



Rt Hon Steve Reed MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Alison McGovern MP

Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness

2 Marsham Street
London. SW1P 4DF

27 November 2025

Re: Support Kent option 3A

Dear Secretary of State and Minister of State,

I am writing on behalf of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in support of the most widely supported option for the configuration of unitary councils in Kent. I would also like to share with you our ambitions for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), public sector reform and devolution in Kent.

Turkeys voting for Christmas

As the leader of a borough council, I should be opposed to LGR. The reality of LGR is you will abolish a council I care deeply about and am proud to lead. However, there are bigger issues at stake than personal egos and council logos.

Today's two-tier system of local government is outdated and no longer able to effectively address the increasingly complex issues we are facing locally. I believe that unitary councils are our best chance to deliver genuinely impactful change for our communities. LGR – done right - is the opportunity that we have been waiting for!

Ambition and vision

Local government is a force for good. Our council staff are amazing, talented and dedicated people. I am thrilled to work alongside them for the good of our borough. But to be frank, they and our residents and businesses deserve more delivery from their public services.

Let us seize the opportunity of LGR to think beyond the silo thinking of 'the council'. Of course, public bodies cooperate but together they could do so much more. Our ambition is for the public sector as a whole to be all pulling together in one direction – improving people's lives.

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Imagine what LGR and wider public sector reform could do in terms of economic growth, housing and health:

- ***What if councils used major housing developments to have a mandatory planning ‘work/life balance standard’?*** Large new settlements would see the creation with local education providers of business incubators including start-ups, providing highly local jobs for residents from those new communities. This would reduce the need for commuting, decongest the transport network, provide a ready customer base for the neighbourhood’s businesses.
- ***What if councils could set up regional infrastructure banks (backed by government) to lend money to developers to build infrastructure before housebuilding begins?*** This set up could change the conversation about housing with local communities. It would help planning authorities build trust with communities and ensure that infrastructure is delivered first. We could save time and energy, reduce building delays and provide better quality homes to residents.
- ***What if council-run leisure centres were free to all residents?*** The public sector pooling budgets and resources could make this happen. We could make progress to reduce child obesity for example. Joined up thinking could lead to impactful preventions which would reduce unacceptable health inequalities within council areas. And of course there are the potential savings for the NHS.

Public sector reform

The three examples above will require public bodies to work closer together, breaking down silos, finding creative solutions, financing initiatives jointly and sharing their staff.

I believe that local government and the rest of the public sector is eager for the challenge. Council staff are deeply committed to the areas within which they work. I feel an energy to serve their communities better, but I also hear and share their frustrations of how local government structures are holding them back.

It is time to unleash the talent and power of the public sector. My hope is that your government’s ambition matches ours. Ministers - may I urge you to be bold, courageous and transformational!

Option 3A

You will have now read above our ambition and seen what we could deliver on the ground. I am writing to strongly advocate for a three unitary model for Kent. I believe three unitary councils gives Kent the best chance to deliver a transformative agenda for our residents and businesses.

Option 3A is:

- **The most sustainable unitarisation.** Dividing Kent into these three areas gives each of the three unitary councils a tax base to face the specific challenges in their new areas. The differences in population size across the three unitaries demonstrates our rationale.

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- **The best chance for public sector reform.** Other public sector bodies have expressed a clear preference for option 3A. Furthermore, the proposed three unitary areas reflect Kent County Council's current working clusters so there is already joint working within each of these three areas.
- **The natural sense of belonging** so vital to our communities. Residents already talk about "West Kent", "East Kent" and "North Kent". I live in West Kent and commute to North Kent, for example. Option 3A for Kent gives us the opportunity to align council structures with residents' natural sense of place.
- **Big enough to deliver, small enough to care.** All three unitary councils will have over half a million residents to be able to create effective councils trusted by residents, relevant to their daily lives as well as being radical leaders of place.

Finances

I must also be clear that LGR will not solve the structural financial problems of local government. A long-term solution is needed. The big cost drivers of adult social care, SEND and school travel must not force new unitary councils into a spiral of service cuts and reactive firefighting. Should this scenario happen, LGR will have failed to deliver on its promise.

Devolution

I also want to take this opportunity to reaffirm that we are seeking a devolution deal for Kent. I believe that Kent must have an equal footing with its neighbouring counties. The quicker Kent can catch up; we can deliver on Kent's huge potential as the UK's European gateway. Delays risk creating two levels of economic growth in adjoining areas.

To conclude, I ask you to support LGR option 3a for Kent. There is a reason why option 3A is the most widely supported business case across councils in Kent: it gives us the best opportunity to meet our ambitions.

I look forward to hearing your views on option 3A and continuing the conversation for the benefit of our residents and businesses.

Best wishes,



B. Chapelard

Ben Chapelard
Leader of the Council