

Medway Council
Meeting of Business Support and Digital Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 2 October 2025

9.10pm to 10.41pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Tejan (Chairperson), Hamilton (Vice-Chairperson), Bowen, Brake, Finch, Hackwell BEM, Jones, McDonald, Nestorov, Perfect and Mark Prenter

Substitutes: Councillors:
Animashaun (Substitute for Browne)
Mrs Turpin (Substitute for Pearce)

In Attendance: Steve Dickens, Democratic Services Officer
Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director, Legal and Governance
Richard Hicks, Chief Executive
Councillor Vince Maple, Leader of the Council

327 Apologies for absence

328 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 21 August 2025 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

329 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

The Chairperson, the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive passed on their condolences for the victims and their families of the attack that had taken place earlier in the day at a synagogue in Manchester.

The Leader added that the Council was working closely with Kent Police and Chatham Synagogue to ensure that it received additional protection required.

330 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests (DPI)

There were none.

Other significant Interests (OSI)

There were none.

Other Interests

There were none.

331 Call-in: Local Government Reorganisation

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Legal and Governance introduced the report, he explained that the meeting had been arranged following the call in of Cabinet decisions 133/2025 and 134/2025 which agreed to progress the full business case for the Medway option (known as 4d) for Local Government Reorganisation. Proposals must be submitted to government by 28 November.

He added that it was the opinion of the S151 Officer and himself as Monitoring Officer that both decisions were within the Budget and Policy framework.

Reasons for Call-in – the lead Member for the call-in set out there were three principal concerns which led to the decision reasons of the call in. They were as follows:

Financial prudence - the cost of developing the business case for government could not be afforded in the current financial circumstances. The Member stated that the Council was currently reliant on Exception Financial Support (EFS) from government and Round One Revenue Budget monitoring showed a projected overspend of £10.9m which was in excess of the Council's general reserves. The allocated monies for the business case would in the view of the Member be better used to reduce the overspend.

Change in strategic direction – the administration had announced its own preferred map (known as 4d), without consultation with other authorities, external partners and without consideration by the Member working group. The plan had subsequently received significant criticism from other authorities in Kent and had not been chosen as one of the two preferred plans to progress, so there was no support for the Medway option.

Scope of the Business Case - the third concern of the group was that the business plan lacked clarity and without support from other authorities would not be satisfactory. The Member added that he felt this had harmed the Council's reputation in the region.

Response from the Leader of the Council - the Leader attended the meeting to respond on behalf of the decision made at Cabinet; he stated that Local Government Reorganisation represented a once in a lifetime opportunity to review local government to set the right boundaries for the future for residents. He referenced each concern as follows:

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Financial situation – the Leader acknowledged the Council's difficult financial circumstances; however, he stated that the Council was making progress, and the ambition of the Administration was to balance the budget without recourse to Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) in 2026/27. The monies spent on building the business case came from the budget for LGR which was agreed at budget Council. It was not therefore additional costs or overspend.

With regard to the Council's strategic direction in response to local government reform, the Leader stated that the administration had always held a clear preference for four councils in the Kent region but not for a single detailed plan for a four authority option. The Leader added that he had always been clear that Medway may propose their own version of a four council region and many authorities across the country and in the Kent region have made their own proposals. The other proposals used current boundaries, and the Medway option did not. The Government was likely to receive five plans from the Kent region, the two options agreed by Kent Leaders to go forwards, and individual plans from Medway Council, Kent County Council and Dartford & Gravesham Borough Council's.

In terms of the business case for the Medway model, the Leader stated that the Medway option was a strong proposal and considered it would receive the highest ranking under the criteria of creating a single tier of local government, and the highest ranking for community empowerment.

Members discussed the following issues:

Council finances – a Member commented that the Council sought to make savings on all budget areas and the monies proposed to use in building the business case would represent an opportunity to make savings and reduce the projected overspend.

The Chief Executive stated that the business case for the two proposals which have gone forward from Kent Leaders would be paid from the central government grant provided to the region. The costs for the additional proposals highlighted by the leader from Medway Council, Kent County Council, and Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils would be borne by those councils. For Medway the cost would be £105,000. This work would be undertaken by the same consultants as the those proposals paid for by government. Kent County Council was developing their own proposal and much of this work was being completed in house.

He added that in terms of recruitment to the policy team, the Council had begun the recruitment process in the new financial year, however, the inevitable timelines meant that the team was not immediately recruited to, resulting in an underspend against the agreed budget.

A Member commented that undertaking the business case ensured that Medway had a voice in the proposals which were provided to government. The decision to complete the work required to support the proposal did not commit

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Medway to a particular proposal, rather it ensured the work was completed. Other authorities in the region were also working on additional proposals, consequently, Medway should be supported to make its own proposals. In his view, the Medway model was a strong proposal based on the principles for reform laid out by the government.

A Member commented that £105,000 represented a small amount in comparison to the annual budget. However, in her view the map looked very similar to the other four authority being put forward by other Kent leaders, she requested further information about the differences between the Medway and other local authority proposals.

The Leader stated that the Medway proposals did not use current boundaries and instead reflected how residents lived in daily work, travel and leisure activities rather than previous boundaries. He added that the proposals would be the basis of local government for the next fifty years, it was his view that in that time, three authorities would be very remote from much of the population. Full Council would meet to discuss the proposals on 13 November 2025, before any submission was made to government and Members would be able to support one of five proposals outlined or to not support any proposal.

A Member commented that he was unaware of any support for the Administration's proposal, which was the only plan that made significant changes to other parts of Kent without having consulted the affected authorities. If there had been support for the proposal from other parts of Kent, it would have gone forward, however, there was no support for the proposal.

A Member agreed, and stated that public consultation was required, as the public view had not yet been tested. The Leader indicated formal consultation would be undertaken by the government next year prior to the final decision which would be provided before parliament rose for summer recess in July 2026. However, the Council was engaging with the public as part of the county wide engagement exercise led by Canterbury on behalf of the Kent leaders. The Kent Leaders had been respectful of the potential options and had not rejected any proposal. The Leader stated it was likely there would be five options put forward for consideration by government.

A Member commented that he supported a four unitary authority model that reflected how the public lived and would be co terminus with NHS boundaries.

A Member commented that the government would make the final decision, and it was likely that the investment of £105,000 in building the business case would fail. The Leader stated that there would be five options put forward, so four of them would be lost, but a business case would be required to take Medway's proposal forward.

A Member commented that the cost of the business case was 36p per resident to enable Medway to put forward a business case and an evidence-based submission. It therefore presented a sensible investment to ensure Medway could make the business case to government for its proposals.

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A Member asked if it was a requirement to spend the monies in building the business case. The Chief Executive stated that Medway had to have a full business case to submit its own proposals to government. KMPG would undertake the work and had been contracted to undertake similar work by a number of authorities across the country.

He added that the Council would continue to discuss LGR with the other Kent authorities on a weekly basis, the Council was also in regular contact with external partners and engaging with the public through county-wide survey and the forthcoming Medway Matters Live event, with 230 attendees already signed up for it.

A recommendation was moved that the Committee refer the decisions back to Cabinet for reconsideration. In accordance with rule 12.4 of the Council rules, a recorded vote was held on the proposal as follows:

For: Councillors Brake, Finch, Hackwell, Perfect, Tejan (5)

Against: Councillors Animashaun, Bowen, Hamilton, Jones, McDonald, Nestorov, Prenter, Turpin (8)

Upon being put the vote, the proposal was lost.

Decision:

The Committee accepted the Cabinet decision and took no further action.

Chairperson

Date:

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