

Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20 August 2026

Local Government Reorganisation

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Summary

This report provides information on the Government's decision on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) of option 4B for Kent and Medway, the implementation programme, national context, governance arrangements, and the relationship between LGR and devolution. Whilst the Council's preferred option was not adopted, the focus now shifts to ensuring successful implementation and securing the best outcomes for residents.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Committee is recommended to note the Government's decision to establish four unitary authorities across Kent and Medway.
- 1.2. The Committee is recommended to note the implementation timetable, governance arrangements, and workstreams.
- 1.3. The Committee is recommended to note the wider implications of devolution and the future Mayoral Strategic Authority.
- 1.4. The Committee is recommended to agree to receive further quarterly progress reports as the implementation programme develops.

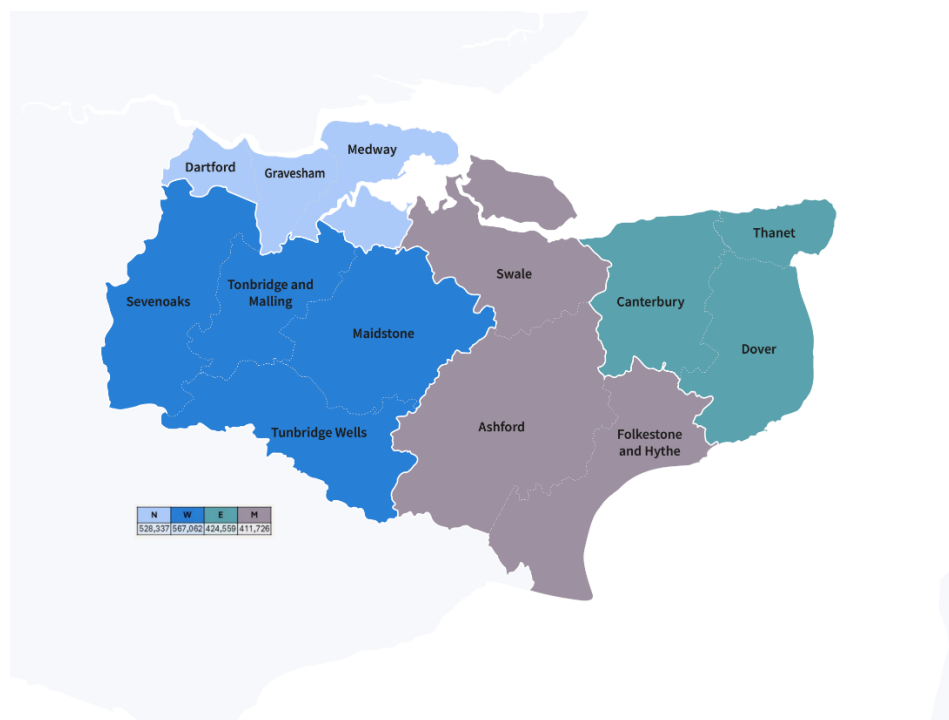
2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. This report is for information only and sits within the Council's approved policy framework.

3. Background

3.1. Government decision

- 3.1.1. The Secretary of State has decided that Kent and Medway will be reorganised into four unitary authorities. The decision confirms Option 4B as the Government's preferred model. Whilst Medway supported Option 4D, the decision provides certainty and allows the programme to move from option development into implementation.
- 3.1.2. The future North Kent Council will comprise Medway, Dartford and Gravesham. The new authority will deliver all principal local government services currently split across county and district councils, creating a single organisation accountable for local services.



3.2. National picture

- 3.2.1. Alongside the Government's announced decisions across 13 reorganisation areas, replacing 134 councils with 38 unitary authorities. Kent and Medway is one of the largest implementation programmes nationally, serving around 1.93 million residents. The table below sets out some information on the most recent decisions compared with Kent and Medway.

Area	Previous councils	No of new UAs	Average population	Boundary changes
Derby and Derbyshire	10	2	538,000	Yes
Devon, Plymouth and Torbay	11	4	313,000	Yes
East Sussex and Brighton and Hove (<i>DPP area</i>)	7	2	431,000	Yes
Gloucestershire	7	1	659,000	No
Hertfordshire	11	4	309,000	Yes
Kent and Medway	14	4	482,000	No
Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool	15	4	400,000	No
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland	10	2	603,000	Yes
Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire	10	4	276,000	Yes
Nottingham and Nottinghamshire	9	2	586,000	Yes
Oxfordshire	6	3	311,000	Yes
Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent	10	2	588,000	No
Warwickshire	6	2	308,000	No
Worcestershire	7	2	309,000	No

3.3. Structural Changes Order

3.3.1. The Structural Changes Order (SCO) is a primary legal instrument that provides the statutory basis for creating the new councils, abolishing predecessor authorities and establishing transition arrangements. Broad timescales are as follows:

- By the 17 August Kent and Medway councils submit outstanding information on Returning Officers, interim warding arrangements, and Parish election alignment.
- Over the summer we will submit our final representations to Government on the SCO for it to go through Parliament.
- Planning for elections will begin in Autumn 2026
- The SCO progresses through the statutory Parliamentary approval process before coming into force in 2027.

3.4. Shadow Authority

3.4.1. Elections to the new shadow authority will be held on 6 May 2027, this is an important step in creating the future organisation and ensuring the necessary decisions can be made ahead of vesting day.

3.4.2. A shadow council is a temporary body made up of the newly elected councillors who will oversee the next steps in preparing for vesting day on 1 April 2028. Members to the Shadow authority will be elected for a period of five years. Following these elections, a new Leader and Chief Executive Officer for the new authority will be appointed. They will play a central role in shaping the organisation, setting strategic direction and leading preparations for the launch of the new council.

3.5. Section 24 Order

- 3.5.1. Government has indicated that Section 24 Directions (as set out in the [Local Government and Public Engagement in Health Act 2007](#)) will be issued following the making of the Structural Changes Order. These Directions are intended to safeguard the future authorities by requiring predecessor councils to obtain appropriate consent before entering into significant contracts, disposing of strategic assets or making major financial commitments during the transition period.
- 3.5.2. Further supporting legislation and transfer schemes will subsequently provide for the transfer of staff, assets, liabilities, contracts, pension arrangements, Housing Revenue Account responsibilities and other statutory functions required to establish the new authorities on Vesting Day.

3.6. Joint Committees and governance

- 3.6.1. In accordance with Government guidance, Joint Committees will be established for each future unitary authority area. These committees will provide strategic oversight of implementation activity across predecessor councils, enabling decisions to be coordinated consistently throughout the transition period and ensuring that the interests of the future authorities are represented prior to Vesting Day.
- 3.6.2. The establishment of Joint Committees represents an important stage in the transition programme, providing the governance framework through which implementation decisions can be coordinated across organisational boundaries while ensuring preparation remains aligned with Government expectations and statutory requirements.
- 3.6.3. The principal objective throughout this period remains to ensure that the new North Kent Council is safe, legal and fully operational from its first day of operation. In light of this it has been agreed that a voluntary Joint Committee will be established prior to the SCO coming into force.

3.7. Implementation Team

- 3.7.1. It was agreed that Amanda Beer, Chief Executive of Kent County Council will be the County-wide Senior Responsible Officer, and Richard Hicks, Chief Executive of Medway Council to act Deputy Senior Responsible Officer. Place Leads for each of the four areas are expected to be appointed from 25 August 2026 to provide geographic leadership across the programme.
- 3.7.2. These positions will be supported by a PMO covering the county-wide activity led by Tim Woolmer, LGR Programme Director and a soon to be appointed strategic partner.

3.8. Warding arrangements

- 3.8.1. Electoral arrangements represent an important component of the implementation programme and will underpin the democratic governance of the future North Kent authority. These arrangements provide the initial basis upon which electoral arrangements will be developed ahead of the shadow authority elections scheduled for May 2027.
- 3.8.2. Detailed consideration of electoral divisions and ward boundaries will continue through the statutory processes led by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.
- 3.8.3. Members should note that the warding proposals presented within the original 4B business case are intended to inform this process and may therefore be subject to further review before the future electoral arrangements are finalised. These are set out by way of a reminder in Table 2 below which shows the draft proposed Councillor numbers per Council as set out in the 4B business case.

	North Kent	West Kent	East Kent	Mid Kent	Total
Electorate*	370,367	411,740	304,480	297,060	1,383,647
Electoral boundaries					
Divisions, assuming 2-member divisions split into two	11	28	22	20	81
Medway Wards	24	-	-		24
Calculation					
3 councillors per division (current KCC area)	33	84	66	60	243
2 members per Medway ward	48				48
Proposed number of councillors	81	84	66	60	291
Electorate to councillor ratio	1: 4,572	1: 4,902	1: 4,613	1: 4,951	1: 4,755

* Electorate figures source: data provided by Kent County Council related to elections in May 2025 and ONS data for Medway.

3.9. Programme delivery

- 3.9.1. With the Government's decision now confirmed, the implementation programme has entered a new phase focused upon detailed planning and delivery. The Medway Programme Management Office (PMO) will continue

to coordinate implementation activity on behalf of the Council whilst working closely with the county-wide implementation team and partner authorities.

- 3.9.2. Its role will include maintaining programme governance, coordinating workstreams, monitoring delivery, managing dependencies and ensuring that statutory milestones are achieved.
- 3.9.3. To support implementation, a comprehensive project plan has developed alongside practical guidance, templates and programme resources to assist services in preparing for transition. This will continue to evolve as we progress through the stages of LGR delivery.
- 3.9.4. Government has also confirmed that a strategic delivery partner will be appointed to provide additional specialist capacity and programme expertise across Kent and Medway.
- 3.9.5. Existing county-wide Priority Activity Groups have now transitioned into seven strategic Theme Boards responsible for overseeing implementation across the principal service areas:
 - Adults
 - Children
 - Place
 - Community, Housing and Public Health
 - Finance, Assets and Procurement
 - Governance, Legal and Democratic Services
 - Digital, Data, Technology and ICT
- 3.9.6. Reporting beneath these Theme Boards will be approximately 40 to 45 individual service workstreams responsible for developing detailed implementation proposals across every area of local government activity.
- 3.9.7. This governance model provides a clear structure for managing one of the largest organisational change programmes ever undertaken across Kent and Medway.
- 3.10. Communications and engagement
 - 3.10.1. Effective communication and engagement will remain fundamental to the successful delivery of the LGR programme delivery.
 - 3.10.2. The Government's decision provides certainty regarding the future organisational model and allows engagement activity to move beyond option development towards implementation planning. The Council will continue to provide regular updates to Members, employees, recognised trade unions, partners and residents as further decisions are made.
 - 3.10.3. As programme planning progresses, both internal and external communications activity will increasingly focus upon explaining implementation decisions, providing clarity regarding future governance arrangements and supporting staff through the transition period. Maintaining

clear, timely and consistent communications will be essential to sustaining confidence in the programme and ensuring stakeholders understand both the rationale for decisions and the practical implications of LGR and future Devolution.

3.11. Devolution

3.11.1. Alongside its decisions on Local Government Reorganisation, Government has reaffirmed its commitment to a strengthened programme of English devolution. With the appointment of a new Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, we know that Government now views LGR as the organisational foundation upon which future devolution arrangements will be built at pace.

3.11.2. The creation of four new unitary authorities across Kent and Medway therefore represents not only a structural change to local government but also an important milestone in preparing the area for a future Mayoral Strategic Authority.

3.11.3. Government has indicated that future strategic authorities will benefit from significantly enhanced powers across transport, housing, economic development, skills, infrastructure and strategic planning together with increased local financial autonomy through enhanced fiscal freedoms and longer-term funding settlements.

3.11.4. For Kent and Medway, the decision to proceed with Option 4B establishes the organisational platform required to engage fully with the next phase of the Government's devolution agenda.

3.11.5. As implementation progresses, increasing attention will therefore be given not only to establishing the new North Kent authority but also to ensuring that Kent and Medway are well positioned to maximise the opportunities presented by future devolved powers, investment and strategic decision-making.

3.11.6. This will require continued collaboration across all Kent councils together with ongoing engagement with Government to ensure the area is able to influence the future design of devolution arrangements and secure the greatest possible benefits for residents, communities and businesses.

4. Risk management

4.1. Local Government Reorganisation represents a significant organisational change programme affecting all local authorities across Kent and Medway. Whilst the Government's decision provides certainty regarding the future structure of local government in Kent and Medway, the programme will require effective governance, programme management and collaboration between all predecessor authorities to ensure successful implementation by Vesting Day on 1 April 2028.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Programme delivery and statutory timetable	Failure to deliver key statutory milestones, including the Structural Changes Order, Shadow Authority preparations and Vesting Day, could delay implementation or increase programme costs.	Robust programme governance, dedicated Programme Management Office, county-wide implementation team, regular reporting to Members and Government, and active programme assurance.	C1
Service continuity	Transition activity could adversely affect delivery of frontline services if resources are diverted from business-as-usual activity.	Maintain clear separation between implementation work and operational service delivery, supported by phased implementation planning and service resilience arrangements.	C2
Workforce capacity and organisational resilience	Uncertainty associated with organisational change may affect staff morale, retention and organisational capacity during implementation.	Continue regular staff engagement and communications, workforce planning, organisational development activity and partnership working with recognised trade unions.	B2
Cross-authority governance and decision-making	Successful implementation depends upon timely decisions across multiple councils and programme partners. Delays or inconsistent approaches could affect programme delivery.	Clear governance arrangements through Joint Committees, Theme Boards, Senior Responsible Officer leadership and agreed programme decision-making processes.	C2
Financial sustainability	Programme costs and future financial assumptions may change as implementation progresses and detailed business planning develops.	Regular financial monitoring, Government engagement regarding implementation funding, robust financial planning and reporting through established governance arrangements.	C2
Stakeholder confidence and communications	Inconsistent or unclear communications could reduce confidence	Delivery of a coordinated communications and	C3

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	amongst Members, staff, residents and partner organisations during the transition period.	engagement strategy, regular Member briefings, staff updates and stakeholder engagement throughout implementation.	

For risk rating, please refer to the following table (please **retain** table in final report):

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	1 Critical 2 Major 3 Moderate 3 Minor

- 4.2. The programme risk register will continue to be reviewed and updated throughout implementation. Risks will be monitored through the Programme Management Office and county-wide governance arrangements, with significant risks escalated where appropriate.

5. Climate change implications

- 5.1. The Council's Climate Oversight and Implementation board have LGR and Devolution as a key, ongoing part of its forward work programme.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1. Implementation of Local Government Reorganisation is expected to cost many millions of pounds, however the original estimates prepared by KPMG and which featured in the business cases for the five options considered by the Secretary of State, will now need to be revised and refined in light of the final decision.
- 6.2. This work will be undertaken within the County-wide PMO and so at this stage a firm figure cannot be provided.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1. The implementation of Local Government Reorganisation will require the laying of a structural changes order in parliament as set out in paragraph 4.3 above.
- 7.2. There are wide ranging implications from the dissolution of the Council and the creation of the new authorities which will impact at all levels of the organisation, these will include the TUPE of staff, the novation of contracts and the transfer of property (both real and intellectual) to name just a few.

- 7.3. As the process continues a new constitution and governance framework will also need to be developed and adopted by the new authority.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None