

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
	615,931			417,842
Population		374,269	523,642	
Current council areas	- Medway (98%) - Gravesham (87%) - Swale (81%) - Dartford (78%) - Small sections of Tonbridge and Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%)	- Sevenoaks - Tunbridge Wells - Tonbridge and Malling (61%) - Dartford (22%) - Gravesham (13%) - Medway (2%)	- Canterbury - Dover - Thanet - Folkestone and Hythe (64%) - Swale (Faversham area 17%)	- Ashford - Maidstone (98%) - Folkestone and Hythe (36%) - Tonbridge and Malling (36%) - Swale (3%)
	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	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	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	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

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
					
Approach to drafting	Kent County Council leading with some shared input around finance and services.	Common approach to drafting with input from councils.			
Structure, formatting and branding	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.

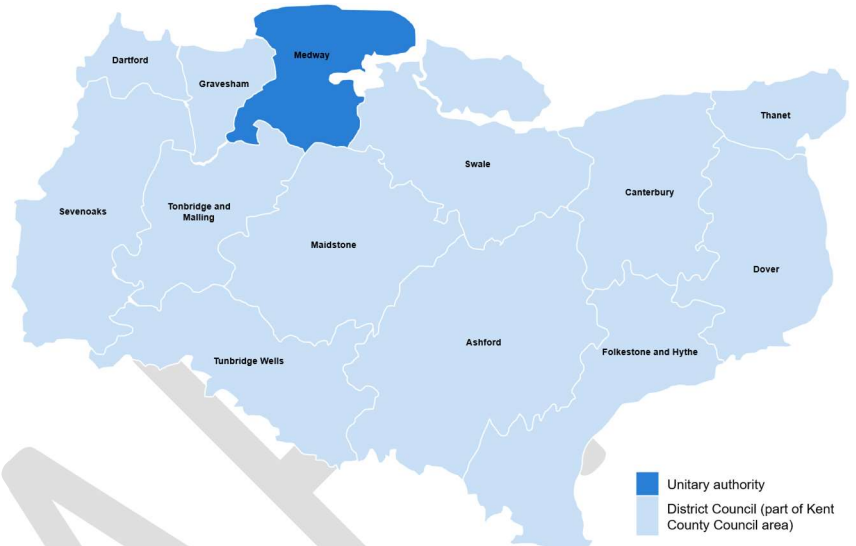
Kent currently has a two-tier local government system.

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.

Key theme	Arguments
Balanced population and fiscal scale	Four councils, each serving 375,000–625,000 residents, meet the optimum size for a viable council. This ensures: • A strong resident voice • Financial resilience • Sustainable budgets Each area is designed to be economically robust within its geography, supporting financial resilience and growth. GVA and council tax bases are balanced. <i>Criteria 1, 2, 5, 6</i>
Functional housing, economic and transport geographies	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: • North Kent – Thames Gateway growth and port economy • East Kent – coastal regeneration and health equality • Mid Kent – M20/HS1 corridor and balanced rural-urban growth • West Kent – rural, commuter and environmental heartland Option 4D will enable a more coherent approach to housing strategy across the region. <i>Criteria 1, 2, 3</i>
Financial Sustainability	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.

Criteria 2

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. <i>Criteria 1, 4, 6</i>
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. <i>Criteria 1, 2, 5, 6</i>
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. <i>Criteria 3</i>
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. <i>Criteria 3, 6</i>
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. <i>Criteria 5</i>

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.

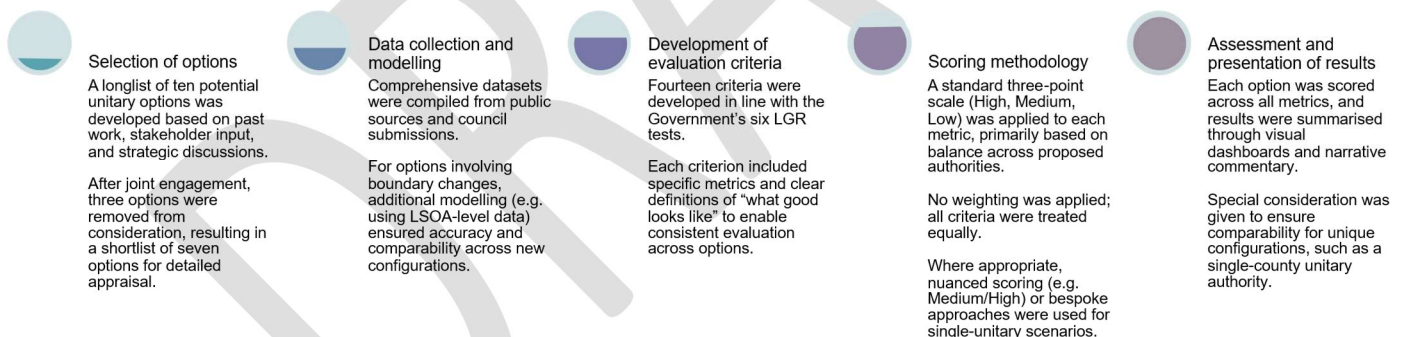
The programme builds on Kent's history of joint working and lessons from previous LGR efforts, supported by targeted governance, workstreams and stakeholder engagement to mitigate risks related to service disaggregation, aggregation, ICT and working together, aiming for a seamless, efficient transition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

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.