

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution
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Please ask for: Sarah Martin
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Your Ref:
Our Ref:

Date: 26 March 2025

Dear Minister of State,

Local Government Reorganisation in Kent

Further to the local government reorganisation interim submission made by the Kent authorities on 21 March 2025, we are writing as the Leaders of Dartford and Gravesham councils to set out the thoughts, concerns and position of our elected Members on this matter.

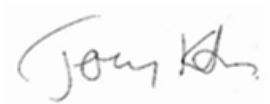
Both councils are proud of their unique characters and their relationship with their local communities. Members are concerned that a large unitary council would lead to the erosion of local identity and would result in an authority that would be too large and remote from its constituents. As Kent continues to grow, it is essential that local government reflects the changing and increasingly multi-ethnic population we have in both Dartford and Gravesham. Their diverse needs must be properly represented within any proposed unitary geographies or changes to councillor-to-population ratios. Ensuring that local voices are not diluted in larger governance structures is critical to maintaining effective democratic representation. With future growth projections, we believe a model of three unitary authorities across Kent would mean the creation of councils serving populations significantly in excess of 500,000. We do not believe this is in the best interests of local residents and will hinder the ability of councils and councillors to deliver local priorities and place based decision making. Our Members are supportive of a four authority unitary model and believe this offers the best opportunity to create the sensible, recognisable geographic and economic areas that the Secretary of State has requested.

Members have expressed concern that both councils' financial positions may be diluted by being pooled with the weaker finances of others. The guidance from Government is that there will be no additional financial support for transition costs or to offset existing debt. Members are concerned that without such funding, the new authorities may struggle to be financially sustainable.

Local government exists to deliver services to local residents and meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Continuity of service will be key to ensure these needs continue to be met. Members are concerned about the impact of the proposed changes on staff and how this may lead to staff retention and recruitment issues. Early decisions would be helpful to try and provide some certainty to staff.

Any proposal for local government reorganisation must be based on the views of our residents and so our priority over the next few months will be to undertake widespread and meaningful engagement to help inform our final proposals.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremy Kite".

Cllr Jeremy Kite MBE
Leader of Dartford Borough Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Burden".

Cllr John Burden
Leader of Gravesham Borough Council