

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION – BUSINESS CASE SUBMISSION

Item OS 25/57 referred from Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 13 November 2025

Following an interim submission to the Government by the 21 March 2025 deadline to propose the Borough Council's preferred geography for new Unitary Councils across Kent, the report of the Chief Executive set out the detailed evidence-based work subsequently undertaken on the business case to enable a submission to be made by the Borough Council on the proposals for the Local Government Reorganisation to the Government by the 28 November 2025 deadline.

Particular attention was drawn to the business case for Option 3A, attached at Annex 3, which proposed a 3-unitary model with the West Kent authority comprising Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone areas. Members noted that this option was potentially supported by five councils across Kent (the West Kent councils plus Folkstone and Hythe), although these Councils still had to complete their formal decision-making processes during November. The advantages of Option 3A, in comparison to Option 4B (a 4-unitary model), being the other option that had been broadly supported by councils in Kent and Medway area and developed by the Strategic Partner, KPMG, with the funding allocated by the Government, were outlined in Section 6 of the report.

Due regard was given to the financial and value for money considerations, risk assessment, legal implications and the Equalities Impact Assessment [Annex 4]. There was robust and detailed discussion on a number of areas including the impact on communities and parish/town councils, the operation of potential neighbourhood area committees and the importance of retaining localism and the role of elected and civic Mayors. Members expressed concern about the financial impact of local government reorganisation and the overall devolution timetable. Many of these issues would be for the new unitary authority to finalise but the need for a balanced approach to ensure financial stability was emphasised.

In recognition that the Borough Council had to submit a response to Government by 28 November 2025 and that option 3A offered the most efficient and least disruptive multi-unitary option for Kent, enabled long-term financial sustainability and reflected the position previously confirmed by Tonbridge and Malling at the interim submission to Government in March 2025, Cllr Oakley proposed, seconded by Cllr King and the majority of the Committee

RECOMMENDED*: That

- (1) the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the draft proposals for Local Government Reorganisation, be noted; and
- (2) based on the evidence set out in the business case (Annex 3), the 3 unitary model, Option 3a be submitted to the Government by the deadline of 28 November 2025 as the Borough Council's preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation.

***Recommended to Cabinet**

[In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8.6, Cllrs Athwal, Cope and Hood asked that their vote against recommendation (2) be recorded in the Minutes.]