
Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Monday, 8 June 2026 from 6.00 pm - 7.20 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney, Andy Booth (Substitute for Councillor James Hunt), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chair), Hayden Brawn (Substitute for Councillor Mark Last), Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson (Chair), Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, Ben J Martin, Julien Speed, Mike Whiting, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Robin Harris, Tim Neal and Sarah Porter.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, James Hunt, Elliott Jayes and Mark Last.

55 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

56 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

57 **Swale Borough Council Structural Change Order Representations for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.**

The Chief Executive introduced the report and explained that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had requested representations from all Kent and Medway councils on the Structural Change Order (SCO).

It was emphasised that, due to the committee system, it was important that the Council's response reflected Members' views rather than officer views.

The Head of Policy and Transformation and the Project and Transformation Manager gave a presentation outlining:

- the purpose of the Structural Change Order
- the five geographic models still under consideration
- the requirement to submit a Council response by 16 June 2026
- the key questions posed by MHCLG, including governance structures, joint committees, elections, implementation arrangements, and naming conventions

Members considered each question in turn.

Recommendation 1 – Transitional Governance Model

Members discussed the proposed transitional governance models.

Members raised the following points:

- concern that a single authority model would not provide sufficient representation for all areas, including Medway
- the importance of ensuring all predecessor councils were involved in transition arrangements
- that a joint committee model would provide more inclusive governance during transition

Recommendation 2 – Membership of Joint Committees

Members considered the proposed membership arrangements for Joint Committees.

Members raised the following points:

- clarification was sought on how county and Medway representation would be reflected within the proposed membership
- officers confirmed that the intention was to include representation from all predecessor councils, including the county and any existing unitary authorities
- Members noted that, particularly for Option 1A, there was a need to ensure that the size of any Joint Committee remained manageable

Members also discussed potential approaches to representation under Option 1A, including the use of geographic groupings.

Recommendation 3 – Chair and Deputy Chair of Joint Committees

Members considered whether the Chair and Deputy Chair should be specified.

It was noted that::

- that it would be preferable for the Joint Committee to appoint its own Chair and Deputy Chair at its inaugural meeting
- that this approach was consistent with practice elsewhere

Recommendation 4 – Political Balance

Members considered whether Joint Committees should be politically balanced.

It was noted:

- that there was no requirement for political balance under MHCLG guidance
- that the primary purpose of Joint Committees was transitional rather than executive governance

Recommendation 5 – Returning Officer

Members considered the appointment of Returning Officers.

Members raised:

- the importance of appointing an individual with appropriate experience
- that the geography of the new authorities should inform the decision

Members agreed that this would be best determined once the final structure of new authorities was known.

Recommendation 6 – Implementation Team

Members considered the proposed implementation team structure.

Members raised the following points:

- the scale of work required, particularly for county disaggregation
- the importance of appointing individuals with sufficient experience and capacity
- questions regarding the role of the Deputy Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)

Officers clarified the proposed arrangements and noted that further detail would be developed through the Kent and Medway programme.

Recommendation 7 – Parish and Town Council Elections

Members discussed alignment of parish and town council elections.

Members raised:

- the financial burden on parish councils of holding separate elections
- the importance of maintaining voter engagement
- that a one-year term would not provide sufficient time for parish councils to operate effectively

Members supported alignment but expressed a preference for an initial five-year term.

Recommendation 8 – Naming of New Councils

Members considered options for naming new councils.

Members raised the following points:

- that geographic naming conventions (e.g. North, Mid, East Kent) were clearer for residents
- that locally derived names could create confusion at this stage
- that naming could be revisited by new authorities in future
- that some proposed names did not reflect all areas within the existing borough

Recommendation 9 – Modelling

Members noted that no further modelling had been undertaken since the submission of business cases.

Resolved to recommend to Council:

(1) That for all geographic options the preferred transitional governance model be a New Council model with Joint Committee.

(2) That joint committee membership be agreed broadly as set out in the report, with provision for Option 1A to reflect geographic representation.

(3) That the Chair and Deputy Chair of each Joint Committee be appointed at the inaugural meeting of the Committee.

(4) That Joint Committees should not be subject to political balance requirements.

(5) That the Returning Officer for each new authority be agreed by the relevant Joint Committee at its inaugural meeting.

(6) That:

- ***a Kent and Medway wide implementation team be established;***
- ***the Kent County Council Chief Executive be the Senior Responsible Officer;***
- ***the Medway Council Chief Executive be the Deputy SRO; and***
- ***Unitary SROs be appointed from the pool of existing borough and district Chief Executives.***

(7) That parish and town council elections be aligned with the new authority elections, with an initial five-year term, followed by a four-year cycle.

(8) That the Table 3 (geographic naming convention) approach be supported.

(9) That it be noted that no further modelling had been undertaken on councillor numbers.

58 Member engagement in Local Government Reorganisation

The Chief Executive introduced the report which set out proposals for Member engagement in the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process.

Members were advised that, whilst Joint Committees and Shadow Authorities would provide formal governance, these would only involve a limited number of Swale Members. Additional mechanisms were therefore proposed to ensure wider Member involvement.

Recommendation 1 – Establish a Cross-Party Member Working Group

Members raised the following points:

- that the working group should be focused and manageable in size
- that Group Leaders would be best placed to participate, with the ability to

- disseminate information within their groups
- that provision should be made for substitutes where appropriate

Recommendation 2 – Establish Quarterly LGR Member Briefings

Members raised the following points:

- that flexibility would be required due to the pace of the programme and future Government announcements
- that a quarterly schedule may not always be sufficient and additional briefings could be required
- the importance of ensuring that all Members, including those not in political groups, were able to access briefings
- that briefings had generally been held remotely to support attendance, although attendance levels had varied
- that Members had responsibility to ensure key information was shared appropriately

Members also discussed the format of briefings and the potential for involvement of both Members and officers in their delivery.

Recommendation 3 – Additional Governance Arrangements

Members raised the following points:

- that there was a need to ensure public awareness and understanding of Local Government Reorganisation
- that consistent and clear messaging would be important to avoid confusion
- that at the current stage, limited information was available to provide definitive answers to residents
- that Local Government Reorganisation would be of interest to residents once impacts on services and costs became clearer
- that communication should be clear and avoid the use of technical acronyms where possible
- that existing Councillor and Resident Forums could be used to provide updates

Resolved:

(1) That a cross-party Member Working Group be established, comprising Group Leaders, with substitutes permitted as appropriate.

(2) That LGR Member briefings be held on a minimum quarterly basis, with additional briefings arranged as required.

(3) That Local Government Reorganisation be included as a standing item on Councillor and Resident Forums to support public awareness and engagement.

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website

<http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel