appraisal.

The model is explicitly comparative: the scores for each option reflect how they perform relative to others in the shortlist, rather than against an absolute benchmark.

#### **Step 5: Assessment and presentation of results**

Each option was scored against every metric, producing an average score for each of the 14 evaluation criteria.

The results were presented via a visual dashboards, supplemented with detailed narrative and commentary to contextualise the findings and highlight key trade-offs or assumptions.

In some cases, particularly for Option 1A, which envisages a single county-wide unitary authority, additional analysis was undertaken to ensure comparability, given that balance metrics were not applicable in the same way as for multi-unitary options.

## Options appraisal results

All 14 councils worked together to complete an options appraisal prior to business case development. Following joint analysis, review and discussion, the options being put forward are those that Leaders believe are both workable and offer the best value for Kent.

Following the completion of the appraisal, Council Leaders convened to review the evidence presented.

During this meeting, they collectively identified preferred options to proceed to business case development.

This decision was informed both by the technical appraisal and by the views of their individual councils and local residents.

While the options appraisal itself did not rank or recommend a preferred outcome, it provided the objective foundation upon which political judgements and democratic input could be made.

**Figure 24:** Summary assessment by evaluation criteria

Headline Government Criteria	Evaluation criteria based on Government guidance	Summary assessment by option						
		1A*	3A	4A	4B	4C	4D	5A
1. Establishing a single tier of local government	1.1 Sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base	M	H	M/L	M	M/H	M	M/L
	1.2 Sensible geography to increase housing supply and meet local needs	M	H	M	M	L	M	M
	1.3 Single tier local government structures	L	L	M	M	M	H	M
2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks	2.1 Appropriate population size	M	H	M	H	M	L	L
	2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances and taxpayer value for money	H	H	M/L	M/L	M/L	M/L	L
	2.3 Transition costs and transformation opportunities	H	H	M	M	M	M/L	L
	2.4 Putting local government finances on a firmer financial footing	H	M	M/L	M/H	M/H	M/L	M
3. High quality and sustainable public services	3.1 Improving service delivery and avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation	M	H	M	M/H	M/L	M/L	M/L
	3.2 Public service reform and better value for money	M	M	M	M	M/L	M/L	M
	3.3 Impact on crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness	M	M	M/H	M	L	L	M
4. Working together to understand and meet local needs	4.1 Issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance	M/L	M	M	M	M	M	M
	4.2 Views expressed through local engagement, and ability to address any concerns	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Supporting devolution arrangements	5.1 Sensible population ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority	L	H	H	H	H	M	M
6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	6.1 Enabling strong community engagement	L	M	L	H	M	H	L

\*Option 1a appraised separately due to it proposing a single unitary and an innovative model of local government which is not suited to the appraisal methodology.

### Notes:

- Each evaluation criterion was scored as High, Medium, or Low, based on an average score derived from multiple metrics.
- For most metrics assessed, the process evaluated how well each option achieves balance across all proposed unitary authorities.
- The model is comparative, assessing how each option performs relative to other options assessed, rather than determining if an option is objectively good or bad.
- Minor differences between options still resulted in at least one option scoring High and one Low, due to the comparative nature of the model.

# Appendix 2: Financial modelling

This section includes:

**Financial context**

**Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling**

**Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model**

**Financial modelling summary outputs**

**Implementation costs**

**Reorganisation savings**

**Disaggregation costs**

**Phasing and payback period**

## 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

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Total external debt across Kent stands at £1,730m. Due to the provision of upper tier services, 26% of borrowing stands in Medway and 41% in the County Council. Three districts, (Dartford, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells) report no general fund borrowing.

### **Gross budget gap of existing councils**

The forecast total gross budget gap for all 14 councils by 2028/29 of **£138.3m**, has therefore not been included within the breakeven analysis.

However, there is recognition that if there were any budget gaps post vesting day, the recurring savings projected from our proposal could contribute to closing any future gross budget gaps across the new authorities.

The financial modelling does not take direct account of existing council budget gaps, which will need to be managed regardless of LGR.

### **Impact of Fair Funding 2.0 on Gross Budget Gap**

The Fair Funding Review is ongoing nationally. While considered by all councils across Kent, the complexity and uncertainty of the review mean it has not been modelled in detail.

There is recognition that Fair Funding 2.0 is likely to have an impact on councils' financial positions.

There are distinct additional needs in the county related to deprivation which are expected to benefit with the Fair Funding formula but no assumptions have been made within the gross budget gap assumptions above as it is not possible to quantify at this stage.

### **Dedicated Schools Grants**

The financial analysis assumes that all existing councils will manage their Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG) positions regardless of LGR, therefore DSG surplus or deficits (if any) have not been included within the breakeven analysis.

It will be the decision of each new authority to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation against any funding pressures observed from DSG.

The combined DSG deficit position as at 31 March 2025 was £150.1m (Medway Council had a £16.4m deficit and Kent County Council had a deficit balance of £133.7m).

Kent County Council entered the Department for Education's "Safety Valve" process in Summer 2022, which involves the local authority reforming its high needs systems and associated spending in return for additional funding to contribute to the historic deficit.

Deficits on the DSG is a national problem affecting county and unitary authorities.

At the present time these are being managed through a statutory override which enables a technical adjustment in the statutory statement of accounts to hold these deficits without recognising the impact against General Fund resources.

A consultation is expected by the government in 2026/27 on reforms to SEND, the root causes of deficits and to invite proposals for a resolution.

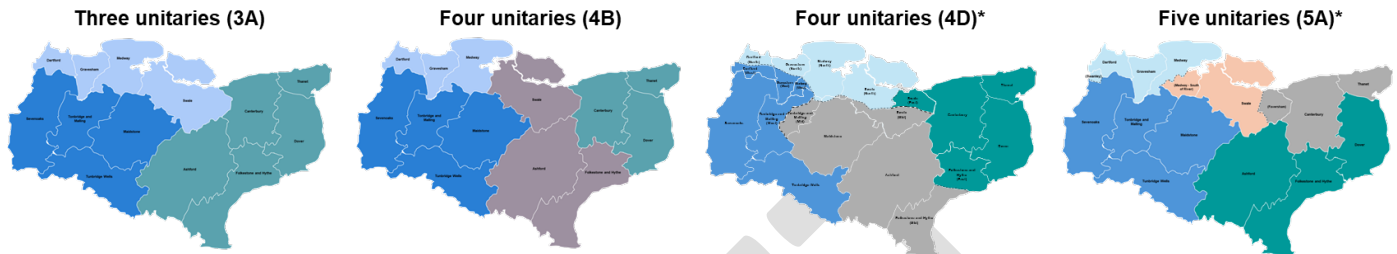
Members of the Shadow Authorities for the proposed unitary authorities will need to carefully consider proposed reforms in light of their local circumstances.

## Purpose and scope of LGR financial modelling

Financial modelling is a key component of the LGR proposal. Its purpose is to evaluate the financial implications of local government reorganisation across Kent in a consistent way across all LGR options.

### The LGR options in scope for financial modelling

A single approach to estimating financial impact of LGR was taken across four options for LGR:



### Purpose of financial model

The financial modelling aims to:

- estimate the financial impact of the evaluated reorganisation options
- compare options on a like-for-like basis, considering savings costs, and payback

### Limitations of scope to date

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

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

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

- LGR, while generally expected to be positive for local government finances in the long term, will not solve the cost, demand and associated funding challenges currently being faced. The scope of the financial modelling considers purely the impact of reorganisation, all other things being equal.
- The work carried out at this stage is not a full bottom-up exercise of the financial impact of LGR. Assumptions are based on the past LGR business cases produced to support other areas which have been through the LGR submission process in recent years.
- Due to the size and number of councils in Kent, there is not a fully comparable example of a recent programme to confidently benchmark against. Due to the level of complexity, payback periods in Kent may therefore be longer than some other reorganisations.
- The speed of delivery and level of savings post vesting day of the new councils will largely be determined by decisions already made by the predecessor authorities and those taken by the new authorities. These include decisions in relation to contractual obligations, borrowing, transformation and wider public service reform.
- A range has been applied specifically for disaggregation costs following collaborative discussions around different scenarios for the impact of LGR on commissioned spend across adult and children's social care.
- The financial modelling does not take account of how transition costs will be funded.

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- The assumptions in the model have not been tested against actual outturn data for any of the previous local government reorganisation programmes.
- Given the context above, the modelling should not be seen as a set of targets that new authorities may be held to account for, as setting the post-vesting day budget will be the responsibility of the new authorities.

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## Methodology and structure of the LGR financial model

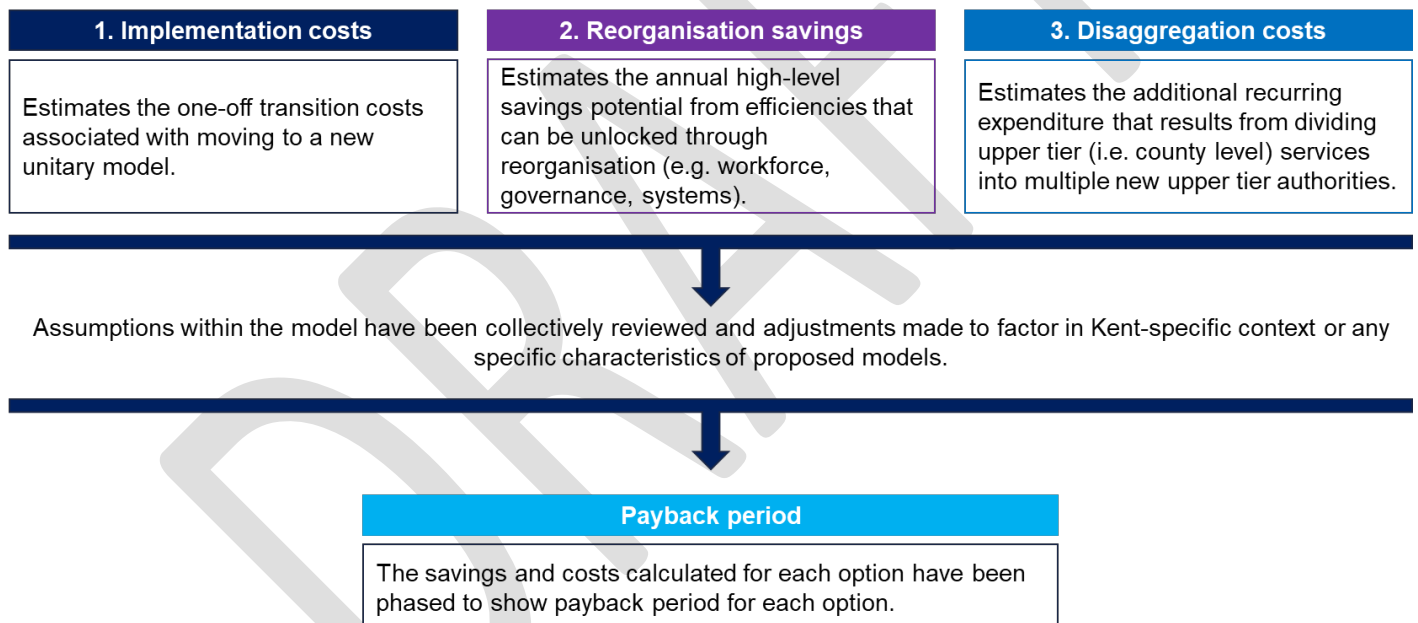
All finance officers across the 14 Kent councils have reviewed and adjusted financial modelling in order to provide a single financial assessment of models for inclusion in proposals to Government.

### Baselining

1. **Standardised data requests** were completed by all 14 councils, covering revenue budgets, reserves, capital plans, balance sheets and key service metrics. Alongside numerical data, contextual narrative was gathered to support understanding of pressures, risks, and transformation plans.
2. **A consolidated financial baseline** was created, using data returns to combine district, unitary and county budgets into unified figures based on agreed assumptions.
3. Baseline information was then used to create a **financial view of all proposed councils** under each of the five options being submitted to government.

### Three elements of the financial modelling

The financial model is made up of three calculators, which have been applied to all options:



Financial calculations are underpinned by benchmarking of previous LGR proposals and the estimated costs and benefits modelled in those reports, adjusted for the budgets, populations and current local government structures within Kent.

Adjustments have been made to reflect experience of local government reorganisation implementation and through discussion with all Section 151 Officers across Kent.

### Further detail of methodology

The calculation of each element of the model applied is explained separately within this section of the report.

## Financial modelling summary outputs

The key driver of difference between options are the number of councils being proposed. Due to the assumptions applied within the modelling, implementation costs and recurring costs of disaggregation increase as the number of councils proposed increases.

Our financial modelling shows:

- **Option 4D, a four-unitary model with boundary changes**, has been built on the same assumptions at Option 4B, but with additional one-off implementation costs due to boundary changes, resulting in an estimated payback period of 7.9 – 14.5 years.

**Table 32: Summary of financial modelling**

Option	Implementation costs (one-off) (£m)	Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m)	Disaggregation costs (£m)*	Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)**	Estimated payback period
4d	(135.9)	67.5	(32.9) - (48.6)	34.6 – 18.9	7.9 – 14.5 years

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

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

### Further analysis

The calculation of each element of the financial model is explained in the following pages.

## Implementation costs

**Implementation costs definition:** The estimated one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model.

### Method of calculation:

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of implementation costs per capita.
- Multiplied the benchmarked costs per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total implementation cost per unitary model.
- Applied an uplift of costs per additional unitary authority being created, due to additional costs through establishing governance structures, IT systems, administrative frameworks, etc.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. A specific uplift of £5m was added to reflect the additional complexity and implementation effort to deliver boundary changes.

### Implementation costs

*Table 33: Implementation cost summary*

Option	Implementation costs (£m)	Commentary
4D	(135.9)	Additional £5m added to implementation costs compared to Option 4B due to additional complexity associated with boundary changes.

### Categories of implementation cost

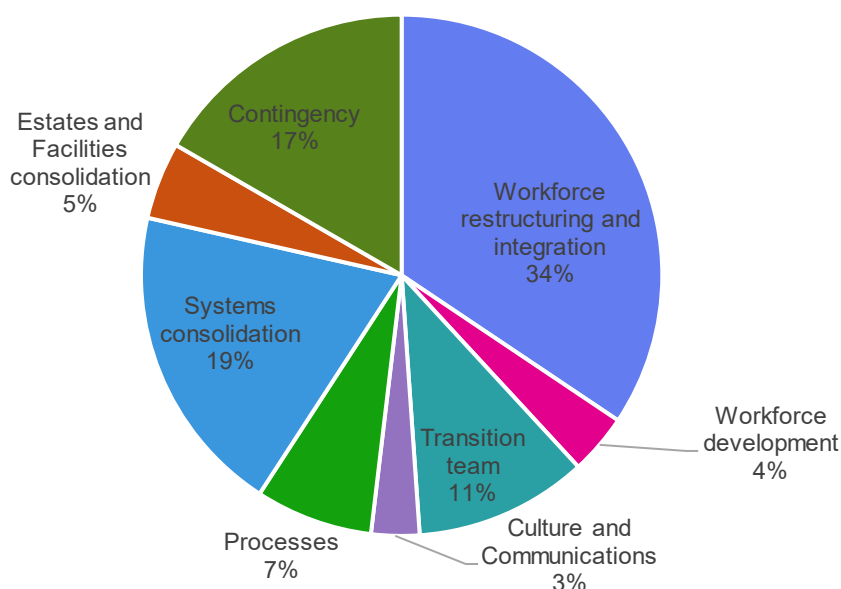
As part of implementation cost benchmarking, categories of implementation costs have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of costs, for any of the LGR options.

*Table 34: Implementation cost categories*

Implementation cost category	Description
<b>Workforce restructuring and integration</b>	Costs associated with delivering TUPE and salary harmonisation processes. Compensation paid to employees as a result of any redundancies and pension strain. <b>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.</b>
<b>Workforce development</b>	Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities.
<b>Transition team</b>	Transition and implementation programme teams including programme management, legal, finance, contract management, finance and other specialist support.
<b>Culture and Communications</b>	Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities.

<b>Processes</b>	Harmonising processes and facilitating effective service transition, including specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition and new policies and procedures.
<b>Systems consolidation</b>	Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration and cyber security.
<b>Estates and Facilities consolidation</b>	Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases.
<b>Contingency</b>	Additional 20% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates.

*Figure 25: Implementation cost distribution*



### Phasing of implementation costs

One-off implementation costs have been assumed to start ramping-up from the shadow year and build up by Year 4. The majority of costs are incurred in year 2 and year 3, where the most staff exit costs are expected to be incurred. The phasing of the contingency reflected the overall phasing of costs.

*Table 35: Implementation cost summary*

Implementation cost category	Shadow Year (FY27/28)	Year 1 (FY28/29)	Year 2 (FY29/30)	Year 3 (FY30/31)	Year 4 (FY31/32)
<b>Workforce restructuring and integration</b>	5%	15%	20%	60%	-
<b>Workforce development</b>	10%	50%	40%	-	-
<b>Transition team</b>	25%	30%	30%	15%	-
<b>Culture and Communications</b>	20%	50%	30%	-	-
<b>Processes</b>	5%	15%	30%	30%	20%

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<b>Systems consolidation</b>	5%	15%	30%	30%	20%
<b>Estates and Facilities consolidation</b>	-	5%	25%	30%	40%
<b>Contingency</b>	10%	25%	30%	25%	10%

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## Reorganisation savings

**Reorganisation savings (gross) definition:** The estimated annual savings from efficiencies achieved through reorganisation, moving from two tiers to one tier of local government, by removing duplication, consolidating services and operating at greater scale.

### Method of calculation:

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of savings per capita achievable through LGR.
- Multiplied the benchmarked savings per capita figure by the total population of Kent to arrive at an estimated total saving for per unitary model.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Kent and assumptions around the models being proposed. This included a reduction in the total savings achievable and contingency being added to the model.
- Applied a dilution of savings for the number of unitary authorities being created, due to reduced ability to operate at scale.

## Reorganisation savings

*Table 36: Reorganisation savings summary*

Option	Gross reorganisation savings (£m)	Commentary
4D	67.5	Gross savings marginally lower than 3A and higher than 5A due to economies of scale.

## Categories of reorganisation saving

As part of benchmarking LGR revenue savings, categories of savings have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of savings.

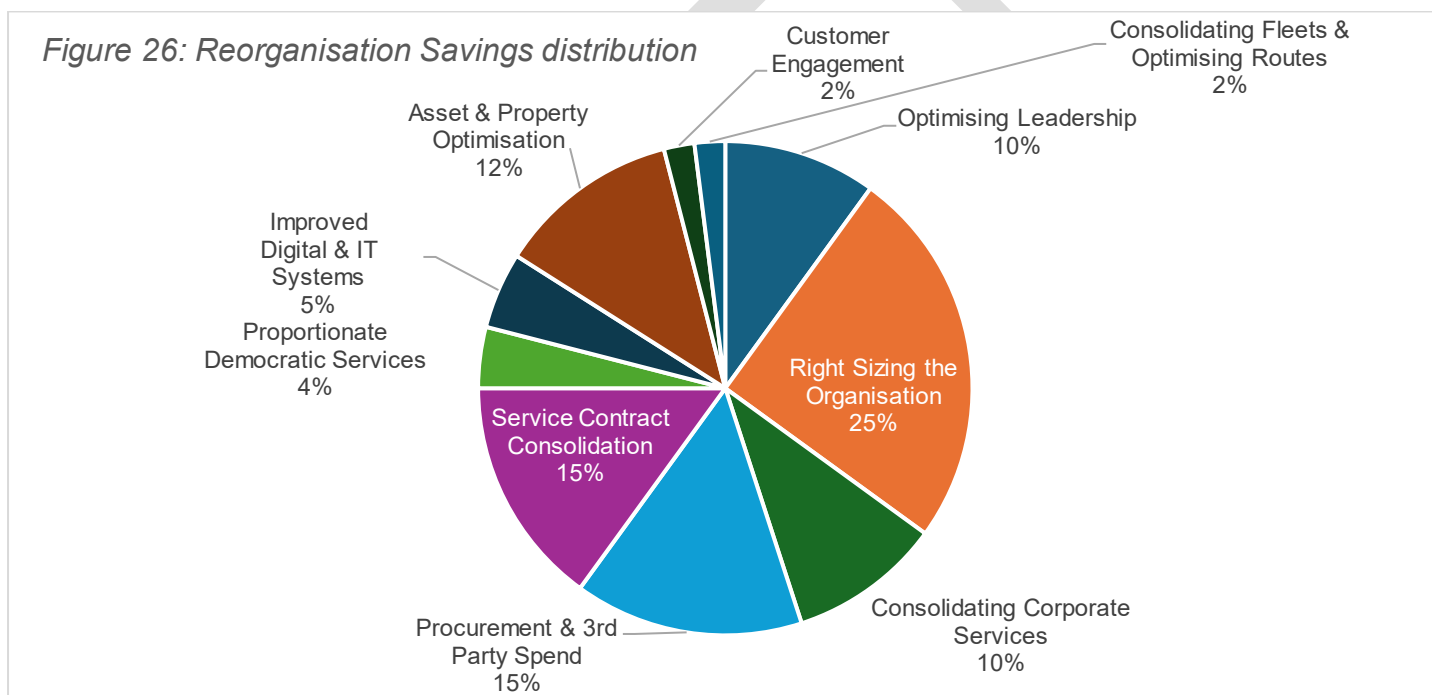
*Table 37: Savings categories*

Savings category	Description
<b>Optimising Leadership</b>	Reducing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication by merging similar responsibilities into fewer positions.
<b>Right Sizing the Organisation</b>	Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation.
<b>Consolidating Corporate Services</b>	Consolidating back-office functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT).
<b>Service Contract Consolidation</b>	Implementing new sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced, potentially leading to financial and operational efficiency.
<b>Procurement &amp; 3rd Party Spend</b>	Centralising procurement, leading to an increase in relative purchasing power and renegotiating terms with suppliers.

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<b>Democratic Services</b>	Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (eg committees, elections).
<b>Improved Digital &amp; IT Systems</b>	Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes.
<b>Asset &amp; Property Optimisation</b>	Reducing asset and property portfolio to align with council needs.
<b>Customer Engagement</b>	Enhancing customer contact facilities and developing a combined approach to managing customer contact centre, where appropriate including digital self-service.
<b>Consolidating Fleets &amp; Optimising Routes</b>	Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs.
<b>Contingency</b>	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.



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

### Phasing of reorganisation savings

Savings are realised to their entirety by Year 6 and are then ongoing. Most savings are achieved in year 3. A 10% negative contingency has been applied to reflect risk and has been phased in line with when other savings are achieved.

**Table 38: Savings summary**

Reorganisation savings category	Year 1 (FY28/29)	Year 2 (FY29/30)	Year 3 (FY30/31)	Year 4 (FY31/32)	Year 5 (FY32/33)
<b>Optimising Leadership</b>	10%	20%	40%	20%	10%
<b>Right Sizing the Organisation</b>	10%	20%	40%	20%	10%



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<b>Consolidating Corporate Services</b>	10%	20%	40%	20%	10%
<b>Procurement &amp; 3rd Party Spend</b>	10%	20%	30%	20%	20%
<b>Service Contract Consolidation</b>	10%	20%	30%	20%	20%
<b>Democratic Services</b>	80%	20%	-	-	-
<b>Improved Digital &amp; IT Systems</b>	5%	15%	30%	25%	25%
<b>Asset &amp; Property Optimisation</b>	10%	15%	25%	25%	25%
<b>Customer Engagement</b>	20%	40%	40%	-	-
<b>Consolidating Fleets &amp; Optimising Routes</b>	-	20%	45%	35%	-
<b>Contingency</b>	15%	20%	30%	20%	15%

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## Disaggregation costs

**Disaggregation costs definition:** The estimated additional recurring expenditure that results from dividing upper tier (i.e. county level) services into multiple new unitary authorities.

### Method of calculation:

- Identified core service categories where disaggregation will drive cost increases as: adult social care, children's services, housing, place services, and corporate and support services.
- Allocated Kent County Council net revenue spend against cost categories defined.
- Applied percentages of additional spend to each cost category to uplift total costs in line with benchmarking from previous LGR cases, to estimate the future level of spend of each cost category.
- Applied an additional uplift to the level of disaggregation costs for each additional unitary being proposed.

### Disaggregation costs

Disaggregation costs are the most significant differentiator between financial model outputs for each option. For each additional council proposed there are assumed to be additional costs, including those associated with management, commissioning and corporate services.

Whilst the costs are significant, it is important to view these within the context of the overall cost of delivering these services. The Kent County Council net revenue expenditure is budgeted to be £1,699m, including £722m for adult social care and £280m for children's services<sup>45</sup>.

**Table 39: Disaggregation costs**

Option	Disaggregation costs (£m)	Commentary
4D	(32.9) - (48.6)	Two additional sets of 'upper tier' services means higher disaggregation costs than a three-unitary model.

### Categories of disaggregation costs

As part of calculating disaggregation costs, costs increase by category of spend have been calculated, as summarised below.

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

<sup>45</sup> 2025/26 RA return and Financial returns submitted by Kent County Council

**Table 40: Disaggregation cost categories and uplift percentages**

Disaggregation cost category	Description	Disaggregation cost uplift (one additional upper tier authority) %
Adult social care	Duplication of some current adult social care management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend.	0.7% - 1.8%
Children’s services	Duplication of some current children’s services management and staffing costs and potential for additional cost of commissioned spend.	2.5% - 3%
Place services	Duplication of some current place services including management and staffing costs, and additional costs of commissioned spend.	3.5%
Corporate and support services	Duplication of corporate & support services management, staffing and systems.	3.8%

**Phasing of disaggregation costs**

All disaggregation costs are assumed to be incurred annually from Day 1 of the new authorities.

## Payback period

**Payback period definition:** the period taken to reach a net positive financial impact of LGR, once all one-off and recurring savings have been considered.

### Cumulative financial benefit and payback period

Set out below is the year-by-year breakdown of the financial impact of LGR, considering both one-off costs and recurring benefits / costs.

The payback period is driven by the outputs of the three calculators (reorganisation savings, disaggregation costs and implementation costs), and the phasing assumptions explained earlier in this Appendix.

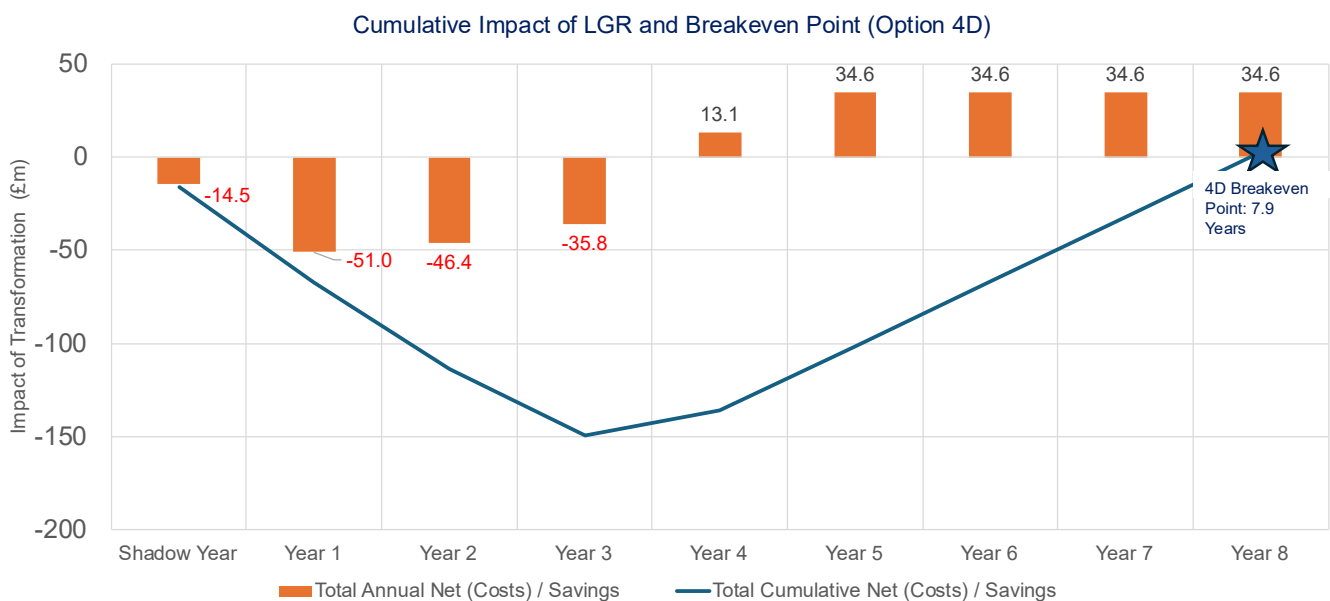
**Table 41: Payback period summary**

Option	Implementation costs (one-off) (£m)	Recurring annual revenue savings (£m)	Estimated payback period	Commentary
4D	(135.9)	34.6 – 18.9	7.9 – 14.5 years	Implementation complexity, costs increase and additional cost due to boundary revisions.

### Payback period

Set out in the figure below is the estimated cumulative financial impact of LGR for the four modelled options.

**Figure 27: Payback period**



\*Chart shows payback period with disaggregation costs at the lowest end of the range

## 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) <sup>46</sup>	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) <sup>47</sup>	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) <sup>46</sup>	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) <sup>48</sup>	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) <sup>48</sup>	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 <sup>49</sup>	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

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales>

<sup>47</sup> [Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas \(December 2023\) in the UK](#)

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities>

<sup>49</sup> [LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics](#)

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Metric	1A	3A			4B				4D				5A				
	All	North	West	East	North	West	East	Mid	North	West	East	Mid	North	West	East	Mid	South
Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (FY28/29) <sup>50</sup>	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) <sup>50</sup>	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) <sup>50</sup>	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) <sup>50</sup>	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) <sup>50</sup>	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 % <sup>50</sup>	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) <sup>50</sup>	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) <sup>50</sup>	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

<sup>50</sup> Financial data return submitted by councils

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(FY28/29) (£m) <sup>50</sup>																		
Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024- 25) <sup>51</sup>	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) <sup>50</sup>	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) <sup>52</sup>	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) <sup>53</sup>	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 % <sup>54</sup>	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) <sup>55</sup>	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 (%) <sup>56</sup>	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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<sup>51</sup> [National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>52</sup> [Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>53</sup> [Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>54</sup> [Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>55</sup> [Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Local authority green belt statistics for England: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)



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	All	North	West	East	North	West	East	Mid	North	West	East	Mid	North	West	East	Mid	South
Number of children in children's social care as % total population (2023-2024) <sup>57</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>59</sup>	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) (%) <sup>60</sup>	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) (%) <sup>60</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	360	277	361	451	176	361	464	511	257	347	470	399	303	360	474	219	448

<sup>57</sup> KCC analysis (districts) & ONS data (Medway) - <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2024>

<sup>58</sup> Data from individual councils

<sup>59</sup> KCC analysis (districts) & LG inform data (Medway) - <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/search/26797?text=Number+of+total+EHCP>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2024>

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Active EHCPs by School District (as of Oct 2025) <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	1,689	658	420	611	476	420	447	346	590	245	521	333	279	405	357	350	298
NEET Rate per 10,000 <sup>58</sup>	348	385	283	370	360	283	425	351	385	237	404	335	329	285	415	422	337
Child in Need Plans (Mar 2025) <sup>58</sup>	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 <sup>58</sup>	87	92	65	104	94	65	104	95	93	62	103	85	82	65	100	100	105
Child Protection Plans (Mar 2025) <sup>58</sup>	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 <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	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 <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>58</sup>	328	114	30	184	92	30	119	87	100	25	141	61	62	30	103	47	86
UASC looked after - Rate per 10,000 <sup>58</sup>	8	7	2	14	7	2	14	10	7	3	14	7	8	2	15	6	11
Kent LAC Starts (2024/25) <sup>58</sup>	745	353	93	299	271	93	205	176	320	77	245	103	131	90	156	205	163
Kent LAC Starts Rate per 10,000 <sup>58</sup>	22	27	9	27	27	9	30	25	28	11	29	14	21	9	28	33	27

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Other Local Authority Looked After Children (OLA LAC) placed in Kent (Mar 2025) <sup>58</sup>	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 <sup>58</sup>	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) <sup>61</sup>	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) <sup>61</sup>	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) <sup>62</sup>	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) <sup>62</sup>	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) <sup>62</sup>	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

<sup>61</sup> 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](https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=23182&mod-area=E06000035&mod-group=AllUnitaryLainCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup)

<sup>62</sup> Data from individual councils

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long term support during the year (2024-2025) <sup>62</sup>																	
People aged 18 and over with Learning Disabilities accessing long term support during the year - rate per 100,000 population (2024-2025) <sup>62</sup>	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) <sup>62</sup>	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) <sup>62</sup>	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) <sup>62</sup>	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) <sup>62</sup>	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) <sup>62</sup>	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) <sup>62</sup>	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

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support during the year (65+) (2024/2025) <sup>62</sup>																	
People accessing long term support during the year - rate per 10,000 population (65+) (2024-2025) <sup>62</sup>	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 <sup>63</sup>	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) <sup>63</sup>	658	205	214	239	151	214	149	144	180	154	181	143	118	203	123	85	129
Councillor to electorate ratio (current) <sup>63</sup>	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) (%) <sup>64</sup>	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%

<sup>63</sup> Publicly available data

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202324-annual-publication>