

POLICY AND RESOURCES	
Meeting Date	Monday 8 th June 2026
Report Title	Member engagement in Local Government Reorganisation
EMT Lead	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
Head of Service	Stephanie Curtis, Head of Transformation and Policy
Lead Officer	Sarah Porter, Project and Transformation Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	For Policy and Resources Committee to agree to: 1. Establish a cross-party Member Working Group as per the Terms of Reference in Appendix 2; and to agree membership. 2. Establish quarterly LGR Member briefings for both of the next phases of LGR. 3. To consider any other governance mechanism they wish to see implemented for member involvement in LGR.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines how Members will be involved in Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) within the statutory framework. It also asks the Policy & resources Committee to consider and agree additional arrangements to ensure Members are kept informed, able to contribute, and appropriately involved throughout the process.

2 Background

- 2.1 Kent and Medway councils submitted proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in November 2025, with Swale Borough Council agreeing that option 4B was our preferred model. In February 2026 The Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) launched a consultation on all five geographic models proposed, including one-unitary and multi-unitary options, with different implications for governance, elections, service transition and local identity.
- 2.2 MHCLG have indicated that a decision on the preferred model for Kent and Medway will be made before mid-July 2026. Following this, we will move into the first transition period. This will involve the preparation and laying of a Structural Change Order (SCO), which will establish the legal framework within for LGR in Kent.

What happens next

- 2.3 Once the SCO is enacted, a Joint Committee for each new unitary authority must meet. Joint Committees have preparatory functions for the new councils. Their focus is to prepare the ground for matters that need to be in place on day one of the Shadow Councils. As such, they are not responsible for taking any decision on behalf of the new councils and should act in a manner that does not hamper any decision the new shadow councils may wish to take. MHCLG have advised that Joint Committees should have 8-16 members to provide appropriate capacity and representation. Decisions should be by a simple majority with a casting vote by the chair where needed. Details of the Joint Committee will be included within the SCO.
- 2.4 Elections to the new Shadow Authorities are expected to take place in May 2027 to each of the new unitary councils. At this stage the Shadow Authorities will replace the Joint Committees, marking the beginning of the second transition period. The SCO will detail the functions, powers and responsibilities of the shadow council; full powers will not transfer until Vesting Day. Their primary focus will include appointment of senior officers; setting the initial budget and shaping key strategies for the new councils.
- 2.5 An officer-led Implementation Team will work alongside the Joint Committees and Shadow Authorities to support delivery of the LGR programme.
- 2.6 The Government's LGR Implementation Guidance provides more detailed information on the role of Joint Committees and Shadow Authorities. Appendix I visually highlights the upcoming stages for LGR.

What this means for Swale Members

- 2.7 The SCO will detail the number of seats on each Joint Committee and from which predecessor council they will come from. Although the number of seats is not yet known, based upon other areas, this will only include a very small number of current Swale Borough Councillors. Additionally, the Joint Committee may include the Swale Borough Council Leader who has no executive powers.
- 2.8 It is also recognised that in delivering the LGR work programme, there will be an impact on delivery of business as usual for officers. Prioritisation will therefore be required to balance these pressures, whilst still delivering against the Corporate Plan.

Why Member engagement is important

- 2.9 With the above in mind, it is important that mechanisms are put into place to engage a greater proportion of Swale's Members in the LGR work programme, both in the first and second transitional phases.
- 2.10 Informal discussions took place with Members at the LGR Member Workshop on the 12th May 2026. Members were asked to consider within breakout groups,

what their role within the LGR work programme should be post the minded to decision from Government; and how they would like to be updated and how. The proposals contained within this report have been developed based upon these conversations.

- 2.11 Members present at the workshop advised that they felt verbal updates were of greater benefit than written updates, due to the pace of update for LGR and were appreciative of the previous Member briefings that had taken place on this subject.
- 2.12 It was also suggested within one of the break-out groups that a cross-party working group would be beneficial to ensure that all groups can access frequent updates; shape the new council through inputs to the Joint Committee; and discuss any Swale specific actions that may relate to both setting up the new council and continuing business as usual.
- 2.13 There may also continue to be times when specific decisions related to LGR need to be taken by the Council or one of its Committees.
- 2.14 If a working group were to be agreed, this would be similar to the constitutional working group – it would be informal in nature and provide updates to this committee as and when required.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 That Policy and Resources Committee agree to establish a cross-party Member Working Group as per the Terms of Reference in Appendix 2; and to agree membership.
- 3.2 That Policy and Resources Committee agree to introduce quarterly LGR Member briefings throughout the remaining transition phases.
- 3.3 That Policy and Resources Committee consider any other additional governance arrangements are required to support member involvement in LGR.

4.0 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 To not implement any further governance measures for Members in relation to LGR. There is no legal requirement to put additional measures in place to engage members in the LGR work programme, however without these, only a very small number of current Members would be formally involved, which impacts upon representation of all groups.

5.0 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Proposals have been developed following informal discussions with Members at the LGR Workshop on 12th May 2026.

6.0 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Ensuring LGR is effectively managed and Members engaged is critical to ensuring the delivery of all priorities within the Corporate Plan.
Financial, Resource and Property	The proposals highlighted within this report have no financial impact for the Council. They do however have an impact on both officer resource to organise and deliver; and member time in attendance.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The process by which LGR will be implemented, is detailed through a Structural Change Order (SCO). An SCO is a Statutory Instrument under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. It establishes the practical framework to deliver local government reorganisation and includes details on Vesting date; arrangements for elections and shadow authorities; transitional arrangements (Joint Committees and implementation structures); and approach to transferring functions, property and liabilities. Any localised mechanisms that Swale wishes to put in place to further engage its Members need to be compliant with our constitution.
Crime and Disorder	There are no direct crime and disorder implications for these proposals.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	There are no direct Environmental Emergency implications for these proposals.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no direct Health and Wellbeing implications for these proposals.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	There are no direct safeguarding implications for these proposals.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	There are no direct health and safety implications for these proposals.
Equality and Diversity	There are no direct Equality and Diversity implications for these proposals.
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no direct privacy or data protection implications for these proposals.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)	This report and proposals discusses the LGR implementation programme and how best to ensure Swale Borough Council Members are best engaged in the process, kept informed and able to make effective decisions for delivery of services for residents.
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7 Appendices

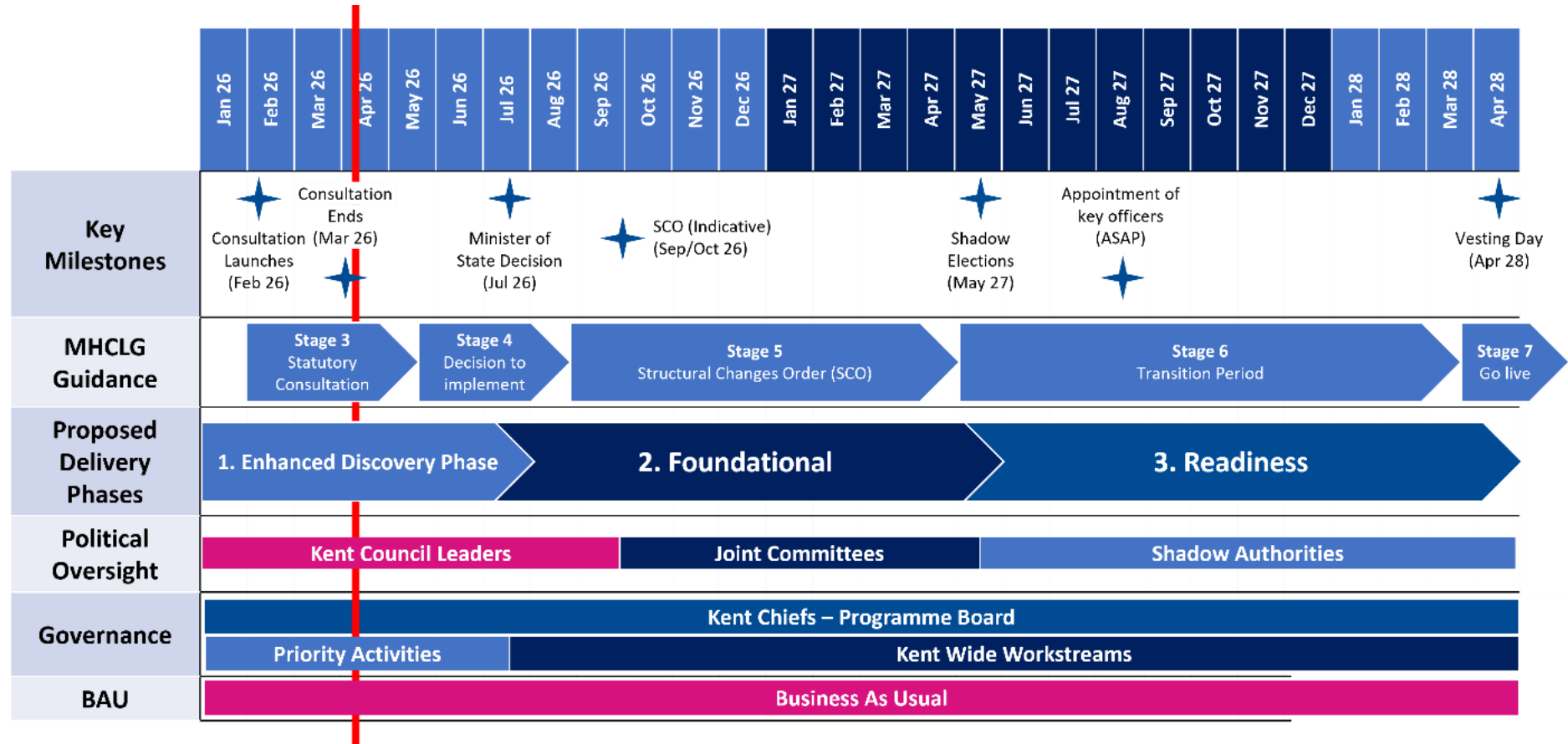
Appendix I: LGR Implementation Diagram

Appendix II: Draft Terms of Reference for Cross-Party Member LGR Working Group

8 Background Papers

Governmental guidance on LGR Implementation - [Local government reorganisation - implementation guidance](#)

Appendix I: Kent and Medway LGR Implementation Diagram



Appendix II: Draft Terms of Reference for Cross-Party Member Working Group

1. Purpose

The purpose of the Cross-Party Member LGR Working Group is to support effective Member engagement in the Local Government Reorganisation process by:

- providing a cross-party forum for Members to receive updates on the progress of LGR;
- enabling Members to discuss the implications of LGR for Swale and its residents;
- providing a mechanism for Members to input views, issues and local priorities into the reorganisation process;
- supporting communication between Members, the Council's appointed representatives on any Joint Committee and relevant officers; and
- helping to ensure that Swale-specific considerations are identified and reflected, where appropriate, during the transition to the new unitary arrangements.

2. Status

The Working Group shall be an informal advisory body established by the Policy and Resources Committee.

The Working Group will have no decision-making powers and may not exercise any executive, committee or regulatory functions of the Council.

Any decisions required in relation to LGR shall remain a matter for the appropriate formal decision-making body of the Council, Joint Committee, Shadow Authority, or other body established through legislation or constitutional arrangements.

3. Role and Scope

The Working Group **may**:

- receive officer briefings on developments relating to LGR;

- consider matters relating to the implementation of LGR that affect Swale Borough Council, its services, residents, staff and communities;
- discuss Swale's local priorities, concerns and opportunities arising from reorganisation;
- provide feedback and informal views to the Leader, relevant Committee Chairs, and officers;
- provide informal views to the Council's appointed representatives on any Joint Committee, to assist them in understanding Member perspectives from across Swale.
- consider how Members more broadly should be kept informed and engaged throughout the transition period;
- help identify issues where broader Member briefing, training or engagement may be beneficial; and
- consider any non-executive Member input that may assist preparedness for the transition to new arrangements.

The Working Group shall **not**:

- make formal decisions on behalf of the Council;
- duplicate the role of the Policy and Resources Committee, Council, Joint Committee or Shadow Authority;
- act in a way that impedes the discretion of future decision-making bodies; or

4. Membership

The working group shall comprise a cross-party membership appointed by the Policy and Resources Committee.

Membership should, so far as practicable, reflect the political balance of the Council, unless otherwise agreed.

The Committee may also wish to include:

- the Leader of the Council;
- the Deputy Leader (if appropriate);
- Group Leaders; and/or

Substitutes may be permitted, subject to agreement.

5. Chairing

The Chair of the Working Group shall be appointed by the Policy and Resources Committee.

The Group may also appoint a Vice-Chair if considered helpful.

6. Frequency of Meetings

The Working Group shall meet as required during the transition period, with an expectation that meetings will be held at key points in the LGR programme.

This may include:

- meetings aligned to major Government announcements or milestones;
- meetings in advance of key Joint Committee activity; and
- meetings to support wider Member briefings.

7. Reporting and Communication

The Working Group will report, where appropriate, to the Policy and Resources Committee.

Notes or action points may be produced from meetings where helpful.

The Working Group should support, but not replace, wider all-Member briefing arrangements on LGR.

8. Officer Support

The Working Group shall be supported by relevant officers, which may include officers from:

- Executive management team;
- Democratic Services;

- Mid Kent Legal Services; and
- Policy and Transformation service.

Officers will provide advice, briefings and administrative support as appropriate.

9. Duration

The Working Group shall continue for the duration of the LGR transition period, unless dissolved earlier by the Policy and Resources Committee.

Its role should be kept under review as governance arrangements develop, particularly following:

- publication of the Structural Change Order;
- establishment of any Joint Committee; and
- election of any Shadow Authority.

10. Review

These Terms of Reference may be reviewed and amended by the Policy and Resources Committee as necessary to reflect changes in legislation, Government guidance, or local governance arrangements relating to LGR.