

Appendix E

Themes discussed at public meeting held to discuss local government reorganisation

12 March 2025

Council Chamber – Swale House

Positives for Unitary Authority

Opportunity for local people to have more power devolved through Town and Parish Councils.

Ability for the Unitary Authority to focus on what Swale needs – more youth work, things for young people to do.

A lot more services under the same umbrella.

Reduce inefficiency (where councils contract out services you have shared responsibility, and these are often two tiers using same contractors for different things and paying twice and having different service levels).

It is currently hard to know currently which organisation to contact – example streetlights, it is KCC or SBC. This would be less under a Unitary Council.

Economy of scale would be easier with Unitary council - could bring services in house

One shop stop for services.

Easier control for central government and for Councils to have discussion with Central Government.

Opportunity to design services the way we want them.

Accountability - when people see the council tax bill they apportion the blame to Swale even though it is not us who are charging the council tax.

It will open up the council office sites for development (brown field).

There is the opportunity to do things properly that are failing at KCC – eg Home to school transport, SEND provision across Kent is poor, would have a chance to do this differently.

There needs to different view on planning to get the housing we need.

Negatives for Unitary Council

Parish and Town – Unitary won't be specific on community assets – football pitches, little areas that communities value we may losing things that are important to us.

People will be paying the same amount of council tax and then may not get the same level of service. If Parish and Town Councils pick up more, there will be a requirement for residents to pay twice.

Residents may not know who their ward councillors are.

Right to look at reform of local Government but this is the wrong answer, and it is too big. County Borough Councils do not work.

We should stick to 3 tiers – it has worked for the past 50 years.

3 times the population of Swale in one council is too big.

A Unitary Council would be more remote.

A Unitary Council would start asset stripping to pay for Adult Social Care.

Benefits of unitary in certain areas – but size of unitary council, the things that are important to the island won't be important to other people.

Much larger ratio of councillors to residents which could lead to people becoming remote from their council.

Will people want to travel the distance to attend meetings we are thinking struggle to get people to come to the council to ask questions – what will it be like if you are travelling further.

Could lose councillors who know the area.

Decisions don't reflect the local population views.

What must a Unitary Focus on for Swale?

Making sure our most vulnerable residents are cared for – those people need to be the people we think about first – we know that local government is the backstop that stops people getting into really difficult situations – sustainable model that helps people.

Engaging with residents – it is too hard currently for residents to engage with KCC.

People should be held accountable – and held to the Nolan Principles.

Ensure residents get the services they pay for.

Young People and services.

Making sure technology doesn't take the human element away.

Making sure residents are heard.

Geography

Three Unitary authority is best.

It needs to be guided by the data and numbers.

Align with Health and ensure that each Unitary authority has an A&E.

Whatever the geography ends up being Parish and Town Councils need to be involved .

People in Teynham tend to go towards Faversham and Faversham people tend to go to Canterbury.

Don't know the enough about the areas – we need more information to decide.

As long as it works – doesn't matter about the Geography.

Our heart is in East Kent.

Don't like the sound of North Kent – Faversham has always leant towards Canterbury – Social Care alignment wouldn't fit.

M2 Corridor – Sittingbourne Faversham and Canterbury – (would include Thanet).

Strain on Social Services if we go with Medway.

How would you like to be involved/informed going forward?

Articles and progress in Inside Swale.

Posters and public meetings.

Devolution data made available when we have it.

Parish and Towns being full involved.