

Council	
Meeting Date	18 February 2026
Report Title	Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Government Consultation
EMT Lead	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
Head of Service	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
Lead Officer	Steph Curtis, Strategic Policy and Communities Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. For Council to provide Delegation to the Chief Executive to prepare and submit the response from Swale Borough Council to MHCLG in response to their consultation on Local Government Reorganisation proposals for Kent and Medway, following a Member workshop and consultation with Group Leaders.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, all councils in Kent and Medway were invited in February 2025 by the Secretary of State to submit proposals for local government reorganisation (LGR) for the region of Kent. These were submitted in November 2025.
- 1.2 This paper provides a summary of the public and stakeholder consultation on these proposals being undertaken by Government and a proposal for how Swale Borough Council can submit its own response.

2 Background, Context and Proposals

- 2.1 On 16 December 2024, HM Government published the English Devolution White Paper setting out its ambition to reshape local government in England. This would be through a combination of devolution to new strategic authorities and reorganisation of all of the remaining two-tier local government areas in England into unitaries. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill published on 10 July 2025 formalised HM Government's intentions to enact these changes.
- 2.2 In response to the White Paper, Council Leaders in Kent were invited to apply for, and submitted a formal request to receive priority status to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP). If successful, this would have accelerated the devolution process and provided additional Government support for those Councils on the DPP.

- 2.3 On 5 February 2025 Government notified Councils in Kent and Medway in a letter from the then Local Government Minister that they were not selected to be on the DPP and instead received a statutory invitation to submit proposals for Local Government reorganisation (LGR). This included guidance around the development of proposals and an expectation that all 14 Councils would collaborate.
- 2.4 The letter detailed a timeline for the process, including a requirement for a joint interim proposal by 21 March 2025 setting out direction of travel and intentions, and a deadline of 28 November 2025 to receive a final submission on reorganisation. Kent Council Leaders agreed to endeavour to work together to respond to the Minister's direction.
- 2.5 On 21 March 2025, Kent Council Leaders submitted an interim response setting out the councils' commitment to working together on reorganisation, highlighting examples of exceptional challenges faced only by Kent, the importance of aligning devolution with reorganisation and the risks of not having a strategic countywide body for Kent. Alongside the collective response signed by all 14 Council Leaders, there were a number of 'side letters' from individual councils in Kent.
- 2.6 Government provided each area with funding towards the development of these proposals. Kent Council Leaders agreed to use this money collectively to develop a shared evidence base, options appraisal and business case(s) to prepare for the 28 November 2025 submission and procure the necessary external support and expertise to meet the deadline. KPMG were appointed as the Kent Councils Strategic Business Partner following a joint procurement process for Phases 1 and 2 and commenced work with all 14 Councils in July 2025.
- 2.7 At an extraordinary Kent Council Leaders meeting 3 September 2025, Leaders were presented with the evidence base and options appraisal assembled by KPMG colleagues with significant input from staff across all 14 Councils. There were seven geographies in scope. As per the governance jointly set around the strategic business partner contract and the funding from Government, each Leader was asked to select the option they would support progressing to strategic business case, the two with the most support then being prioritised for the collective process. As a result of the debate, Options 3a and 4b were selected to progress.
- 2.8 Subsequently, Kent County Council (Option 1a), Medway Council (4d) and Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils (5a) (see appendix 4, 5 and 6) determined they are willing to self-fund strategic business cases for their specified options.
- 2.9 Timescales leading up to 28 November 2025 submission were tight and as such, a regular rhythm of collaborative governance meetings, milestones and activity was established.
- 2.10 Kent and Medway Councils met during November 2025 to agree each of their preferred proposals, and these were submitted to Government by the submission deadline.

- 2.11 Swale Borough Council resolved at its meeting on the 19 November 2025 to submit option 4B as its preferred option to MHCLG.
- 2.12 Across Kent and Medway, there was a range of support for all 5 proposals, resulting in the submission of all 5.
- 2.13 Government has launched its public consultation on Kent and Medway LGR on Thursday 5 February 2026 and it will close on Thursday 26 March 2026.
- 2.14 Their intention was to consult on all proposals that met the terms of the 5 February 2025 statutory invitation – for Kent and Medway, this is all proposals that were submitted. They have advised that a formal assessment against the criteria has not yet taken place, but that this will be completed alongside the statutory consultation so all relevant evidence can be considered together.
- 2.15 Although the consultation is being led by the Government, it has been agreed that Kent and Medway Councils will support its promotion in order to ensure that all stakeholders and members of the public within our county have the opportunity to have their say.
- 2.16 The consultation details are available on the Kent Council Leaders website – this joint platform was agreed and used to share details of the model business cases.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 For Council to provide Delegation to the Chief Executive to prepare and submit the response from Swale Borough Council to MHCLG in response to their consultation on Local Government Reorganisation proposals for Kent and Medway, following a Member workshop and consultation with Group Leaders.
- 3.2 All Members will be invited to participate in the Member workshop that will inform the consultation response.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 An alternative option would be for an Extraordinary Council be organised prior to the consultation end date and for Members to debate a proposed response.
- 4.2 Swale Borough Council could choose not to submit a response to the Government Consultation on proposed LGR Models for Kent and Medway. This option is not recommended as although Swale Borough Council did submit its preferred model along with accompanying evidence, this is an opportunity to comment on the other proposals on the table – some of which Members may feel are not suitable for the borough of Swale.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Consultation on the proposed Kent and Medway LGR options is being led by Government. This is an opportunity for Swale Borough Council to respond and provide its views on the proposed models being considered, prior to the Ministerial Decision expected by July 2026 on which model will be implemented.
- 5.2 This proposal asks for Delegation to the Chief Executive in the preparation and submission of the consultation response from Swale BC, however, this would be prepared following a Member workshop and in consultation with Group Leaders.
- 5.3 Swale Borough Council will also promote the consultation widely to its key stakeholders and members of the public to ensure responses are submitted that reflect the views of our local communities.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
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	Financial implications of each of the proposed models for LGR in Kent and Medway are included as part of the original business cases submitted to MHCLG by Kent and Medway Councils. They are referenced within the consultation documents prepared by Government.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The Secretary of State had invited the Leaders of all fourteen councils in Kent and Medway to submit proposals for a single tier of local government under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'). Now that proposals have been received, the Secretary of State is considering them and the statutory public consultation is one of the next key steps. Following consultation, if the Secretary of State decides to proceed with one of the reorganisation proposals (with or without modifications), then a detailed Structural Change Order dealing with the transfers of powers, property, assets, and staff, as well as any boundary and electoral changes necessary to give effect to the reorganisation will need to be laid in Parliament. This will also set out a timescale for implementation of the new structures and sets out interim arrangements.

	Whilst many of the specific obligations regarding a particular reorganisation are derived from the primary Statutory Instrument passed under Section 7 of the 2007 Act, the Secretary of State has also passed a series of more generic regulations applicable to all reorganisation under Section 17 of that Act. These cover the common practical issues that arise when implementing a re-organisation including finance requirements, the transfer of assets and employees and other necessary transitional arrangements. Section 16 of the act provides for agreements between successor authorities. There is no legal requirement for Swale Borough Council to submit a response to the Government led consultation.
Crime and Disorder	There are no direct crime and disorder implications for this proposal.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	There are no direct environment and climate/ecological emergency implications for this proposal.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no direct health and wellbeing implications for this proposal.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	There are no direct safeguarding implications for this proposal.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	If a local authority decides to not submit a response to the public consultation being led by Government, the Minister will still take a decision on their preference for LGR, based upon the responses of other Councils and stakeholders. There would be a risk that this decision would not factor in the detailed local knowledge and understanding the of the local area held by Swale Borough Council, although this information was shared within the Proposal Submitted in November 25.
Equality and Diversity	An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was undertaken by local authorities in Kent and Medway responding to the Government's statutory invitation to submit proposals for LGR in November 25. The EqIA was developed to assess the potential general implications of LGR and was not option specific. A more detailed and specific EqIA will be required once the government announces the final configuration of unitary councils across Kent and Medway. It should also be noted that the decision to implement LGR will be taken by the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, who will also make the decision on the geographies for the new Unitary Councils. Whilst it is appropriate that equalities impacts are considered by local authorities in implementing these

	decisions, the decision on the geographies for the new Unitary Councils lies with the Minister of State.
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no direct privacy and data protection implications for this proposal.
Local Government Reorganisation	This public consultation, led by Government, is the next formal step in the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) journey for Kent and Medway Councils. Following which, the Secretary of State will decide upon which model to implement for Kent and Medway.

7 Appendices

7.1 There are no appendices included within this report.

8 Background Papers

8.1 The full consultation documents can be found at <https://kentcouncilleaders.org.uk/>

8.2 The minutes of the 19 November 2025 Council meeting can be found at <https://ws.swale.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=128&MId=4331>