



Miatta Fahnbulleh MP

Minister for Devolution, Faith & Communities,
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
Government
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Kent Council Leaders

c/o Partnerships Team
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28 November 2025

Dear Minister of State,

Kent Council Leaders Commitment to Achieving Devolution for Kent

As the Leaders of Kent's 14 Local Authorities, we are writing to you to reemphasise in the strongest possible terms our collective positive ambition for achieving devolution in Kent.

Whilst individually our positions on the merits of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) might have naturally varied from Leader to Leader, we have remained steadfast both in anticipation of, and then in response to, publication of the White Paper in our collective determination to get the best outcomes for Kent residents. We believe this has to be through securing full devolution for Kent, equitable with other areas, and we are unwavering in that determination.

You will recall that at every opportunity, we have collectively responded to Ministers' requests for engagement on devolution. This includes informal expressions of interest late last year, a formal request to join the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) earlier this year, and following the decision in February 2025 determining Kent not being on the DPP, expressing the importance of aligning devolution and LGR in Kent at every interaction with the Ministry since, including letters dated 21 March 2025 from Leaders to Ministers and from Chief Executives dated 26 September 2025 to the Permanent Secretary.

Despite the decision to exclude Kent from the DPP, we have demonstrated again our strong record of collaboration in developing our response together to LGR. As directed by the Minister, we are perhaps the only area in the country to have all participated in a single joint process to do so, from appointing a single strategic business partner, undertaking a single options appraisal based on a unified evidence base, to developing business cases through a jointly-governed programme based on a single financial analysis, datasets, communications, and a partially shared narrative. In short, we have demonstrated how well we can work together at political and officer level and with our strategic partners, and how we would have and could in the future apply this approach to devolution.

We believe this strong track record of successful collaboration and partnership working in response to LGR demonstrates our ability to co-design and co-deliver devolution at pace for our residents. Within our LGR submissions, we clearly set out a single, clear rationale for why devolution is critical to our region, including on housing delivery, transport, education and skills, with economic growth at its core. We have a population of almost 2 million people living in large conurbations, smaller towns and villages, rural and coastal communities and the resulting mixed economies that they make up. Put simply, we are a microcosm of our country,

larger than 5 EU nations and 91 countries and dependencies globally.

While Kent is often associated with prosperity, it is important to recognise that our county includes some of the most deprived communities in England. Councils such as Medway, Gravesham, Swale, and Thanet, have wards and output areas ranked within the top 10% most deprived nationally. This reality underscores the need for devolution to deliver inclusive growth and tackle entrenched inequalities, ensuring that all residents, not just those in more affluent areas, benefit from improved outcomes and opportunities.

We are taking a proactive approach to driving economic growth through the development of a comprehensive Local Growth Plan. Phase one of our analysis has already been completed, assessing the relative strength of Kent and Medway's sectors against the eight nationally recognised high-growth industries. This evidence base identifies agri-food and agri-tech, port, transport and logistics, digital, and energy, as priority sectors where Kent demonstrates a significant concentration of businesses and/or outperforms national growth trends. Our region plays a critical role in underpinning the UK's food security, border and trade resilience, energy security, and digital infrastructure. We therefore urge Government not to overlook the strategic importance of Kent. To accelerate this work, we would welcome the allocation of a dedicated civil service resource to support phase two of our programme, which will involve detailed sectoral analysis and stakeholder engagement to establish shared priorities for sustainable economic growth.

We are also the gateway to London, the South East, the wider country and our European neighbours and with that brings enormous opportunities for growth, many of which we are already delivering on in partnership with Government. Our region is already projected to deliver additional Gross Value Added (GVA) of £23 billion and a resulting uplift of 1% of England's economy by 2050, with investment in Kent yielding a 14% larger increase in GVA than the national average. Devolution of powers and resources to Kent would further enable that delivery of successful outcomes, contributing to the Government's mission to kickstart economic growth. Growth delivered in Kent delivers better outcomes for our entire country.

With our significant size and scale comes significant responsibilities, some of which are better led strategically, and which the direction to deliver LGR without devolution raises unnecessary risks and uncertainties. This includes infrastructure of national importance related to UK border management and the challenge of being the first responsible authority managing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). We are clear that a strategic authority in Kent could take a leading role on key elements such as transport and critical national infrastructure around our ports of entry, economic development and regeneration including the Local Growth Plan, delivery of the Spatial Development Strategy, skills and employability, public service reform including strategic collaboration with health, and the residual functions that need to be adopted from the discontinuation of the Police and Crime Commissioner offices nationally.

We believe the alignment of devolution with LGR in Kent is not only logical, it is essential. This is supported by a broad range of our strategic partners including health, higher and further education, business, housing and developers and transport who share our significant concerns around lack of alignment on LGR and devolution. We are collectively working with them to understand the implications and risks of fragmenting key services as well as all of the one-off missed opportunities for extensive public service reform. They are likely to write to you over the coming weeks to demonstrate our complete unity on this matter. In addition, we have actively engaged with Kent and Medway MPs throughout this process to ensure they are fully briefed on our ambitions and to secure their support for achieving devolution.

With almost all of our geographical and statistical neighbours across the south east and nationally either having already achieved devolution or being on the DPP, Kent faces the detrimental prospect of becoming a 'devolution desert'. This would mean missing out on

significant powers and resource from Government, being one of the only areas not to have a voice on the Council of the Nations and Regions, and the very real impact this will have on our ability to improve outcomes and deliver growth for our residents.

As a diverse set of Leaders representing six different political parties, we are absolutely united that, for our residents, Kent requires a seat at the devolution table. We stand united and ready to work together with each other and with Government, as we have demonstrated on LGR, on achieving and delivering devolution for our region. We ask in the strongest possible terms that Kent be considered for inclusion in the next phase of the devolution programme, and we would kindly request further clarity on what those next steps look like and likely timescales. We would also like to warmly welcome you and your officials to Kent to further explore our ambitions.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Kent and Medway Council Leaders

(signatures overleaf)

Noel Overden
Leader, Ashford Borough Council

Alan Baldock
Leader, Canterbury City Council

Jeremy Kite ME
Leader, Dartford Borough Council

Kevin Mills
Leader, Dover District Council

Jim Martin
Leader, Folkestone & Hythe District Council

John Burden
Leader, Gravesham Borough Council

Linden Kemkaran
Leader, Kent County Council

Stuart Jeffery
Leader, Maidstone Borough Council

Vince Maple
Leader, Medway Council

Kevin Maskell
Leader, Sevenoaks District Council

Tim Gibson
Leader, Swale Borough Council

Rick Everitt
Leader, Thanet District Council

Matt Boughton
Leader, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

Ben Chapelard
Leader, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council