

<b>COUNCIL</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	17 September 2025
<b>Report Title</b>	Local Government Reorganisation options
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
<b>Head of Service</b>	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>That Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the contents of the report and the work undertaken so far by Kent Leaders and Chief Executives</li> <li>2. That Council agree to remain part of the Kent programme which is working with KPMG to produce full business cases for model 3 and model 4b for Local Government Reorganisation.</li> </ol>

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress made to date in relation to Local Government Reorganisation and sets out the options for Swale to continue in the process

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 On 16 December 2024 the Government published the '*English Devolution White Paper - Power and partnerships: Foundations for growth*' which made clear their intent to deliver both devolution and local government reorganisation. A report was taken to an Extraordinary Full Council on 4 February to outline the contents of the White Paper and the possible implications for the Council and the Borough. A number of all-councillor briefings (written and verbal) have also been provided on the issue
- 2.2 The Leaders of Kent County Council, Medway Council and the District and Borough Councils have led the process to choose the geographies. On 13 August 2025 Kent Leaders considered ten geographical models and decided that options appraisals would be undertaken on 7 geographical models (see appendix 1), with a view to 2 being taken to full business case. The models for which an options appraisal was undertaken were:

Model 1 – a single county unitary  
Model 3 – 3 unitary councils - Swale with Medway, Gravesham and Dartford.  
Model 4a – 4 unitary councils – Swale with Canterbury and Thanet  
Model 4b – 4 unitary councils – Swale with Ashford and Folkestone and Hythe  
Model 4c – 4 unitary councils – Swale with Ashford and Maidstone  
Model 4d – 4 unitary councils – Swale split with Faversham moving East  
Model 5 – 5 unitary councils – Swale split with Faversham moving East.

- 2.3 A two unitary model was not taken forward to options appraisal.
- 2.4 A more detailed map showing the models for which options appraisals were undertaken can be found at Appendix 2.
- 2.5 Swale Group Leaders have met informally every fortnight to discuss matters relating to Local Government Reorganisation and to ensure that when the Leader of the Council attends the meetings of Kent Leaders, he is able to share the view of all groups in the council.
- 2.6 The Group Leaders had discussed all the options prior to each Kent Leaders meetings and the majority had indicated that Model 4C was the preferred option for Swale. Although the Group Leaders advised that 4A or 4B would also be acceptable.
- 2.7 The Kent Leaders met on 3 September 2025 to discuss the options appraisal and agree which two options would go forward to full business case.
- 2.8 As there was no clear consensus of a preferred model for Kent. The Leaders of the Kent Councils agreed to undertake the following process

### **Stage 1**

Leaders considered the models assessment based on the KPMG metrics and its alignment with government criteria.

Leaders sought a consensus on which two models are taken forward to business case.

As there was no clear consensus on which two models to take forward Leaders undertook a further stage

### **Stage 2**

Under stage 2 it was agreed that the following was required

- A model must be supported by at least one Leader to be considered (each leader may support only one model).
- Leaders will be asked to name their preferred choice of model, with the two models receiving the most support to be taken forward to business case.

-Leaders will be asked whether they support adding any additional models, acknowledging the additional cost it will add to the joint process. If the addition of a further model(s) receives majority support, it will be included in the joint process.

Councils wishing to pursue a model not agreed for a full business case may do so independently but will need to fund the business case development themselves.

- 2.9 The models with the most votes by Kent Leaders were Options 3 and 4B.
- 2.10 If Swale wishes to pursue model 4C to full business case, KPMG will undertake the work on our behalf at a cost of £80,000.
- 2.11 The alternative to KMPG developing a full business case for Option 4C is for members to agree to support the two models (3 and 4B) being developed into a full business case with a view to members deciding which one to support at the council meeting in November 2025.
- 2.12 There is a possibility that another Council in Kent may choose to undertake a full business case of another of the models. We are certain that no other council wishes to commission an additional full business for option 4C.

### **3.0 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

The option to commission KPMG to prepare a full business case for option 4C (or one of the other options) has been considered and is feasible and although it has not been rejected, it is not recommended due to the cost £80,000 which must be funded from council resources.

### **4.0 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

Other than member briefings and meetings with Parish and Town Councils, there has been no formal consultation on this.

### **5.0 Implications**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>
Corporate Plan	Local Government Reorganisation is not currently part of the corporate plan, however it is a key piece of work which is critical to the future of services in Swale
Financial, Resource and Property	The cost of the business case will be £80k. The council approved a one off funding allocation of £100k for LGR work in the 2025/26 budget. This is currently funding the uplift of the Senior LGR officer and the LGR support officer which will cost c £39k in 2025/26 and £52k in 2026/27. This funding allocation could support some of the cost of a business case in 25/26 (c£60k) but a further growth bid

	would then be required in 26/27 to fund the officers delivering LGR for Swale. Alternatively further reserve funding could be allocated to fund the business case, but once again this goes with the caveats that means a reduction in the reserve balances in place to support the council's overall budget position as per the MTFP.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The is the proposed legislation which covers Local Government Reorganisation is English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. Proposals need to be with Government by 28 November 2025
Crime and Disorder	There are no direct crime and disorder implications of this proposal
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	There are no direct Environmental Emergency implications of this proposal
Health and Wellbeing	There is no direct Health and Wellbeing impact of this proposal
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	There are no direct safeguarding implications of this proposal
Risk Management and Health and Safety	There are no direct health and safety implications of this proposal
Equality and Diversity	There are no direct Equality and Diversity implications of this proposal
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no direct privacy or data protection implications of this proposal

## 7 Appendices

- Appendix 1: Maps of models considered for options appraisal
- Appendix 2: Maps of models for which options appraisal were undertaken

## 8 Background Papers

None

