



Dear fellow Kent Leaders,

We are writing today to update you on our joint position with regards our next steps on the road to Local Government Reorganisation.

While we fully respect the majority decision of Leaders taken on Wednesday 3 September to put forward options 3a and 4b for the development of business cases, we have taken the days following that vote to give serious consideration to our own proposed structure, known as 5a.

As a reminder, 5a would see five unitary authorities with the following geography.

- 1) Dartford, Gravesham, the parts of Medway west of the River Medway and south to Snodland, and Swanley;
- 2) Sevenoaks (excluding Swanley), Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells, and Maidstone;
- 3) The remainder of Medway with the western part of Swale (Sittingbourne area);
- 4) The remainder of Swale (Faversham area), Canterbury, and Thanet;
- 5) Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe, and Dover.

After due consideration we will be progressing 5a to the business case stage.

The changes we are making now to the way we serve our local communities will last for generations to come.

We have one chance to get this right, and to ensure that the unique identities of every neighbourhood – from the largest conurbations to the smallest rural hamlets - are preserved, at the same time as the vital services we provide for them are run at their most efficient and remain effective.

Fittingly, we believe there are five key benefits for the county from option 5a.

1. **Empowerment:** We believe local decisions should only be taken by local leaders who understand their community. Our model provides the closest possible link to residents, with the greatest number of new councils amongst all options proposed.

Ours is a model that provides the greatest level of democracy; maintaining the closest relationship with elected councillors, increasing transparency to hold council services to account; creating strong voices to speak up for our area at a regional and national level; and a model that secures the level of local intelligence needed to design services that continuously evolve to deliver the best possible outcomes for our residents.

2. **Partnership:** Local government has its greatest impact when working in partnership. Ours is a model that ensures the essential services in Kent receive minimal disruption - there is no value in simply redesigning boundaries for the sake of it.

For example, by matching the existing health and care partnerships in north and west Kent, and aligning those further afield as well, we are ensuring those all-important prevention and early intervention activities can be retained, giving us the best chance of tackling the scale of health inequalities that effect Kent so dramatically.



3. **Equity:** We have properly considered Kent's geography to provide the right areas for our community now and into the future. To put this into numbers, despite having the largest number of proposed councils in this new era, through our model even the authority with the smallest resident population would feature in the top-20 sized unitaries in the country as of today. We believe that is a fair outcome.
4. **Sustainability:** At the lowest possible geography, ours is a model to help sustain a continued pride in place; celebrating the unique identity, strengths, and heritage of local communities across Kent by retaining areas with a natural connection to each other.

Supported by a commitment to the levels of future housing and economic growth required by government, we believe this provides the right environment for the design of sustainable new authorities, improving capacity and providing best value public services to our residents.

5. **Governance:** We will put structures in place that are big enough to work well and generate the efficiencies required of this process. However, our model has the unique additional benefit of creating smaller councils than other proposals. This would mean we would retain the ability to be agile and flexible to respond to future local and national demands.

These proposed five authorities will be able to grow and adapt to what our communities need over time, to make the most of new opportunities, and create a sustainable platform for the future.

Our proposal is based on how we think the high-quality services we know our communities deserve can most effectively be delivered, while protecting their current identities.

It puts our residents and businesses first; not us, nor our personal or political interests.

We will, as we are sure you would expect, be sharing this letter with the press and explaining our proposal and the thinking behind it to our communities.

Cllr John Burden

Leader

Gravesham Borough Council

Cllr Jeremy Kite

Leader

Dartford Borough Council