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21 March 2025

Dear Minister of State,

Supplementary Submission from Kent Councils on Local Government Reorganisation

Thank you for your letter dated 05 February 2025 inviting Leaders of all 14 Local Authorities across Kent & Medway to submit an interim plan for reorganisation of Local Government in our county.

In addition to the letter submitted jointly by all 14 principal authorities in Kent setting out our Interim Plan for Local Government reorganisation and our strong aspirations for full devolution, the Leaders of the Authorities listed above wish to submit an additional paper alongside it to further supplement the submission.

We recognise that you (and your officials) have expressed a clear preference for a single, area-wide submission, and we are proud that in Kent we have been able to maintain unity whilst agreeing a single Interim Plan. Nevertheless, as Leaders of the Authorities above, we were keen to set out a supplementary submission that does not add additional options or geographies from the single Interim Plan but rather includes some further thinking on the proposed geographies and the data that sits behind them assessed against the criteria set out in your letter on 5 February 2025, demonstrating our commitment to the process. We trust that this initial work will help equip us for the next stage of preparing a final submission by November 2025.

You and your officials have been clear that this next level of detail isn't a requirement, but the signatory councils to this supplementary submission believe that this initial data will prove useful in helping your officials and all 14 Kent councils in focussing attention on deliverable models as we head towards the final 28 November submission.

Seven Local Authorities in Kent have taken the opportunity to work with an external partner to undertake an analysis on the predominant initial geographies emerging from local discussions. This was in order to assess the strengths, weaknesses and ultimately, the viability of each. We wanted to inform our own thinking with an external, expert, independent assessment of each geography against the qualitative criteria outlined in the MHCLG Framework. This includes a financial analysis of the benefits and disbenefits of each, initial consideration around disaggregation and implementation costs, Council Tax harmonisation, alignment with plans for devolution, and an assessment of the requirements of what Kent needs from a strategic partner as we look ahead to November.

We have not included the full detail of the analysis within this submission, however the initial findings have been extremely useful in informing our thinking. They have contributed to the Financial Analysis provided in Section 4 of our supplementary submission, while Section 5 provides an initial options analysis, showing how the different geographies respond to the MHCLG criteria. This draws out the variations between the options, for example the different degrees of alignment with Health and Care Partnership geographies, which are likely to impact delivery of sustainable public sector services.

Moving forward, we will endeavour to use the more detailed analysis as we look to continue working alongside all of our Local Authorities, our wider partners and your officials to inform the full and final submission that is due at the end of November.

At the same time as we progress with work on a final submission, we would like to emphasise our strong desire that local government reorganisation is accompanied by devolution, such that the devolution timescale is aligned with local government reorganisation, with elections in 2027 and the formation of new authorities in 2028.

We hope that this supplementary submission provides some useful additional information in the meantime to complement the countywide submission that has been agreed by all Leaders in Kent.

Yours sincerely,



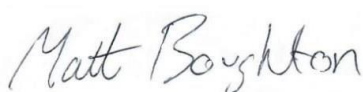
Alan Baldock
Leader, Canterbury City Council



Stuart Jeffery
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Roddy Hogarth
Leader, Sevenoaks District Council



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