

Local Government Reorganisation July Update

Kent & Medway and the National Picture

Introduction

On 16 July 2026, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) alongside the Secretary of State, Steve Reed, confirmed plans to streamline two-tier councils in an additional 14 areas. This sees 133 councils streamlined into 38 unitary authorities that will comprise single councils that carry out all local government functions in their area, that will go live on 01 April 2028.

At this stage, the key element is the transitional period itself (i.e., up to 01 April 2028), with shadow authority elections being undertaken in May 2027, this is as a result of potential disruption to plan-making, decision-making, and production of authority monitoring reports.

Broadly, this is seen as a positive growth-focused development. MHCLG's purpose for Kent & Medway is that councils are aligned with housing markets and local need, in addition to supporting the growth of the whole area, whilst maintaining locally responsive services and strengthening local voices through neighbourhood committees.

Whilst the details at this stage are limited, this change supports an opportunity to implement a strategic authority at the Kent and Medway level to lead on activity such as transport & infrastructure, strategic planning arrangements, and economic development.

How is Kent & Medway Impacted?

'Option 4B' has been selected to replace the existing 14 councils across Kent and Medway, the below table sets out the current councils that each new unitary authority replaces from 01 April 2028:

North Kent	West Kent	Mid Kent	East Kent
REPLACES Dartford Gravesham Medway	REPLACES Sevenoaks Tonbridge & Malling Maidstone Tunbridge Wells	REPLACES Swale Ashford Folkestone & Hythe	REPLACES Canterbury Dover Thanet

At this stage the announcement only confirms the future council arrangement. There are no immediate changes to services, roles, delivery arrangements, budgets, or staffing structures. The existing councils will continue to operate and remain decision-makers, whilst the transitional period takes place.

The current indicative timetable indicates:

- **16 July 2026:** Government decision announced.
- **September – December 2026:** Legislation prepared.
- **May 2027:** Shadow authority elections.
- **01 April 2028:** New unitary councils become operational.

What About the National Picture?

The below table sets out the current councils in place within areas of reorganisation in addition to the number of unitary authorities that will replace them.

Area of Reorganisation	Current Councils	New Unitaries
Gloucestershire	7	1
Derby and Derbyshire	10	2
Warwickshire	6	2
Worcestershire	7	2
Oxfordshire	6	3
Hertfordshire	11	4
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland	10	2
Nottingham and Nottinghamshire	9	2
East Sussex and Brighton and Hove	7	2
Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent	10	2
Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool	15	4
Kent and Medway	14	4
Devon, Plymouth and Torbay	11	4
Lincolnshire, North and North East Lincolnshire	10	4

Opportunities and Risk Snapshot

Pro-Growth Mandate

The reforms are framed around housing delivery and unlocking growth. Singular streamlined planning authorities in each area, alongside new Local Plans and the prospect of strategic-scale planning and infrastructure funding create a favourable backdrop for well-positioned developments.

Fresh Local Plan Cycle

Each new unitary will need a new Local Plan, this will provide a valuable opportunity to promote sites to seek to secure draft allocations.

Transition-timing Strategy

Where current authorities remain capable decision-makers until the new unitary authorities become operational, there is merit in progressing applications and representations now.

Local Plan Gap and Land-Supply Uncertainty

Each new unitary will need a new Local Plan, which will require the merging of differing positions of its constituent districts, which have different plans, politics, and housing markets. Expect possible stalling of site allocations and less uncertain five-year housing land supply positions, in instances of weak supply this could comprise an opportunity.

Strengthened Localism

The Government intends to strengthen local voices through neighbourhood committees, this could have the potential to increase the weight given to local community views in decisions, this could prove a potential headwind for more contentious developments.

Disruption to Decision-Making During Transition

Service design, organisational structures, workforce arrangements, and future operating models are yet to be confirmed. There is a risk of staff turnover leading to losses of local knowledge, and political attention being diverted to reorganisation, particularly around the shadow authority elections. Together this could slow the determination of applications and pre-application discussions.

Prolonged Governance and Devolution Uncertainty

Significant details remain to be worked out at a national and local level. Strategic authorities have no confirmed timetable and therefore schemes that depend on strategic policy direction (such as strategic sites and cross-boundary infrastructure) are likely to experience some ambiguity.