



Local Government Reorganisation

Engagement exercise responses

1. Introduction

Government ministers have asked councils across Kent and Medway to explore new ways of delivering local services.

In what will be the most significant reform of local government in nearly 50 years, the proposal is to replace existing county, district and borough councils with a smaller number of new unitary councils.

Each unitary council would serve a population of around 500,000 people.

A unitary council is a single organisation responsible for delivering all local government services within its area.

This differs from the current two-tier system, where Kent County Council provides some services, such as education, social care and highways, and the district or borough councils delivers others, such as waste collection, housing and planning.

Medway Council already operates as a unitary authority.

This process, known as Local Government Reorganisation, aims to simplify how services are delivered, reduce duplication and make it clearer for residents to understand which council is responsible for what.

At this stage, councils in Kent and Medway are working together to consider what arrangements could best meet the needs of local communities, including how many unitary councils there should be and what areas they should cover.

To support this process, the councils are being advised by KPMG, who are helping to ensure that emerging proposals meet the government's criteria and are underpinned by robust data and evidence.

Government will ultimately use this evidence to make its final decision on the future structure of local government in Kent and Medway.

Further information about this process can be found at KentCouncilLeaders.org.uk/change.

Public and stakeholder engagement on Local Government Reorganisation took place between Tuesday 9 September 2025 and Friday 10 October 2025.

The exercise was run by Canterbury City Council on behalf of Kent County Council, Medway Council and the 12 district and borough councils.

A total of **2,107 responses** were received.

2. Executive summary

- Service quality was ranked as residents' top priority, with 81.4% rating it very important and a further 7.5% as important, underlining the need to maintain reliable everyday services through local government reorganisation.
- Efficiency and value for money was the second priority, with 74.3% rating it very important and 12.3% as important and residents expressing anxiety about costs and desire that promised savings materialise in practice.
- Problem resolution time ranked third in importance, with 85.3% of respondents indicating it held some level of importance and emphasising concerns about delays and service gaps.
- Disabled residents and those with long-term health conditions prioritised both service quality and having meaningful influence over decisions, reflecting a desire for responsive, inclusive services and concerns about accessibility, loss of voice and potential disruption to existing support.
- Respondents saw service standardisation and accessibility as the leading opportunity of reorganisation, viewing it as a chance to simplify local government, clarify responsibilities and make joined-up services more accessible and responsible.
- Participants identified economies of scale as another key opportunity of reorganisation, seeing it as a way to streamline operations, reduce bureaucracy and deliver better value and a fairer balance of power across areas.
- Respondents also emphasised the importance of resident-focused governance, calling for locally-accountable structures that stay closely connected to communities.
- Residents' strongest concern was the risk of governance becoming more impersonal and remote, with fears that larger unitary councils could become disconnected from communities, particularly in rural and coastal areas.
- Participants questioned whether the promised efficiencies would outweigh the significant costs of restructuring and expressed concern about potential service disruption.
- There was concern that reorganisation will undermine local democracy and fears that larger councils could weaken local accountability, reduce democratic

representation and limit residents' ability to influence decisions that affect their communities.

- Stakeholders saw opportunities for greater efficiency, integration and clearer accountability, but also warned of risks including reduced local representation, loss of community identity, widening inequality, unresolved financial pressures and disruption to housing and estate management during transition.
- Engagement with parish councils and community representatives in September 2025 identified potential benefits such a stronger local voice, improved collaboration, efficiency and joined-up policy making, but raised concerns about community identity, loss of local accountability, east/west disparities, splitting debts, managing assets and ensuring deprived areas are not left behind.

3. Engagement methodology

Engagement on the Local Government Reorganisation took place between Tuesday 9 September 2025 and Friday 10 October 2025.

The following methods were used to seek views:

- an online survey which received 2,058 responses
- a total of 49 written representations were received
- an engagement workshop with parish and town representatives in the Canterbury district

The consultation was promoted in the following ways:

- a letter was sent to key stakeholders across Kent and Medway
- posts on all councils' social media channels
- meetings with local groups in each of the districts

4. Findings

The findings draw on several resources: responses to the survey, written representations, as well as summary notes from engagement workshops.

Public engagement responses - survey results

As part of the upcoming changes to local government structure across Kent and Medway, residents were invited to share their views through a public survey.

The aim was to understand people's experiences of their current councils, what they value most about local government and what they see as priorities as the new arrangements are developed.

The survey asked residents a series of questions about:

- which council they currently live in and pay council tax to
- how strongly they feel connected to their local area and council
- the importance of being able to contact councillors or attend council meetings
- how easy it is to access council services in person or online
- views on the quality and reliability of local services
- opinions on council size, representation and efficiency
- perceptions of value for money and the use of public resources
- what opportunities and concerns they can see from local government reorganisation

A total of 2,058 people responded to the survey.

Question 1

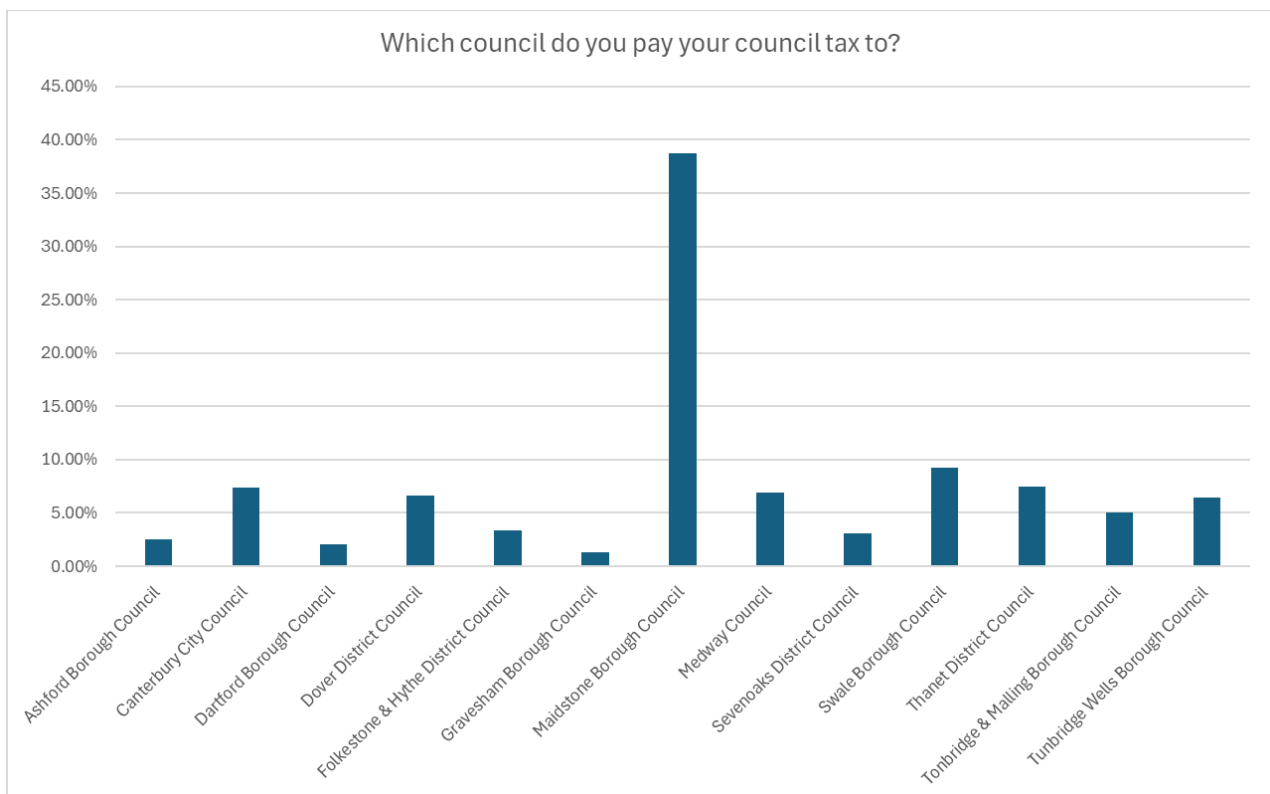
Respondents to the survey represented all local authority areas across Kent and Medway. Question 1 demonstrated the largest proportion of respondents (38.7%) said they pay their council tax to Maidstone Borough Council, followed by Swale Borough Council (9.2%), Thanet District Council (7.5%) and Canterbury City Council (7.4%).

Smaller proportions came from other areas, including Medway Council (6.9%), Dover District Council (6.6%), Tunbridge Well Borough Council (6.4%) and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (5%).

Lower response levels were recorded in Folkestone & Hythe District Council (3.4%), Sevenoaks District Council (3.1%), Ashford Borough Council (2.5%), Dartford Borough Council (2.1%) and Gravesham Borough Council (1.3%).

Which council do you pay your council tax to?

Ashford Borough Council	52	2.5%
Canterbury City Council	153	7.4%
Dartford Borough Council	43	2.1%
Dover District Council	136	6.6%
Folkestone & Hythe District Council	69	3.4%
Gravesham Borough Council	27	1.3%
Maidstone Borough Council	796	38.7%
Medway Council	142	6.9%
Sevenoaks District Council	63	3.1%
Swale Borough Council	190	9.2%
Thanet District Council	154	7.5%
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council	102	5.0%
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	131	6.4%



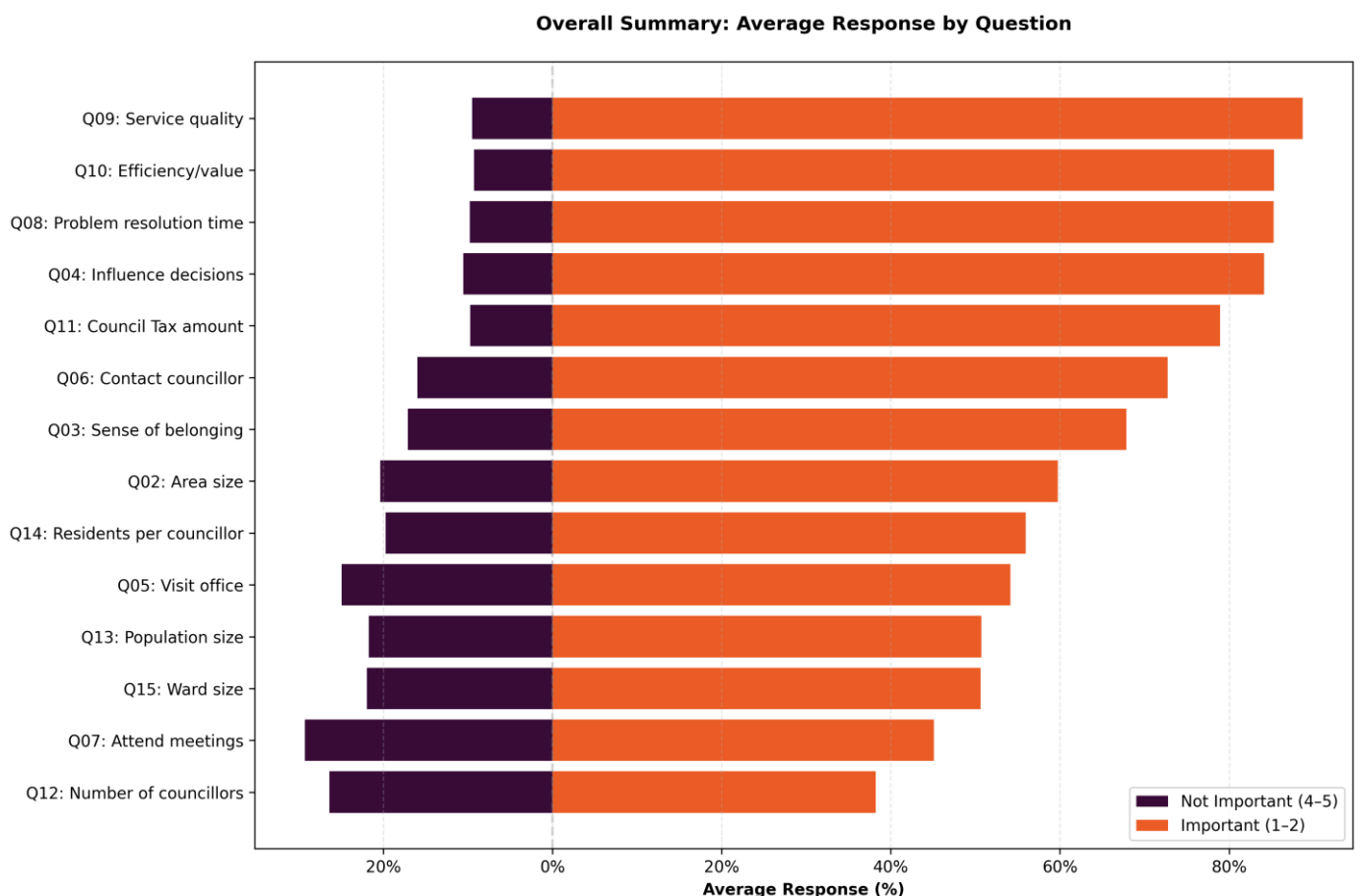
Question 2

Question 2 asked respondents to rate different factors, ranking them from very important to not very important.

Overall, the highest-rated aspects were service quality, efficiency and value, problem resolution time, decision-making influence and the size of Council Tax bills.

Contacting your councillor, a sense of belonging, area size and residents per councillor ranked in the middle of the chart.

The factors considered least important included the ability to visit a council office, population size, ward size, attendance at council meetings and number of councillors.



What residents prioritise: geographically, age and health variations in local government concerns

Geographic variations

The three most important factors occasionally varied dependent on the area.

‘Service quality’ is the top priority for almost all areas of Kent, appearing nine times as number one, twice as number two and once as number three priority, reflecting a concern that reorganisation should not compromise the day-to-day services residents depend on.

‘Efficiency/value’ is the second highest priority, appearing twice as number one, six times as number two and three times as number three, expressing anxiety about costs and a desire that promised savings actually materialise.

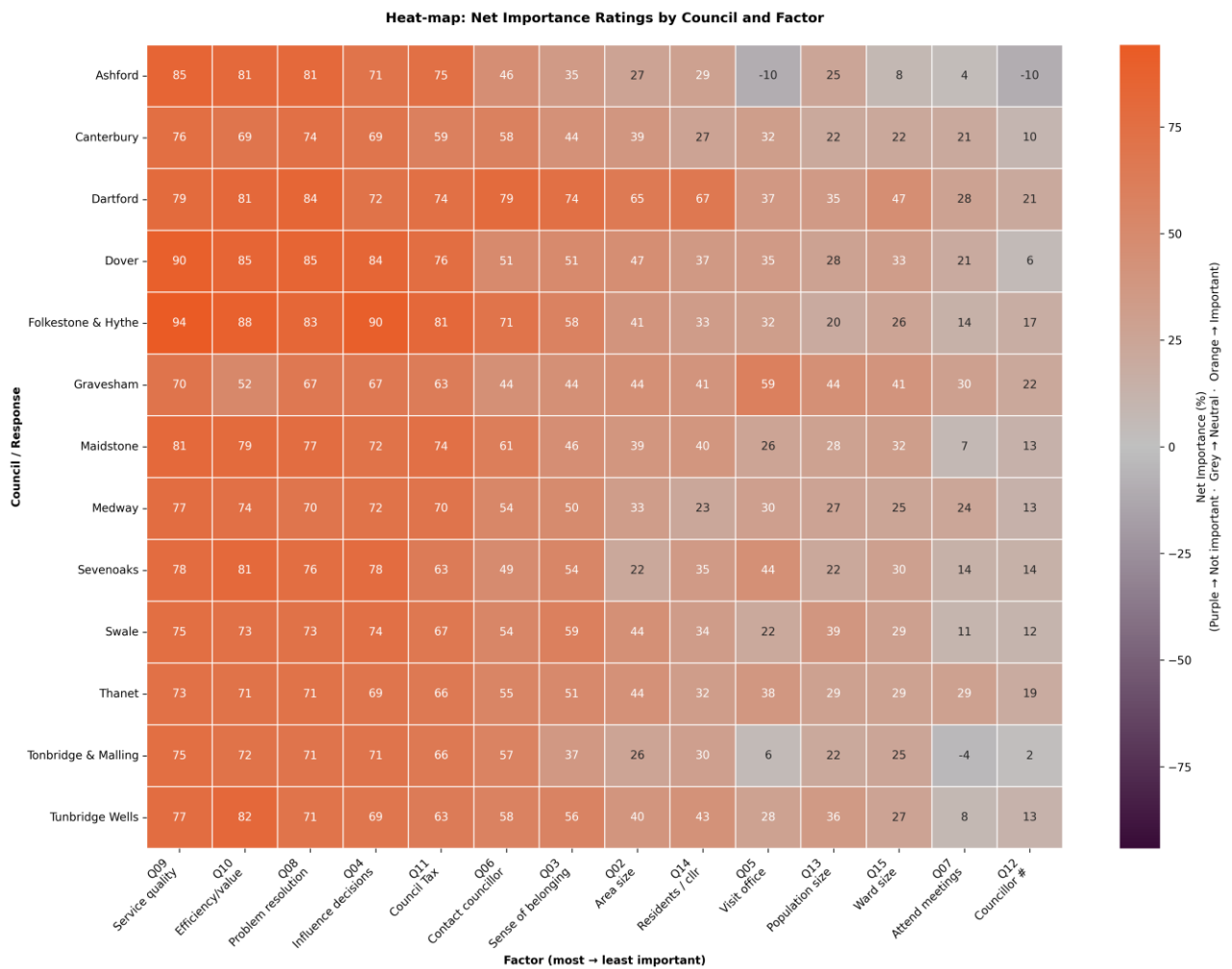
‘Problem resolution time’ is the third highest priority, appearing once as number one, twice as number two and six times as number three priority, indicating respondents are concerned delays and services gaps.

‘Influence decisions’ is also high on the list for many respondents, suggesting people want their voices and views to be heard and are concerned about maintaining local say over matters affecting them.

Area	Ranking ¹		
	1	2	3
Ashford	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution
Canterbury	Service quality	Problem resolution	Efficiency/value
Dartford	Problem resolution	Efficiency/value	Service quality
Dover	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution
Folkestone & Hythe	Service quality	Influence decisions	Efficiency/value
Gravesham	Service quality	Problem resolutions	Influence decisions
Maidstone	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution
Medway	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution
Sevenoaks	Efficiency/value	Service quality	Influence decisions
Swale	Service quality	Influence decisions	Efficiency/value
Thanet	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution
Tonbridge & Malling	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Influence decisions
Tunbridge Wells	Efficiency/value	Service quality	Problem resolution

¹ In some cases, areas might have received the same number of points, or the margins were close. Where this occurred, rankings were determined based on general consensus. Please see the heatmap for full breakdown.

The full breakdown of all areas and factors is shown in the heatmap below, organised alphabetically by area and then by factor, from most to least important.



Age-related patterns

Views were generally aligned, though subtle differences emerged between age groups.

Young people under 18 ranked influencing decisions, problem resolution time, service quality and efficiency/value as the most important factors.

“More influence for the residents over all aspects of where they live, easier to report problems to the right people in the council, more unity within the local community, more opportunities for the residents to interact with the local government and more opportunities for developments within the community.”

The 18-25 age group ranked service quality first and efficiency second, closer to the general pattern, but still include influence decisions as equally important as problem resolution time in third.

“It would be best for them to focus more on communities and people who really need help the most. People pay a lot of council tax and they don't feel that the money there giving is not going to anything beneficial in the area or if it helps them at all. Also the government's key criteria should be focusing on how much people want this change and taking their thoughts into consideration as the people are the most important thing of this country.”

All age groups ranked service quality as their top priority.

The under-18 group, however, gave equal scores to service quality, influencing decisions, problem resolution time, service quality and efficiency/value.

It's worth noting that only four respondents were under 18, which may explain why all four factors were rated equally and there was limited variation in responses.

Ages 26-44 and 55-64 prioritise problem resolution time second.

“With a pool of knowledge within our communities, it is an untapped free resource to answers to such things (but not limited too) planning, problem resolutions, investment needs, anti- social behaviours.”

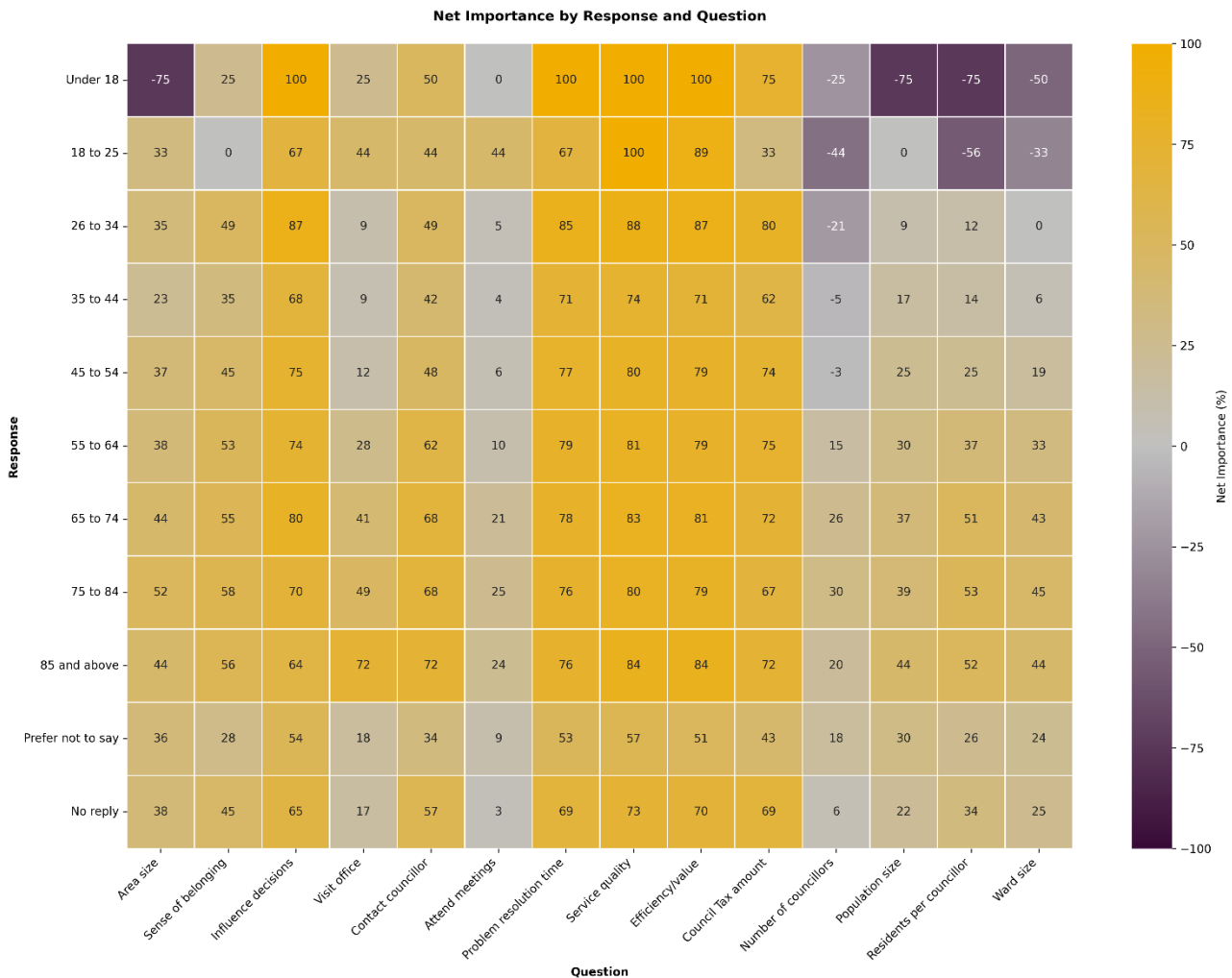
Ages 45-54, 65-84 and 85+ prioritise efficiency and value second.

Notably, ‘influence decisions’ largely disappears from middle-aged and older cohorts' top three priorities, except for the 26-34, and 65-74 group (where it ranks third).

However, differences between the top factors are minimal, so rankings should be interpreted with caution. It is important to consider the results in context and examine the underlying data in detail.

Age	Ranking		
	1	2	3
Under 18	Service quality	Influence decisions	Problem resolution time & Efficiency/value
18-25	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Influence decisions & Problem resolution time
26-34	Service quality	Problem resolution time	Influence decisions & Efficiency/value
35-44	Service quality	Problem resolution time	Efficiency/value
45-54	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution time
55-64	Service quality	Problem resolution time	Efficiency/value
65-74	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Influence decisions
75-84	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution time
85 and above	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution time
Prefer not to say	Service quality	Influence decisions	Problem resolution time
No reply	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution time

The full breakdown of all ages and factors is shown in the heatmap below.



Health and disability considerations

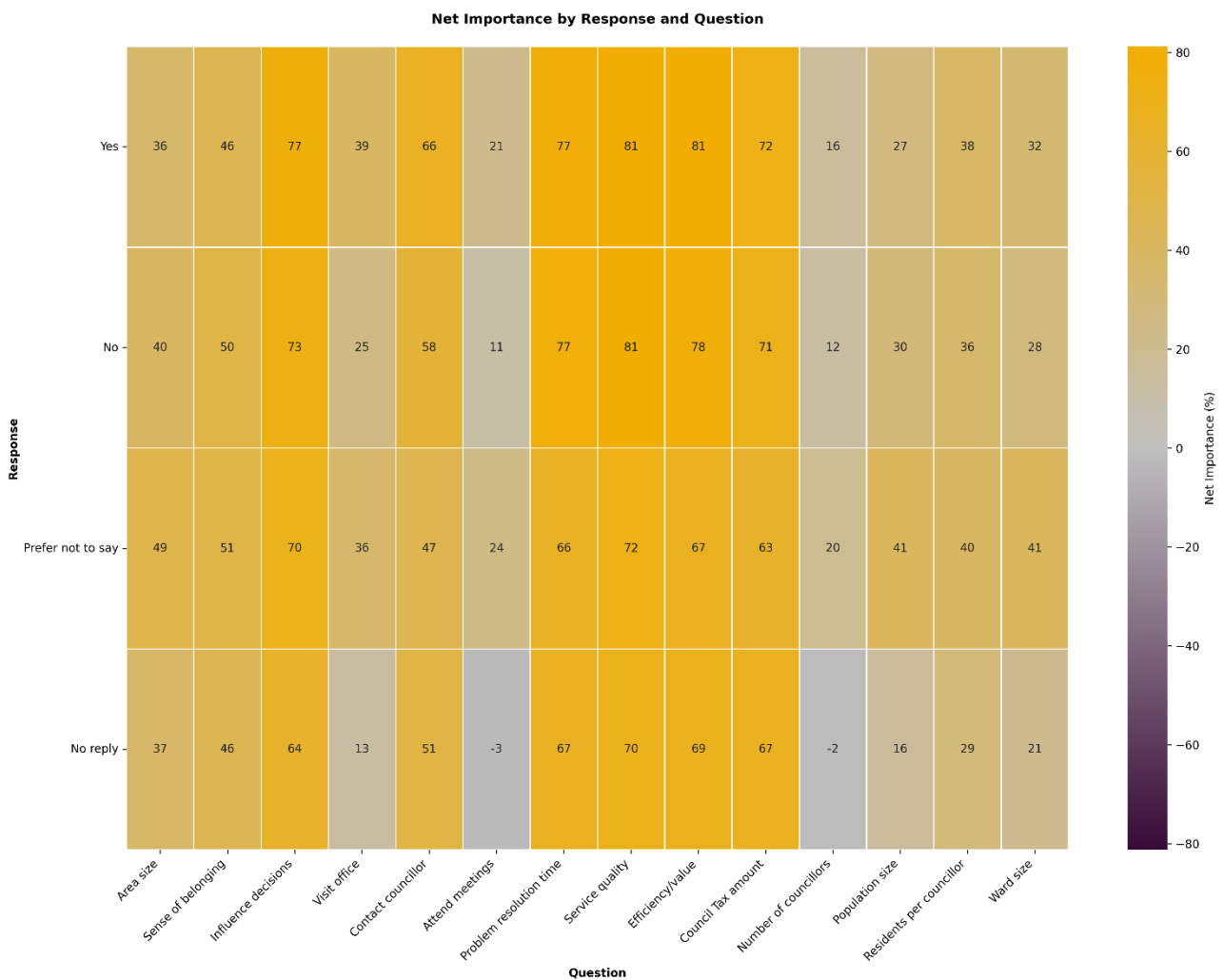
Service quality remains a priority for people considering themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition. They also put a strong emphasis on influencing decisions.

This may suggest disabled residents value both swift service resolution and meaningful say in decisions affecting them. When asked to outline their concerns about local government reorganisation, a respondent who considered themselves to have a disability or a long-term health condition said:

“Ability to be heard and to influence decision making in a much larger council area; The loss of a local Council making decisions for local people; The possibility of the Council offices being located somewhere that I can't get to (I don't drive); The possibility of losing services currently provided.”

Disability or long-term health condition	Ranking		
	1	2	3
Yes	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Influence decisions & Problem resolution time
No	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution time
Prefer not to say	Service quality	Influence decisions	Efficiency/value
No reply	Service quality	Efficiency/value	Problem resolution time & Council tax amount

The full breakdown of all answers and factors is provided in the heatmap below.



Question 2

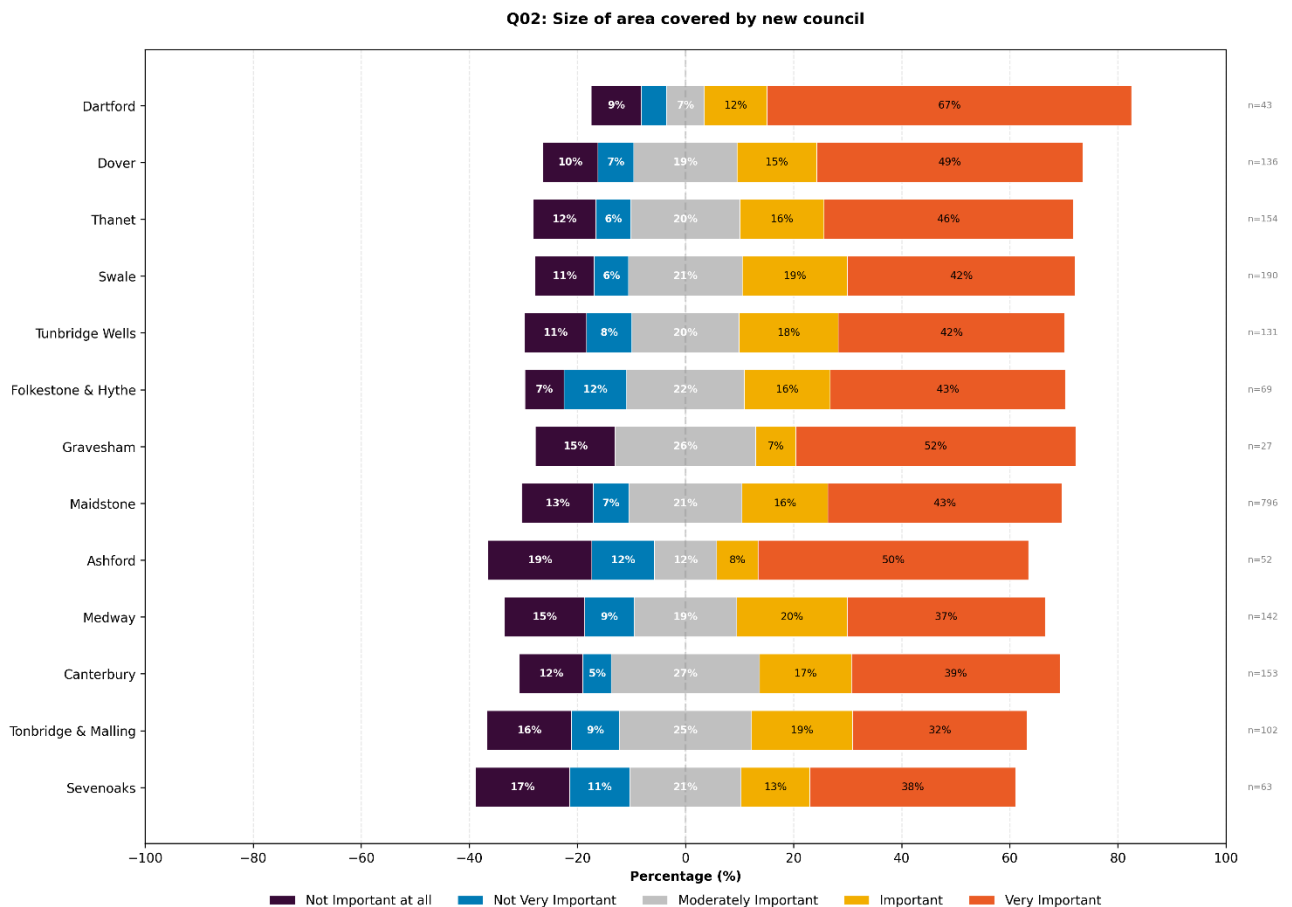
Factor: Size of area covered by new council

Overall, 43% of respondents consider this factor very important, followed by 16.3% of people who view it as important.

20.8% respondents have a neutral stance and find this as moderately important, 7.1% don't find it very important and 12.8% consider it not important at all.

Dartford shows the highest emphasis on the importance with 79% respondents expressing this factor is very important or important to them.

This is followed by Dover (64%), Thanet (62%), Swale (61%) and Tunbridge Wells (60%).



Size of area covered by new council

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	885	26	59	29	67	30	14
	43.0%	50.0%	38.6%	67.4%	49.3%	43.5%	51.9%
Important	335	4	26	5	20	11	2
	16.3%	7.7%	17.0%	11.6%	14.7%	15.9%	7.4%
Moderately important	428	6	42	3	26	15	7
	20.8%	11.5%	27.5%	7.0%	19.1%	21.7%	25.9%
Not very important	147	6	8	2	9	8	-
	7.1%	11.5%	5.2%	4.7%	6.6%	11.6%	-
Not important at all	263	10	18	4	14	5	4
	12.8%	19.2%	11.8%	9.3%	10.3%	7.2%	14.8%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	345	52	24	80	71	33	55
	43.3%	36.6%	38.1%	42.1%	46.1%	32.4%	42.0%
Important	126	29	8	37	24	19	24
	15.8%	20.4%	12.7%	19.5%	15.6%	18.6%	18.3%
Moderately important	167	27	13	40	31	25	26
	21.0%	19.0%	20.6%	21.1%	20.1%	24.5%	19.8%
Not very important	52	13	7	12	10	9	11
	6.5%	9.2%	11.1%	6.3%	6.5%	8.8%	8.4%
Not important at all	106	21	11	21	18	16	15
	13.3%	14.8%	17.5%	11.1%	11.7%	15.7%	11.5%

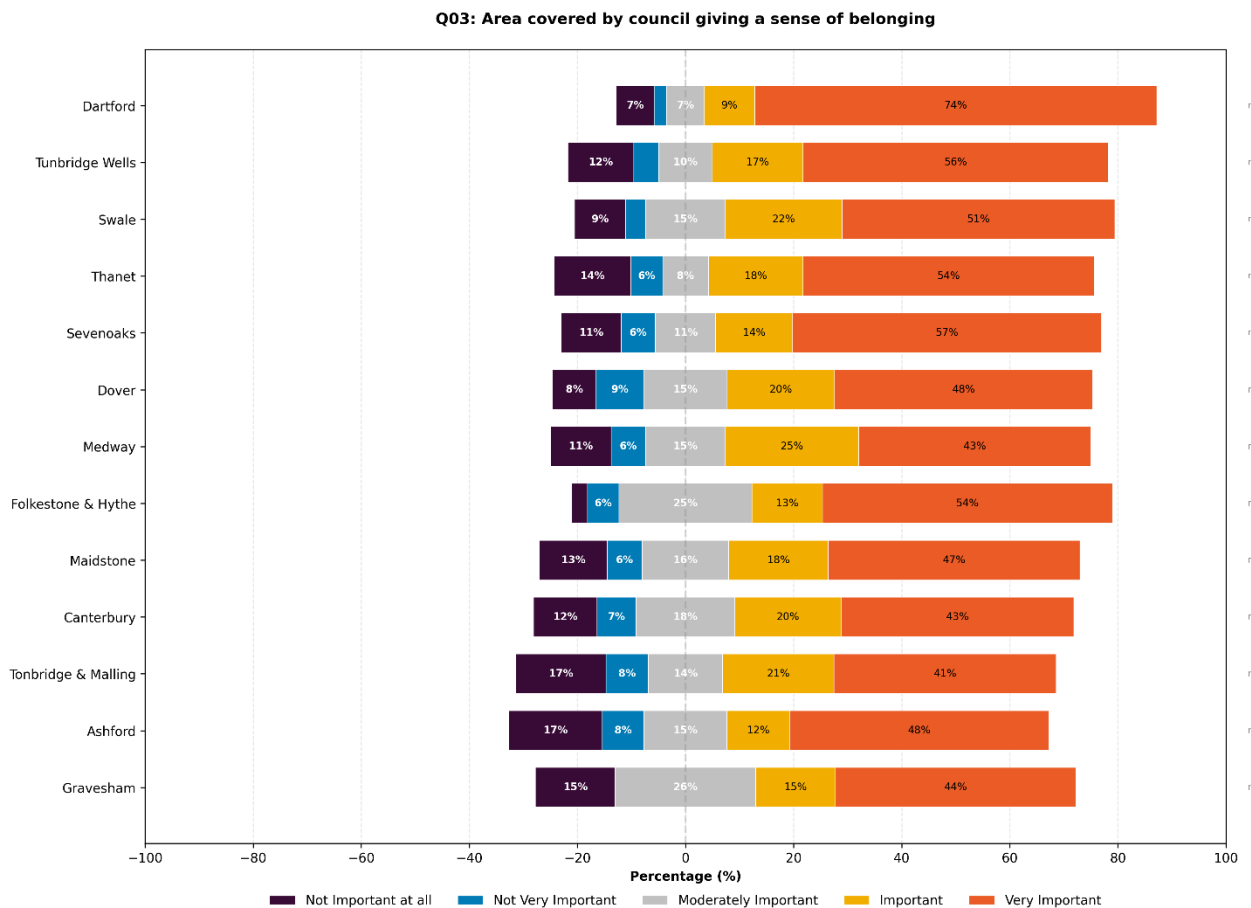
Question 2

Factor: Area covered by council giving a sense of belonging

48.6% respondents consider a sense of belonging to their council areas as very important. An additional 18.5% rate it as important.

15% feel neutral and a smaller proportion finds it not very important (6.1%) or not important at all (11.8%).

83% of respondents in Dartford rated a sense of belonging as very important or important. This is followed by Tunbridge Wells (73%), Swale (73%), Thanet (72%) and Sevenoaks (71%).



Area covered by council giving a sense of belonging

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	1,000	25	66	32	65	37	12
	48.6%	48.1%	43.1%	74.4%	47.8%	53.6%	44.4%
Important	381	6	30	4	27	9	4
	18.5%	11.5%	19.6%	9.3%	19.9%	13.0%	14.8%
Moderately important	308	8	28	3	21	17	7
	15.0%	15.4%	18.3%	7.0%	15.4%	24.6%	25.9%
Not very important	126	4	11	1	12	4	-
	6.1%	7.7%	7.2%	2.3%	8.8%	5.8%	-
Not important at all	243	9	18	3	11	2	4
	11.8%	17.3%	11.8%	7.0%	8.1%	2.9%	14.8%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	371	61	36	96	83	42	74
	46.6%	43.0%	57.1%	50.5%	53.9%	41.2%	56.5%
Important	146	35	9	41	27	21	22
	18.3%	24.6%	14.3%	21.6%	17.5%	20.6%	16.8%
Moderately important	128	21	7	28	13	14	13
	16.1%	14.8%	11.1%	14.7%	8.4%	13.7%	9.9%
Not very important	51	9	4	7	9	8	6
	6.4%	6.3%	6.3%	3.7%	5.8%	7.8%	4.6%
Not important at all	100	16	7	18	22	17	16
	12.6%	11.3%	11.1%	9.5%	14.3%	16.7%	12.2%

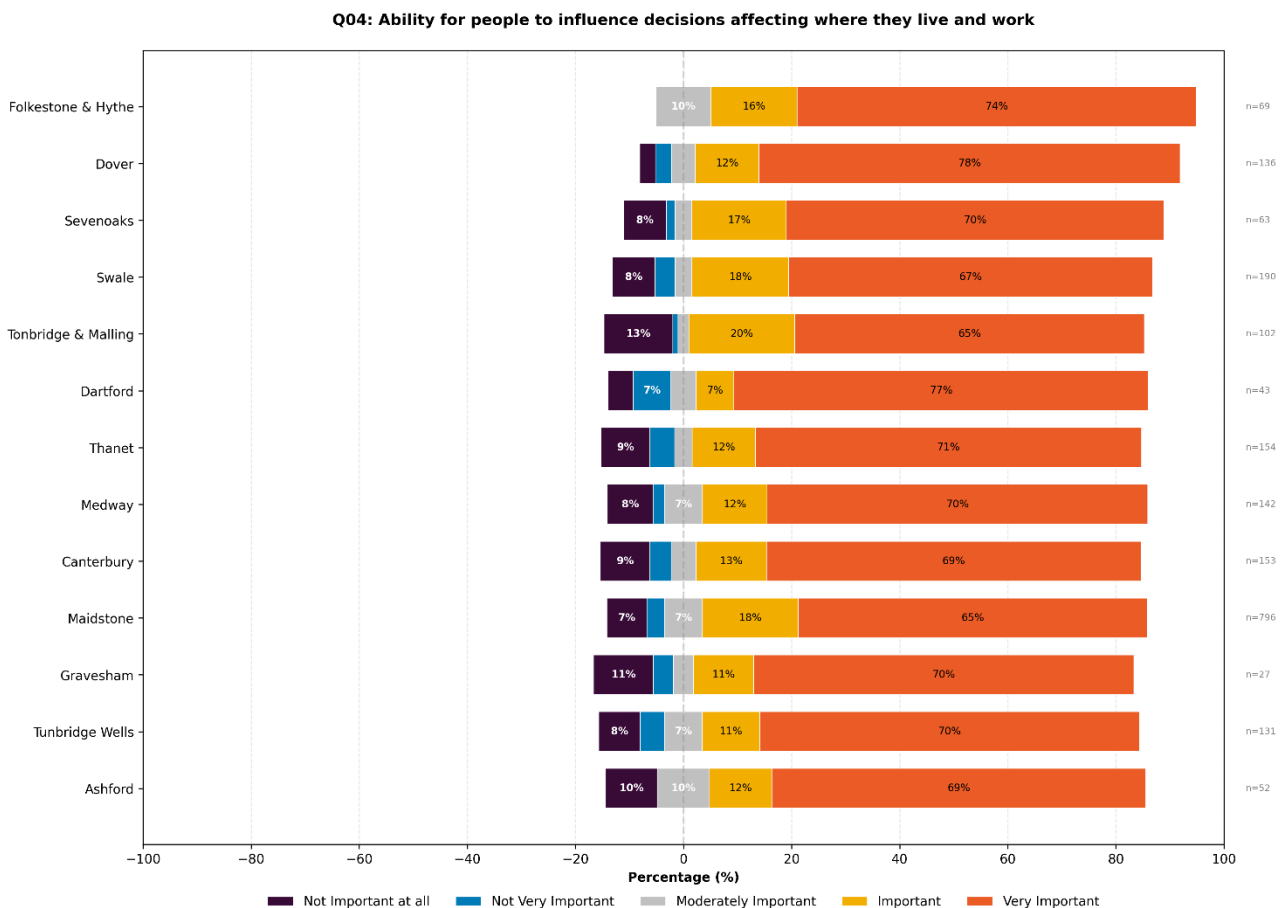
Question 2

Factor: Ability for people to influence decisions affecting where they live and work

Overall, a majority of respondents view this ability as either very important or important. 68.3% of participants across all areas rated it as very important, with an additional 15.3% considering it important.

5.7% respondents have a neutral stance and find this as moderately important, 3.2% don't find it very important and 7.6% consider it not important at all.

Folkestone & Hythe (90%), Dover (90%), Sevenoaks (87%), Swale (85%) and Tonbridge & Malling (85%) expressed this factor is very important or important to them.



Ability for people to influence decisions affecting where they live and work

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	1,405	36	106	33	106	51	19
	68.3%	69.2%	69.3%	76.7%	77.9%	73.9%	70.4%
Important	314	6	20	3	16	11	3
	15.3%	11.5%	13.1%	7.0%	11.8%	15.9%	11.1%
Moderately important	118	5	7	2	6	7	1
	5.7%	9.6%	4.6%	4.7%	4.4%	10.1%	3.7%
Not very important	65	-	6	3	4	-	1
	3.2%	-	3.9%	7.0%	2.9%	-	3.7%
Not important at all	156	5	14	2	4	-	3
	7.6%	9.6%	9.2%	4.7%	2.9%	-	11.1%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	514	100	44	128	110	66	92
	64.6%	70.4%	69.8%	67.4%	71.4%	64.7%	70.2%
Important	141	17	11	34	18	20	14
	17.7%	12.0%	17.5%	17.9%	11.7%	19.6%	10.7%
Moderately important	56	10	2	6	5	2	9
	7.0%	7.0%	3.2%	3.2%	3.2%	2.0%	6.9%
Not very important	26	3	1	7	7	1	6
	3.3%	2.1%	1.6%	3.7%	4.5%	1.0%	4.6%
Not important at all	59	12	5	15	14	13	10
	7.4%	8.5%	7.9%	7.9%	9.1%	12.7%	7.6%

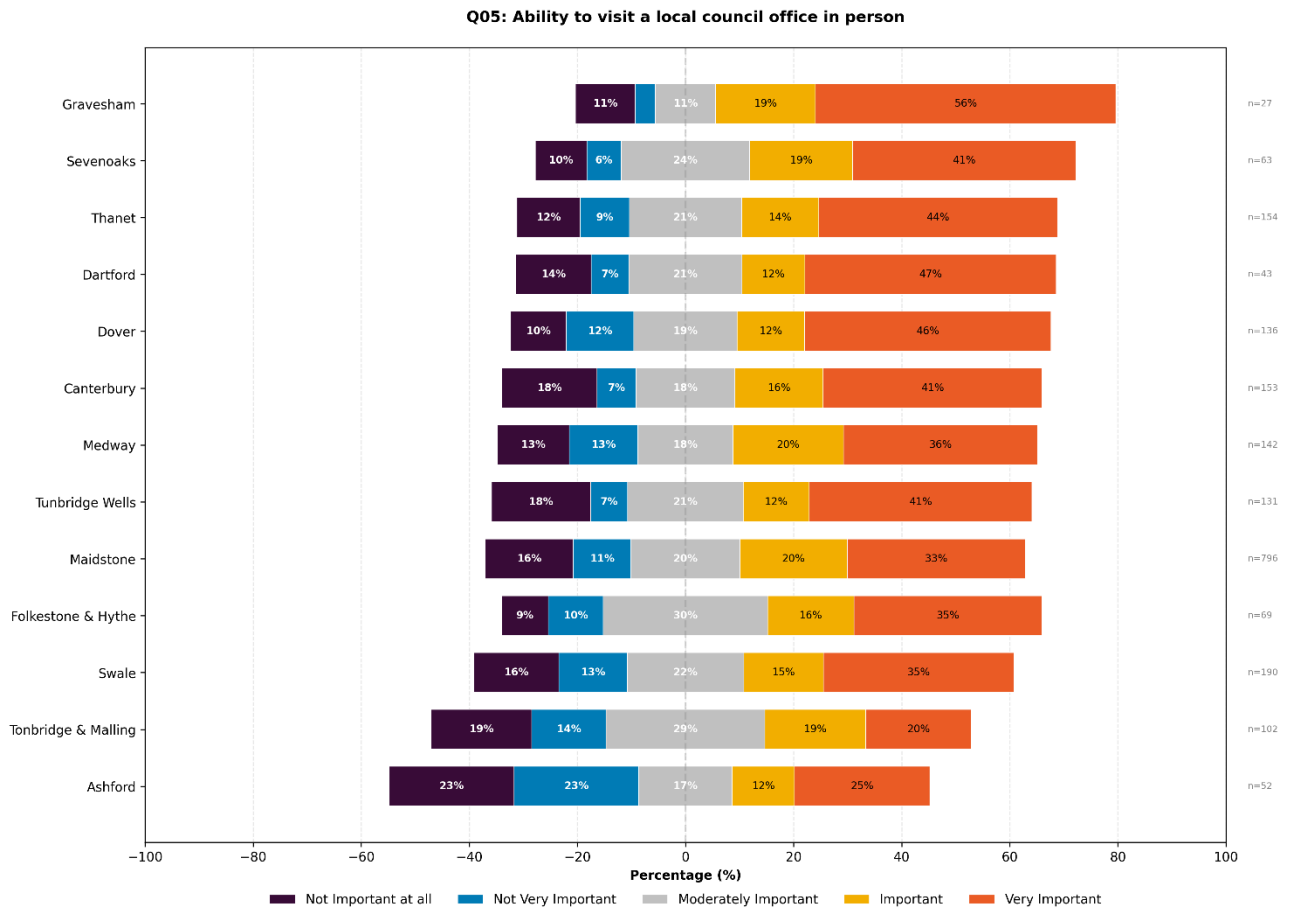
Question 2

Factor: Ability to visit a local council office in person

36.2% respondents consider ability to visit a local council office in person as very important.

An additional 17.2% rate it as important. 20.7% feel neutral and a smaller proportion finds it not very important (10.8%) or not important at all (15.3%).

75% of respondents in Gravesham rated this as very important or important. This is followed by Sevenoaks (60%), Dartford (59%), Thanet (58%) and Dover (58%).



Ability to visit a local council office in person

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	745	13	62	20	62	24	15
	36.2%	25.0%	40.5%	46.5%	45.6%	34.8%	55.6%
Important	353	6	25	5	17	11	5
	17.2%	11.5%	16.3%	11.6%	12.5%	15.9%	18.5%
Moderately important	427	9	28	9	26	21	3
	20.7%	17.3%	18.3%	20.9%	19.1%	30.4%	11.1%
Not very important	219	12	11	3	17	7	1
	10.6%	23.1%	7.2%	7.0%	12.5%	10.1%	3.7%
Not important at all	314	12	27	6	14	6	3
	15.3%	23.1%	17.6%	14.0%	10.3%	8.7%	11.1%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	263	51	26	67	68	20	54
	33.0%	35.9%	41.3%	35.3%	44.2%	19.6%	41.2%
Important	158	29	12	28	22	19	16
	19.8%	20.4%	19.0%	14.7%	14.3%	18.6%	12.2%
Moderately important	160	25	15	41	32	30	28
	20.1%	17.6%	23.8%	21.6%	20.8%	29.4%	21.4%
Not very important	85	18	4	24	14	14	9
	10.7%	12.7%	6.3%	12.6%	9.1%	13.7%	6.9%
Not important at all	130	19	6	30	18	19	24
	16.3%	13.4%	9.5%	15.8%	11.7%	18.6%	18.3%

Question 2

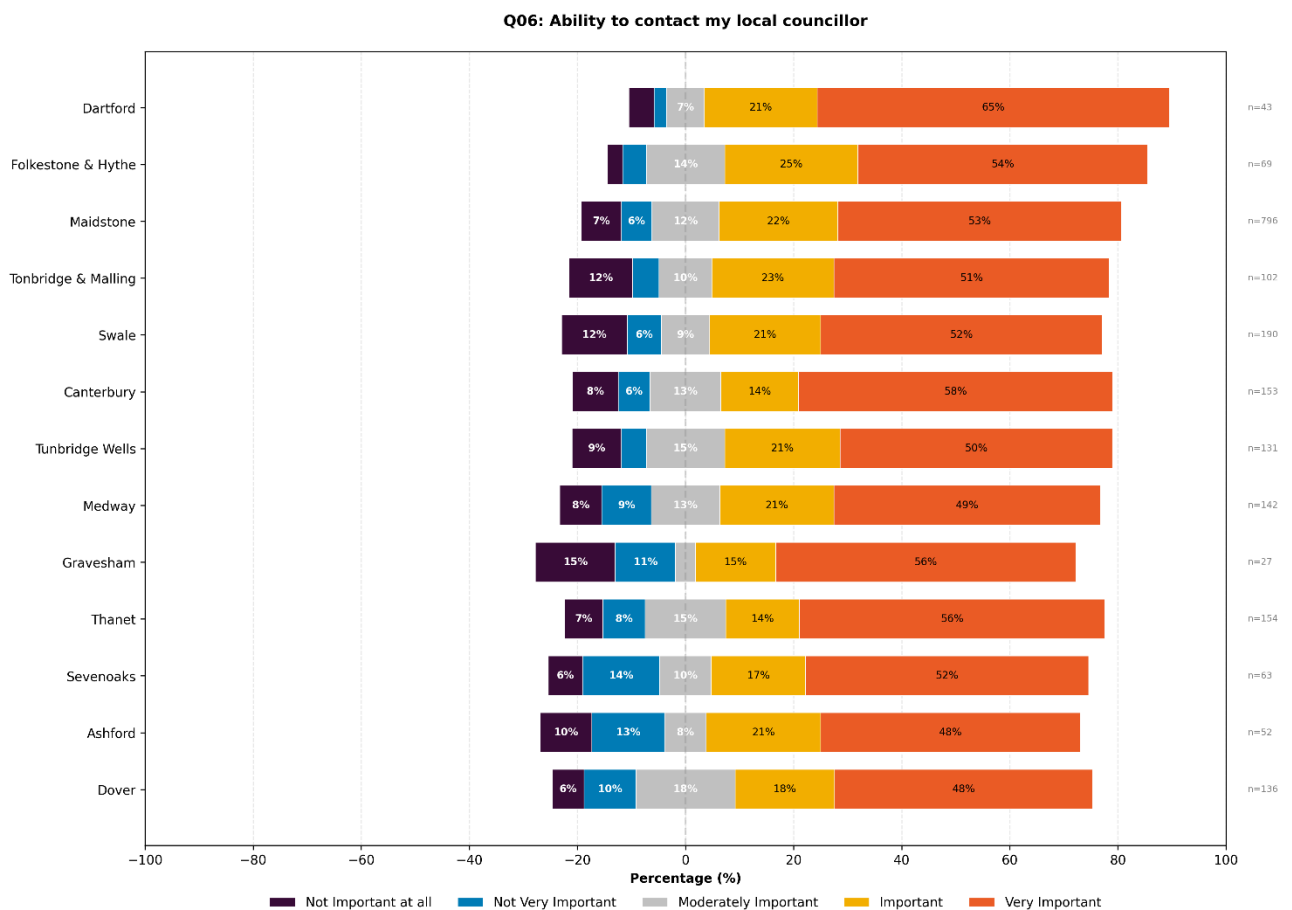
Factor: Ability to contact my local councillor

A total of 52.7% of respondents rated this factor as very important, with a further 20.2% describing it as important.

12.4% took a neutral view, while 6.7% felt it was not very important and 8.1% said it was not important at all.

86% of respondents in Dartford rated this as very important or important.

Similar views were also seen in Folkestone & Hythe (79%), Maidstone (75%), Tonbridge & Malling (84%) and Swale (73%).



Ability to contact my local councillor

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	1084	25	89	28	65	37	15
	52.7%	48.1%	58.2%	65.1%	47.8%	53.6%	55.6%
Important	415	11	22	9	25	17	4
	20.2%	21.2%	14.4%	20.9%	18.4%	24.6%	14.8%
Moderately important	255	4	20	3	25	10	1
	12.4%	7.7%	13.1%	7.0%	18.4%	14.5%	3.7%
Not very important	138	7	9	1	13	3	3
	6.7%	13.5%	5.9%	2.3%	9.6%	4.3%	11.1%
Not important at all	166	5	13	2	8	2	4
	8.1%	9.6%	8.50%	4.7%	5.9%	2.9%	14.8%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	418	70	33	99	87	52	66
	52.5%	49.3%	52.4%	52.1%	56.5%	51.0%	50.4%
Important	175	30	11	39	21	23	28
	22.0%	21.1%	17.5%	20.5%	13.6%	22.5%	21.4%
Moderately important	99	18	6	17	23	10	19
	12.4%	12.7%	9.5%	8.9%	14.9%	9.8%	14.5%
Not very important	45	13	9	12	12	5	6
	5.7%	9.2%	14.3%	6.3%	7.8%	4.9%	4.6%
Not important at all	59	11	4	23	11	12	12
	7.4%	7.7%	6.3%	12.1%	7.1%	11.8%	9.2%

Question 2

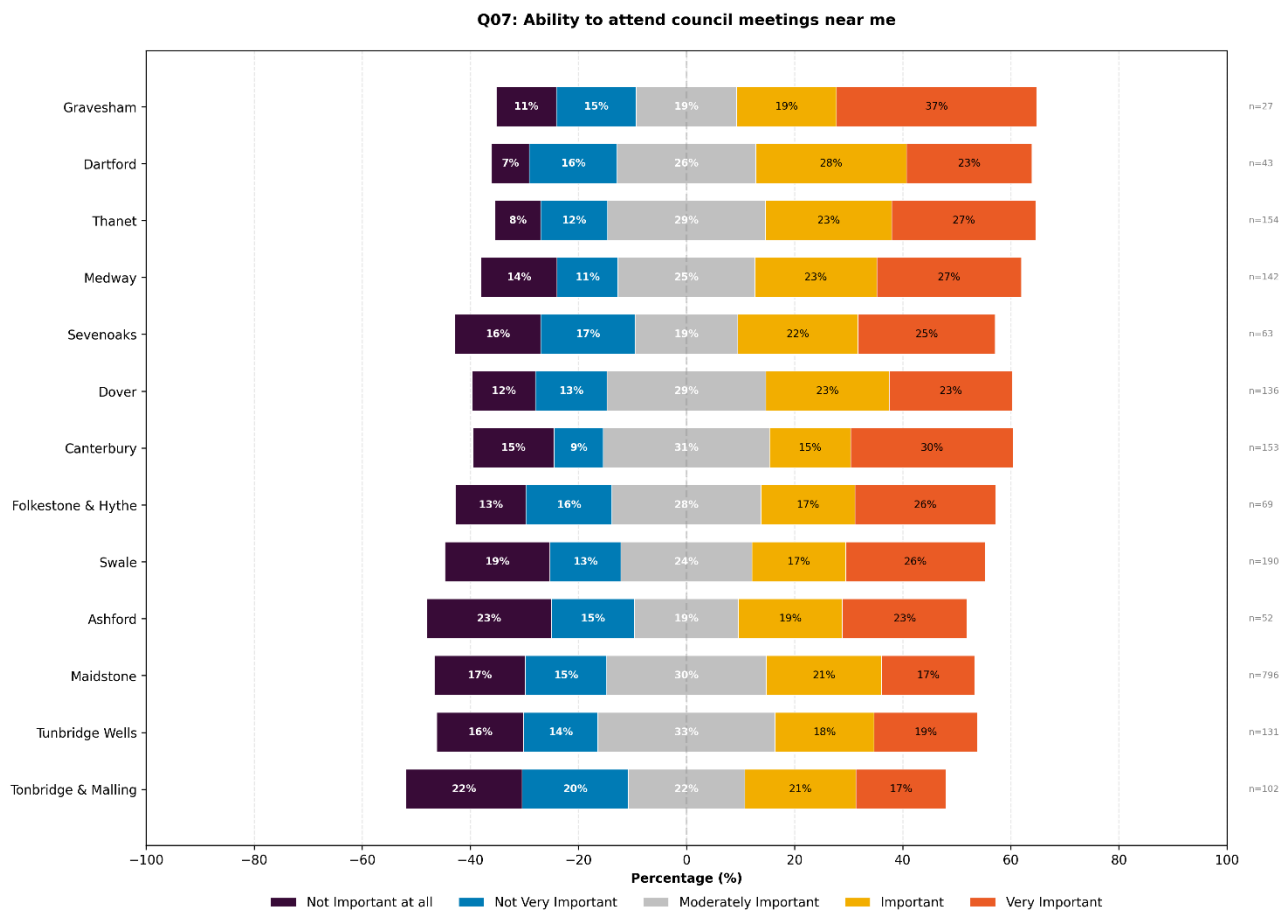
Factor: Ability to attend council meetings near me

Responses show that 42.5% of respondents attach some importance to this factor, with 21.9% describing it as very important and 20.6% as important.

Most respondents (27.7%) were neutral and noted this factor was moderately important to them and 29.8% considered it not very important or not important at all.

Levels of importance varied across the area, with Gravesham (56%) showing the highest proportion of respondents rating the factor as important or very important.

Other areas included Dartford (51%), Thanet (50%), Medway (50%) and Sevenoaks (47%).



Ability to attend council meetings near me

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	450	12	46	10	31	18	10
	21.9%	23.1%	30.1%	23.3%	22.8%	26.1%	37.0%
Important	423	10	23	12	31	12	5
	20.6%	19.2%	15.0%	27.9%	22.8%	17.4%	18.5%
Moderately important	571	10	47	11	40	19	5
	27.7%	19.2%	30.7%	25.6%	29.4%	27.5%	18.5%
Not very important	291	8	14	7	18	11	4
	14.1%	15.4%	9.2%	16.3%	13.2%	15.9%	14.8%
Not important at all	323	12	23	3	16	9	3
	15.7%	23.1%	15.0%	7.0%	11.8%	13.0%	11.1%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	137	38	16	49	41	17	25
	17.2%	26.8%	25.4%	25.8%	26.6%	16.7%	19.1%
Important	170	32	14	33	36	21	24
	21.4%	22.5%	22.2%	17.4%	23.4%	20.6%	18.3%
Moderately important	235	36	12	46	45	22	43
	29.5%	25.4%	19.0%	24.2%	29.2%	21.6%	32.8%
Not very important	120	16	11	25	19	20	18
	15.1%	11.3%	17.5%	13.2%	12.3%	19.6%	13.7%
Not important at all	134	20	10	37	13	22	21
	16.8%	14.1%	15.9%	19.5%	8.4%	21.6%	16.0%

Question 2

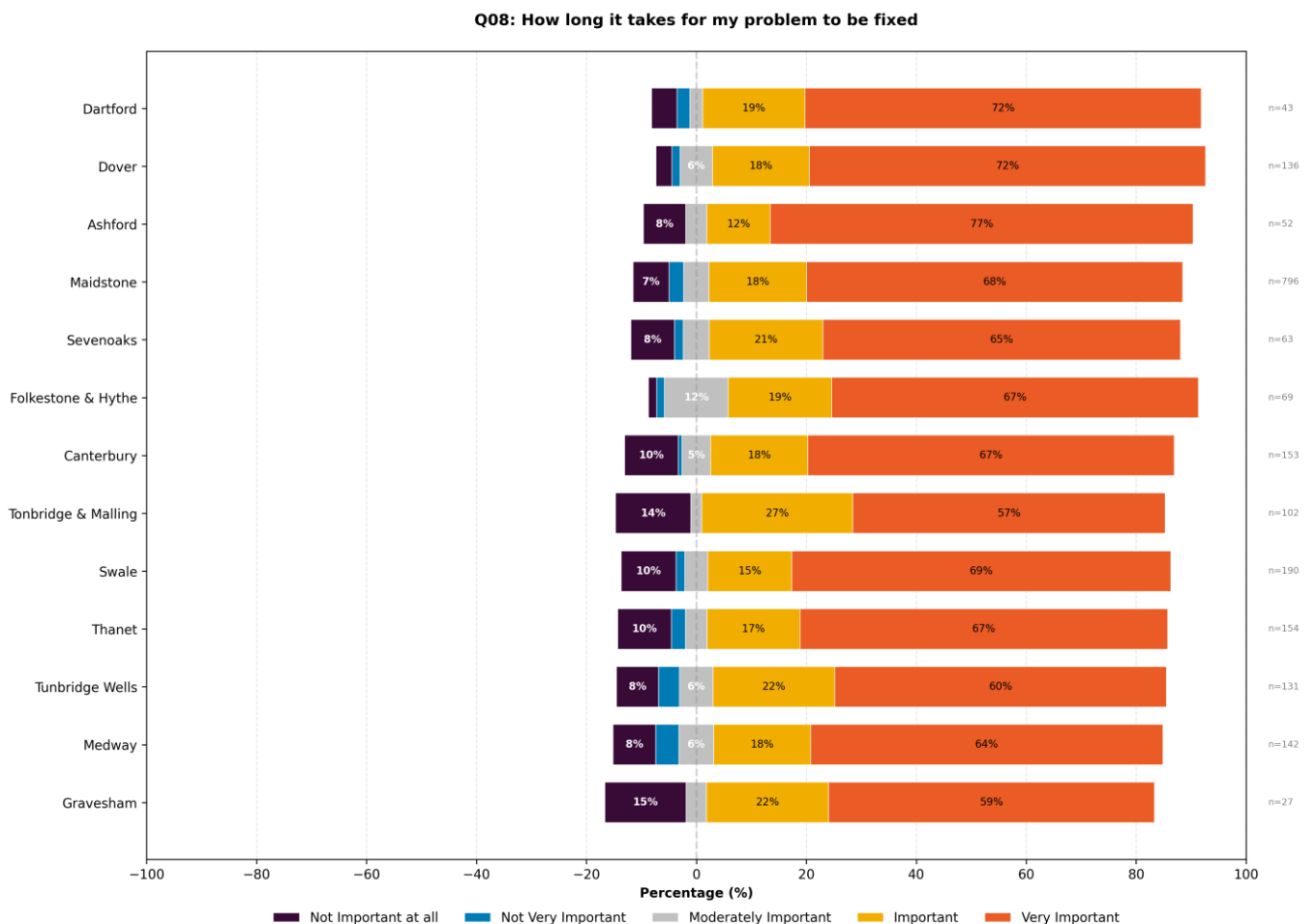
Factor: How long it takes for my problem to be fixed

This was ranked as the third most important factor.

A significant 85.3% of respondents indicated that this factor holds some level of importance, with 67.1% describing it as very important and 18.2% as important.

4.9% felt neutral and said it was moderately important, whilst 2.2% indicated it was not very important and 7.6% of participants considered it not important at all.

The highest levels of importance were reported in Dartford (91%), Dover (90%), Ashford (89%), Maidstone (86%) and Sevenoaks (86%).



How long it takes for my problem to be fixed

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	1,381	40	102	31	98	46	16
	67.1%	76.9%	66.7%	72.1%	72.1%	66.7%	59.3%
Important	375	6	27	8	24	13	6
	18.2%	11.5%	17.6%	18.6%	17.6%	18.8%	22.2%
Moderately important	101	2	8	1	8	8	1
	4.9%	3.8%	5.2%	2.3%	5.9%	11.6%	3.7%
Not very important	45	-	1	1	2	1	-
	2.2%	-	0.7%	2.3%	1.5%	1.4%	-
Not important at all	156	4	15	2	4	1	4
	7.6%	7.7%	9.8%	4.7%	2.9%	1.4%	14.8%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	545	91	41	131	103	58	79
	68.5%	64.1%	65.1%	68.9%	66.9%	56.9%	60.3%
Important	141	25	13	29	26	28	29
	17.7%	17.6%	20.6%	15.3%	16.9%	27.5%	22.1%
Moderately important	37	9	3	8	6	2	8
	4.6%	6.3%	4.8%	4.2%	3.9%	2.0%	6.1%
Not very important	21	6	1	3	4	-	5
	2.6%	4.2%	1.6%	1.6%	2.6%	-	3.8%
Not important at all	52	11	5	19	15	14	10
	6.5%	7.7%	7.9%	10.0%	9.7%	13.7%	7.6%

Question 2

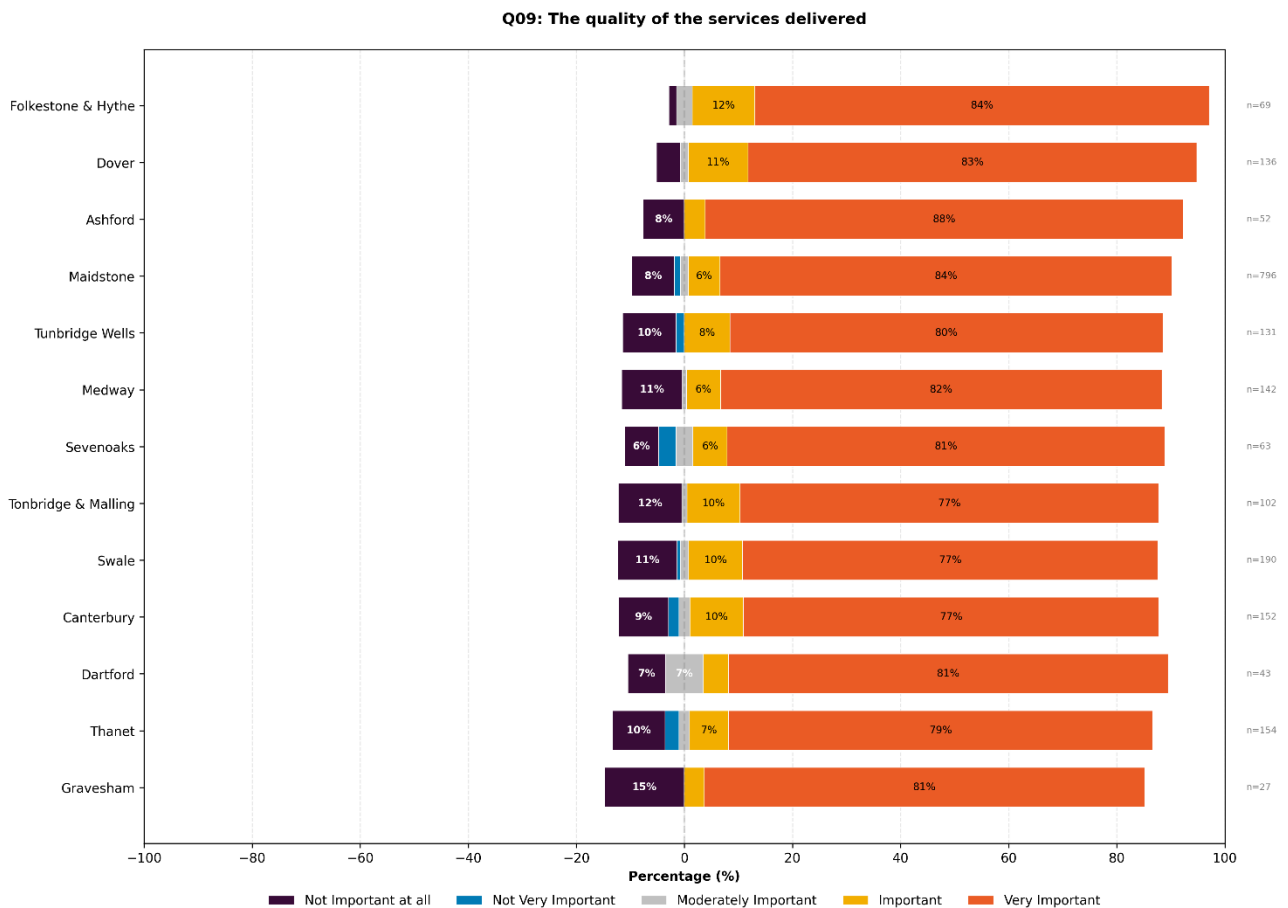
Factor: The quality of the services delivered

The quality of services delivered was ranked as the most important factor overall.

81.4% of respondents rated it as very important and a further 7.5% as important.

1.5% took a neutral view, while 1.0% felt it was not very important and 8.6% considered it not important at all.

Respondents in Folkestone & Hythe placed the greatest importance on this factor, with 96% rating it as very important or important, closely followed by Dover (94%), Ashford (92%), Maidstone (90%) and Tunbridge Wells (88%).



The quality of the services delivered

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	1675	46	117	35	113	58	22
	81.4%	88.5%	76.5%	81.4%	83.1%	84.1%	81.5%
Important	154	2	15	2	15	8	1
	7.5%	3.8%	9.8%	4.7%	11.0%	11.6%	3.7%
Moderately important	31	-	3	3	2	2	-
	1.5%	-	2.0%	7.0%	1.5%	2.9%	-
Not very important	21	-	3	-	-	-	-
	1.0%	-	2.0%	-	-	-	-
Not important at all	176	4	14	3	6	1	4
	8.6%	7.7%	9.2%	7.0%	4.4%	1.4%	14.8%
No reply	1		1				
	0.0%		0.7%				

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	666	116	51	146	121	79	105
	83.7%	81.7%	81.0%	76.8%	78.6%	77.5%	80.2%
Important	47	9	4	19	11	10	11
	5.9%	6.3%	6.3%	10.0%	7.1%	9.8%	8.4%
Moderately important	11	1	2	3	3	1	-
	1.4%	0.7%	3.2%	1.6%	1.9%	1.0%	-
Not very important	9	-	2	1	4	-	2
	1.1%	-	3.2%	0.5%	2.6%	-	1.5%
Not important at all	63	16	4	21	15	12	13
	7.9%	11.3%	6.3%	11.1%	9.7%	11.8%	9.9%

Question 2

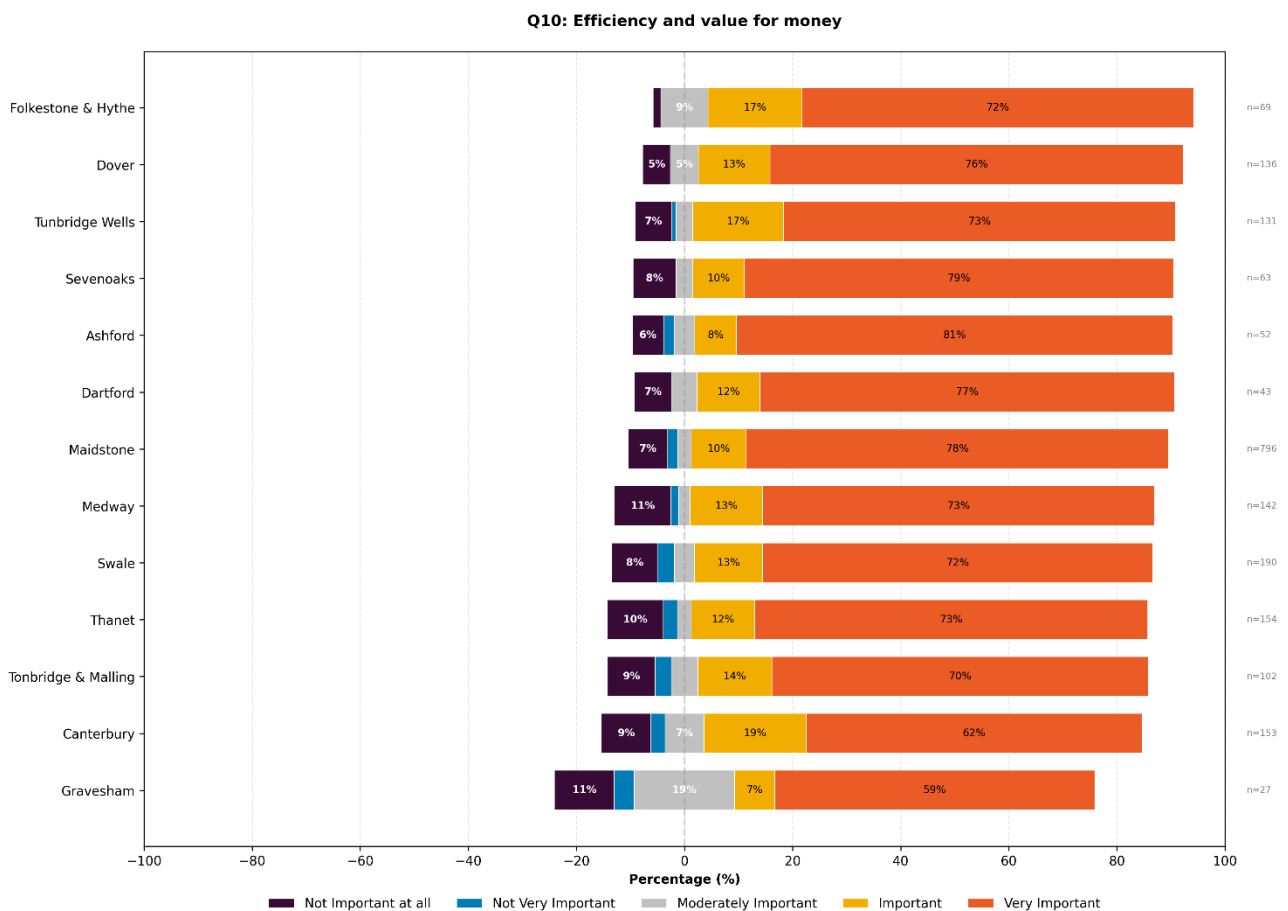
Factor: Efficiency and value for money

The second-highest ranked factor was efficiency and value for money.

A total of 74.3% respondents rated this factor as very important, with a further 12.3% describing it as important.

3.8% took a neutral view, ranking it as moderately important, while 1.8% felt it was not very important and 7.7% said it was not important at all.

Respondents in Tunbridge Wells (90%), Folkestone & Hythe (89%), Dover (89%), Sevenoaks (89%), Ashford (89%) and Dartford (89%) rated it as very important or important.



Efficiency and value for money

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	1,530	42	95	33	104	50	16
	74.3%	80.8%	62.1%	76.7%	76.5%	72.5%	59.3%
Important	254	4	29	5	18	12	2
	12.3%	7.7%	19.0%	11.6%	13.2%	17.4%	7.4%
Moderately important	78	2	11	2	7	6	5
	3.8%	3.8%	7.2%	4.7%	5.1%	8.7%	18.5%
Not very important	37	1	4	-	-	-	1
	1.8%	1.9%	2.6%	-	-	-	3.7%
Not important at all	159	3	14	3	7	1	3
	7.7%	5.8%	9.2%	7.0%	5.1%	1.4%	11.1%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	622	103	50	137	112	71	95
	78.1%	72.5%	79.4%	72.1%	72.7%	69.6%	72.5%
Important	81	19	6	24	18	14	22
	10.2%	13.4%	9.5%	12.6%	11.7%	13.7%	16.8%
Moderately important	20	3	2	7	4	5	4
	2.5%	2.1%	3.2%	3.7%	2.6%	4.9%	3.1%
Not very important	15	2	-	6	4	3	1
	1.9%	1.4%	-	3.2%	2.6%	2.9%	0.8%
Not important at all	58	15	5	16	16	9	9
	7.3%	10.6%	7.9%	8.4%	10.4%	8.8%	6.9%

Question 2

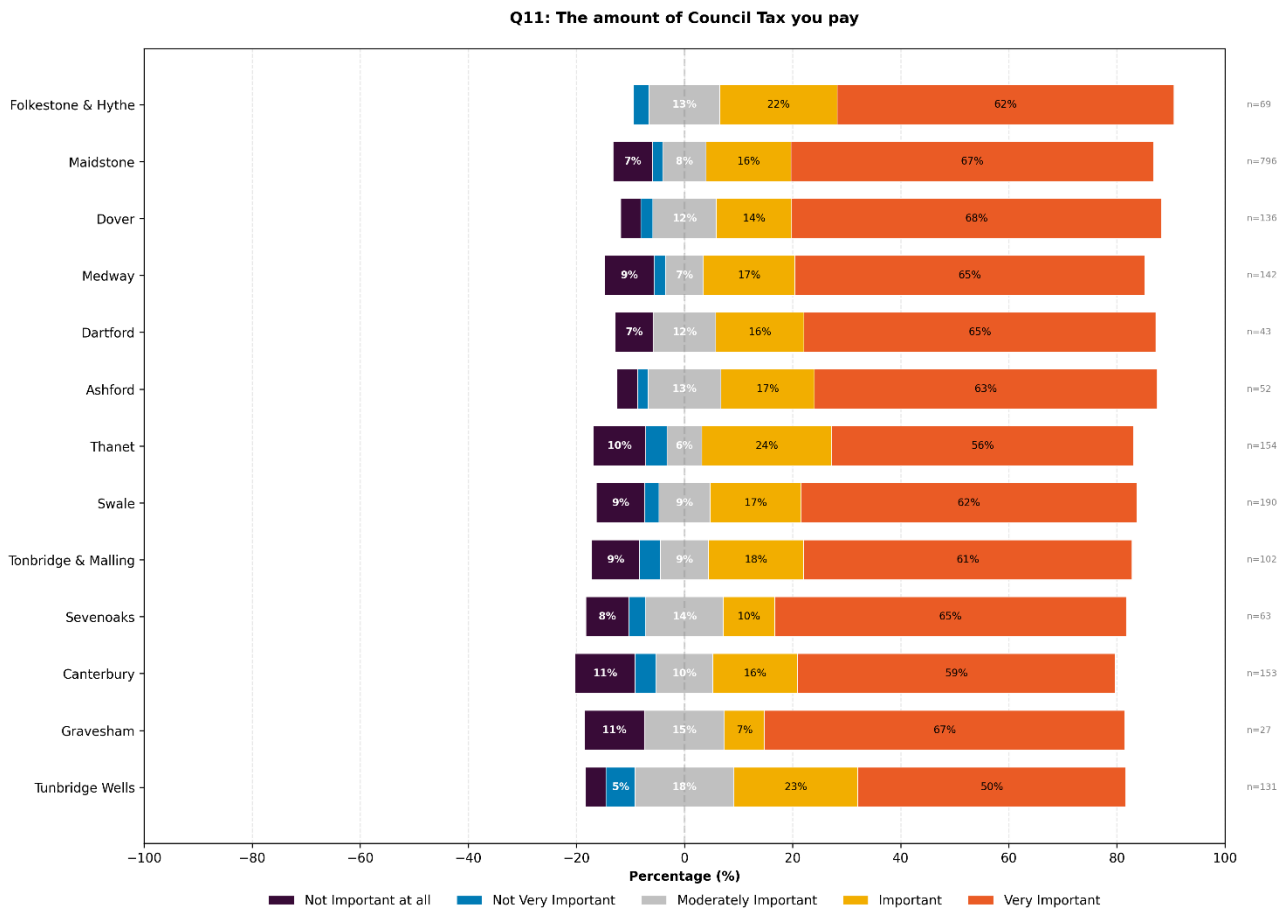
Factor: The amount of council tax you pay

Overall, 63.3% of respondents consider this factor very important, followed by 16.9% of people who view it as important.

9.8% felt neutral and said it was moderately important, whilst 2.6% indicated it was not very important and 7.4% of participants considered it not important at all.

84% of respondents in Folkestone & Hythe rated this as very important or important.

Similar views were also seen in Maidstone (83%), Medway (83%), Dover (82%), Dartford (81%)



The amount of council tax you pay

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	1,303	33	90	28	93	43	18
	63.3%	63.5%	58.8%	65.1%	68.4%	62.3%	66.7%
Important	348	9	24	7	19	15	2
	16.9%	17.3%	15.7%	16.3%	14.0%	21.7%	7.4%
Moderately important	201	7	16	5	16	9	4
	9.8%	13.5%	10.5%	11.6%	11.8%	13.0%	14.8%
Not very important	54	1	6	-	3	2	-
	2.6%	1.9%	3.9%	-	2.2%	2.9%	-
Not important at all	152	2	17	3	5	-	3
	7.4%	3.8%	11.1%	7.0%	3.7%	-	11.1%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	534	92	41	118	86	62	65
	67.1%	64.8%	65.1%	62.1%	55.8%	60.8%	49.6%
Important	125	24	6	32	37	18	30
	15.7%	16.9%	9.5%	16.8%	24.0%	17.6%	22.9%
Moderately important	64	10	9	18	10	9	24
	8.0%	7.0%	14.3%	9.5%	6.5%	8.8%	18.3%
Not very important	15	3	2	5	6	4	7
	1.9%	2.1%	3.2%	2.6%	3.9%	3.9%	5.3%
Not important at all	58	13	5	17	15	9	5
	7.3%	9.2%	7.9%	8.9%	9.7%	8.8%	3.8%

Question 2

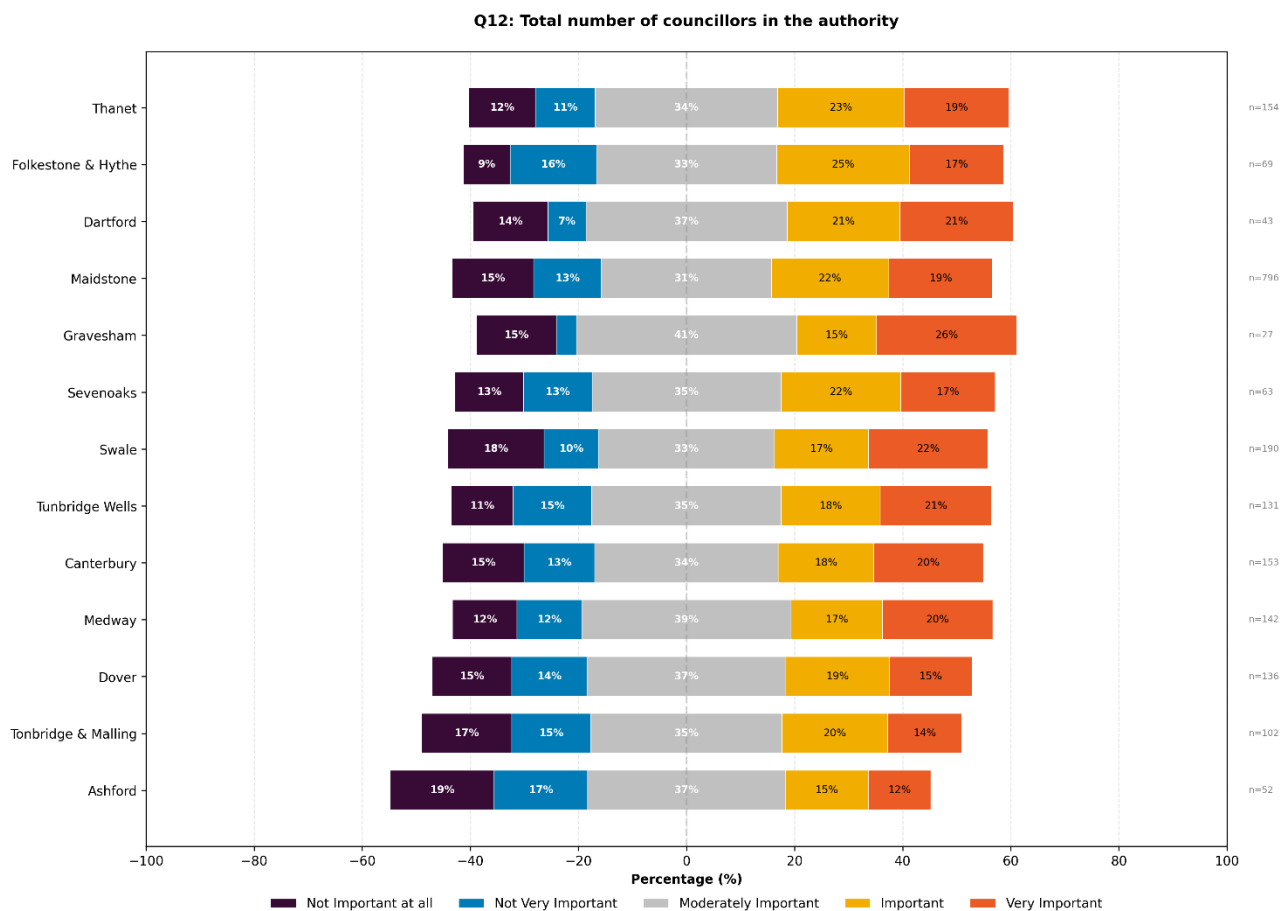
Factor: Total number of councillors in the authority

Responses show that 39.2% of respondents attach some importance to this factor, with 19% describing it as very important and 20.2% as important.

Most respondents (33.7%) were neutral and noted this factor was moderately important to them and 27% considered it not very important or not important at all.

Levels of importance varied across the area, with Thanet (42%), Folkestone & Hythe (42%) and Dartford (42%) showing the highest proportion of respondents rating the factor as important or very important.

Other areas included Maidstone (41%) and Gravesham (41%).



Total number of councillors in the authority

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	392	6	31	9	21	12	7
	19.0%	11.5%	20.3%	20.9%	15.4%	17.4%	25.9%
Important	415	8	27	9	26	17	4
	20.20%	15.4%	17.6%	20.9%	19.1%	24.6%	14.8%
Moderately important	694	19	52	16	50	23	11
	33.7%	36.5%	34.0%	37.2%	36.8%	33.3%	40.7%
Not very important	258	9	20	3	19	11	1
	12.5%	17.3%	13.1%	7.0%	14.0%	15.9%	3.7%
Not important at all	299	10	23	6	20	6	4
	14.5%	19.2%	15.0%	14.0%	14.7%	8.7%	14.8%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	153	29	11	42	30	14	27
	19.2%	20.4%	17.5%	22.1%	19.5%	13.7%	20.6%
Important	173	24	14	33	36	20	24
	21.7%	16.9%	22.2%	17.4%	23.4%	19.6%	18.3%
Moderately important	250	55	22	62	52	36	46
	31.4%	38.7%	34.9%	32.6%	33.8%	35.3%	35.1%
Not very important	100	17	8	19	17	15	19
	12.6%	12.0%	12.7%	10.0%	11.0%	14.7%	14.5%
Not important at all	120	17	8	34	19	17	15
	15.1%	12.0%	12.7%	17.9%	12.3%	16.7%	11.5%

Question 2

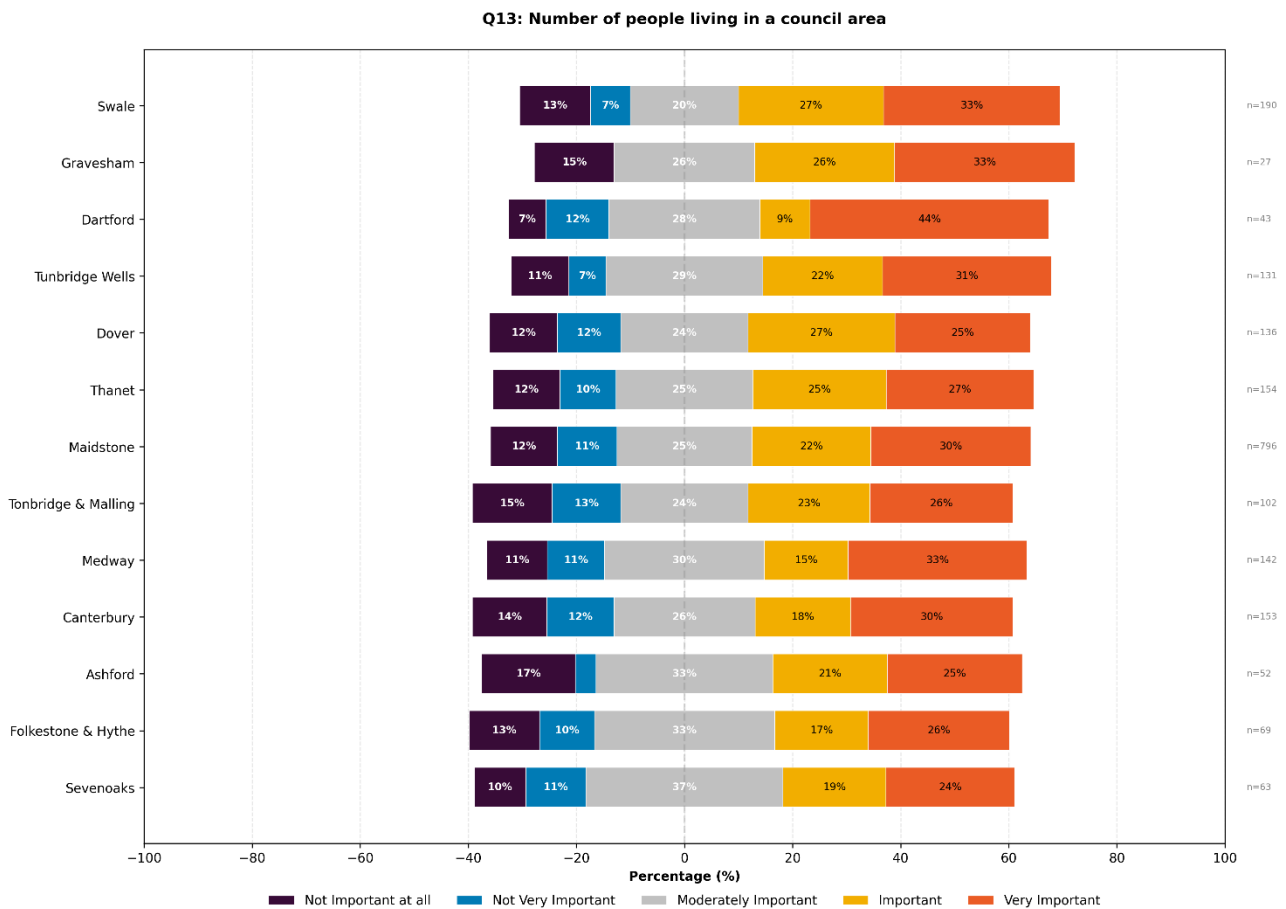
Factor: Number of people living in a council area

A total of 29.6% of respondents rated this factor as very important, with a further 21.8% describing it as important.

25.9% took a neutral view, while 10.3% felt it was not very important and 12.4% said it was not important at all.

60% of respondents in Swale rated this as very important or important.

Similar views were also seen in Gravesham (59%), Dartford (53%), Tunbridge Wells (53%) and Dover (52%).



Number of people living in a council area

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	609	13	46	19	34	18	9
	29.6%	25.0%	30.1%	44.2%	25.0%	26.1%	33.3%
Important	448	11	27	4	37	12	7
	21.8%	21.2%	17.6%	9.3%	27.2%	17.4%	25.9%
Moderately important	534	17	40	12	32	23	7
	25.9%	32.7%	26.1%	27.9%	23.5%	33.3%	25.9%
Not very important	211	2	19	5	16	7	-
	10.3%	3.8%	12.4%	11.6%	11.8%	10.1%	-
Not important at all	256	9	21	3	17	9	4
	12.4%	17.3%	13.7%	7.0%	12.5%	13.0%	14.8%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	236	47	15	62	42	27	41
	29.6%	33.1%	23.8%	32.6%	27.3%	26.5%	31.3%
Important	175	22	12	51	38	23	29
	22.0%	15.5%	19.0%	26.8%	24.7%	22.5%	22.1%
Moderately important	199	42	23	38	39	24	38
	25.0%	29.6%	36.5%	20.0%	25.3%	23.5%	29.0%
Not very important	88	15	7	14	16	13	9
	11.1%	10.6%	11.1%	7.4%	10.4%	12.7%	6.9%
Not important at all	98	16	6	25	19	15	14
	12.3%	11.3%	9.5%	13.2%	12.3%	14.7%	10.7%

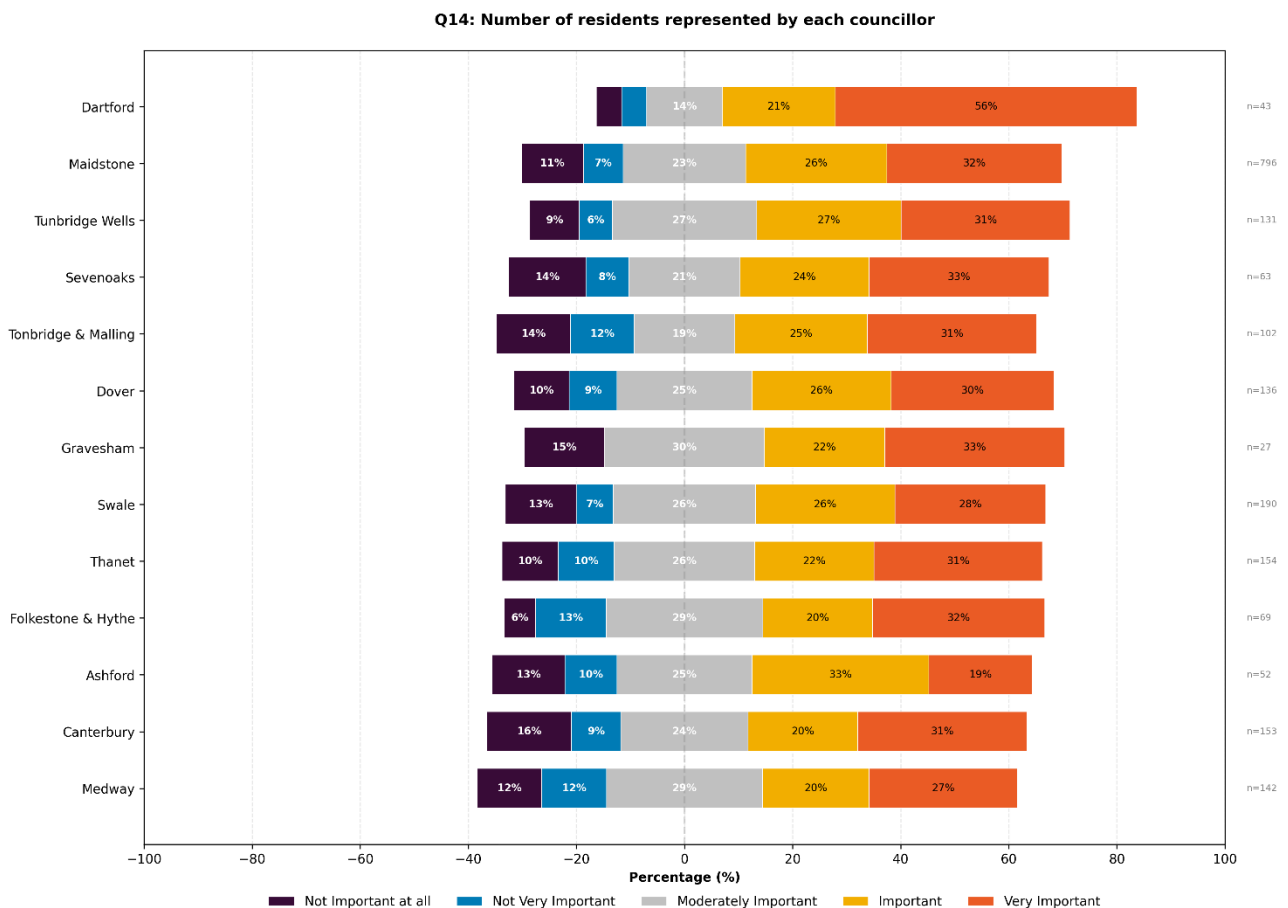
Question 2

Factor: Number of residents represented by each councillor

56% of respondents indicated that this factor holds some level of importance, with 31.4% describing it as very important and 24.6% as important.

24.1% felt neutral and said it was moderately important, whilst 8.4% indicated it was not very important and 11.6% of participants considered it not important at all.

The highest levels of importance were reported in Dartford (77%), Maidstone (58%), Tunbridge Wells (58%), Sevenoaks (57%) and Tonbridge & Malling (56%).



Number of residents represented by each councillor

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	646	10	48	24	41	22	9
	31.4%	19.2%	31.4%	55.8%	30.1%	31.9%	33.3%
Important	506	17	31	9	35	14	6
	24.6%	32.7%	20.3%	20.9%	25.7%	20.3%	22.2%
Moderately important	495	13	36	6	34	20	8
	24.1%	25.0%	23.5%	14.0%	25.0%	29.0%	29.6%
Not very important	172	5	14	2	12	9	-
	8.4%	9.6%	9.2%	4.7%	8.8%	13.0%	-
Not important at all	239	7	24	2	14	4	4
	11.6%	13.5%	15.7%	4.7%	10.3%	5.8%	14.8%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	258	39	21	53	48	32	41
	32.4%	27.5%	33.3%	27.9%	31.2%	31.4%	31.3%
Important	208	28	15	49	34	25	35
	26.1%	19.7%	23.8%	25.8%	22.1%	24.5%	26.7%
Moderately important	180	41	13	50	40	19	35
	22.6%	28.9%	20.6%	26.3%	26.0%	18.6%	26.7%
Not very important	59	17	5	13	16	12	8
	7.4%	12.0%	7.9%	6.8%	10.4%	11.8%	6.1%
Not important at all	91	17	9	25	16	14	12
	11.4%	12.0%	14.3%	13.2%	10.4%	13.7%	9.2%

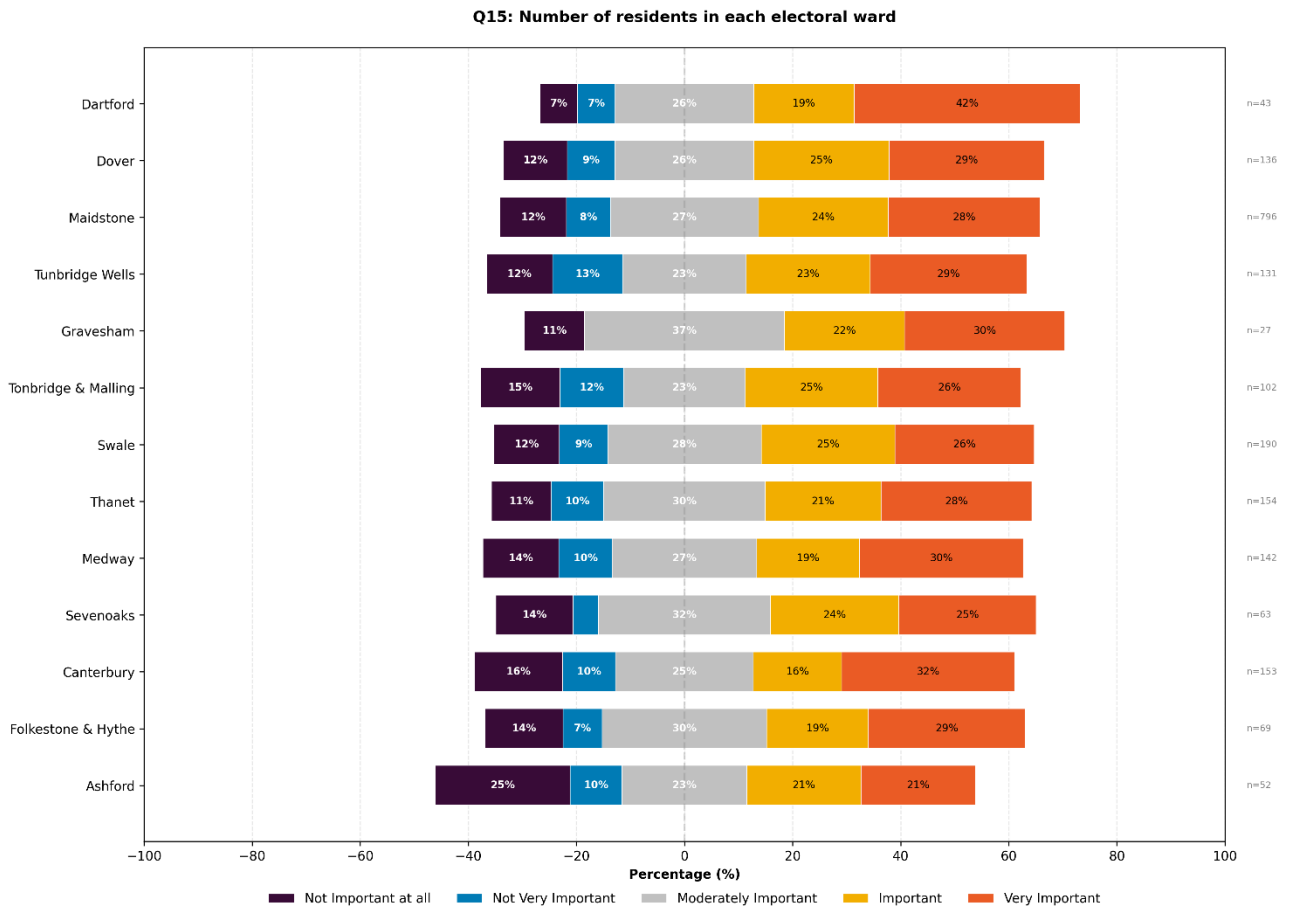
Question 2

Factor: Number of residents in each electoral ward

Overall, 28.4% of respondents consider this factor very important, followed by 22.6% of people who view it as important.

27.1% felt neutral and said it was moderately important, whilst 8.9% indicated it was not very important and 13% of participants considered it not important at all.

The highest levels of importance were reported in Dartford (61%), Dover (54%), Maidstone (52%), Tunbridge Wells (52%) and Gravesham (52%).



Number of residents represented by each councillor

Full details on how respondents in each area feel are provided below.

	Overall	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Folkestone & Hythe	Gravesham
Very important	585	11	49	18	39	20	8
	28.4%	21.2%	32.0%	41.9%	28.7%	29.0%	29.6%
Important	465	11	25	8	34	13	6
	22.6%	21.2%	16.3%	18.6%	25.0%	18.8%	22.2%
Moderately important	557	12	39	11	35	21	10
	27.1%	23.1%	25.5%	25.6%	25.7%	30.4%	37.0%
Not very important	183	5	15	3	12	5	-
	8.9%	9.6%	9.8%	7.0%	8.8%	7.2%	-
Not important at all	268	13	25	3	16	10	3
	13.0%	25.0%	16.3%	7.0%	11.8%	14.5%	11.1%

	Maidstone	Medway	Sevenoaks	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge & Malling	Tunbridge Wells
Very important	224	43	16	49	43	27	38
	28.1%	30.3%	25.4%	25.8%	27.9%	26.5%	29.0%
Important	191	27	15	47	33	25	30
	24.0%	19.0%	23.8%	24.7%	21.4%	24.5%	22.9%
Moderately important	218	38	20	54	46	23	30
	27.4%	26.8%	31.7%	28.4%	29.9%	22.5%	22.9%
Not very important	65	14	3	17	15	12	17
	8.2%	9.9%	4.8%	8.9%	9.7%	11.8%	13.0%
Not important at all	98	20	9	23	17	15	16
	12.3%	14.1%	14.3%	12.1%	11.0%	14.7%	12.2%

Question 3

In Question 3, respondents were asked to outline the opportunities they can see from local government reorganisation.

A total of 1,447 out of 2,058 people answered this question.

For readability, we have shortened each comment to capture the main sentiment rather than reproducing each one in full.

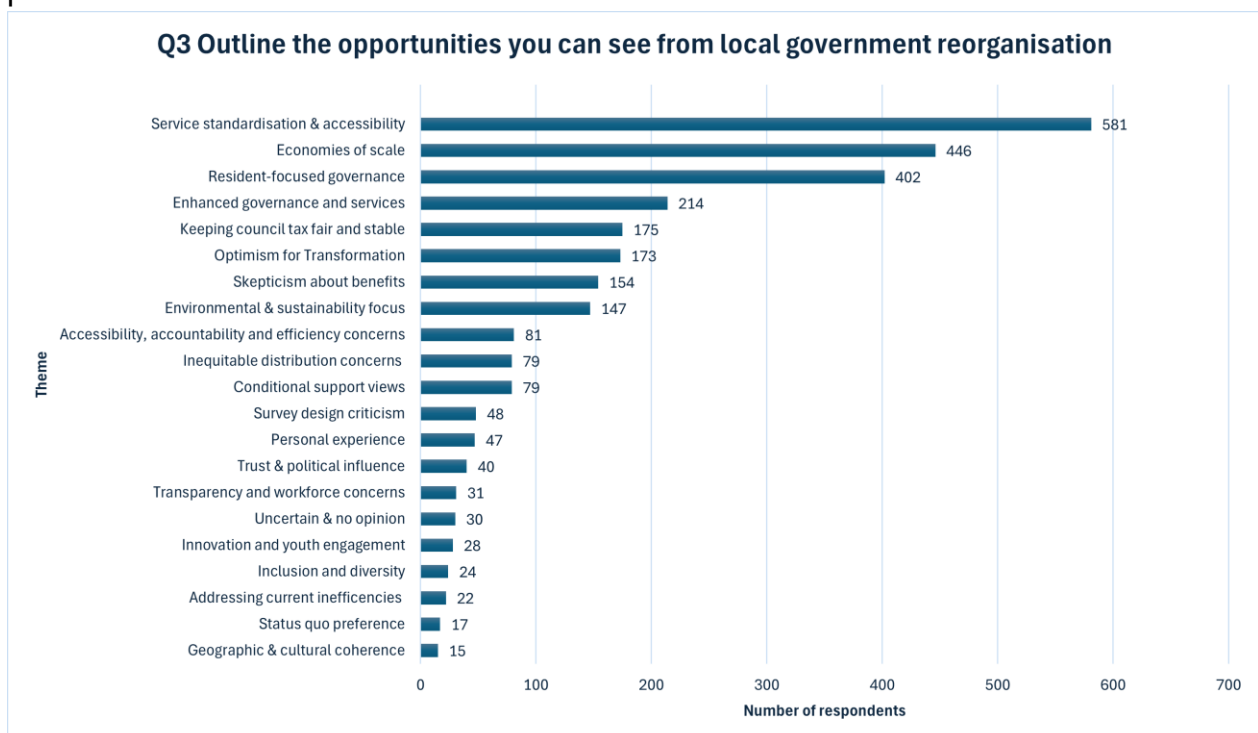
Some longer responses have been broken down into separate comments. This means that where several comments are listed, they may not represent the views of multiple respondents, but rather different points raised within one individual's response.

This approach ensures that the full detail and depth of feedback is captured while still allowing common themes to be identified.

The most frequently raised theme was Service Standardisation and Accessibility highlighted in 581 comments, followed by Economies of Scale with 446 comments and Resident-Focused Governance (402 comments).

Other recurring themes included Enhanced Governance and Services (214 comments) and Keeping Council Tax Fair and Stable (175 comments).

A full breakdown of all themes, along with residents' comments across specific areas, is provided below.



Outline opportunities you can see from local government reorganisation

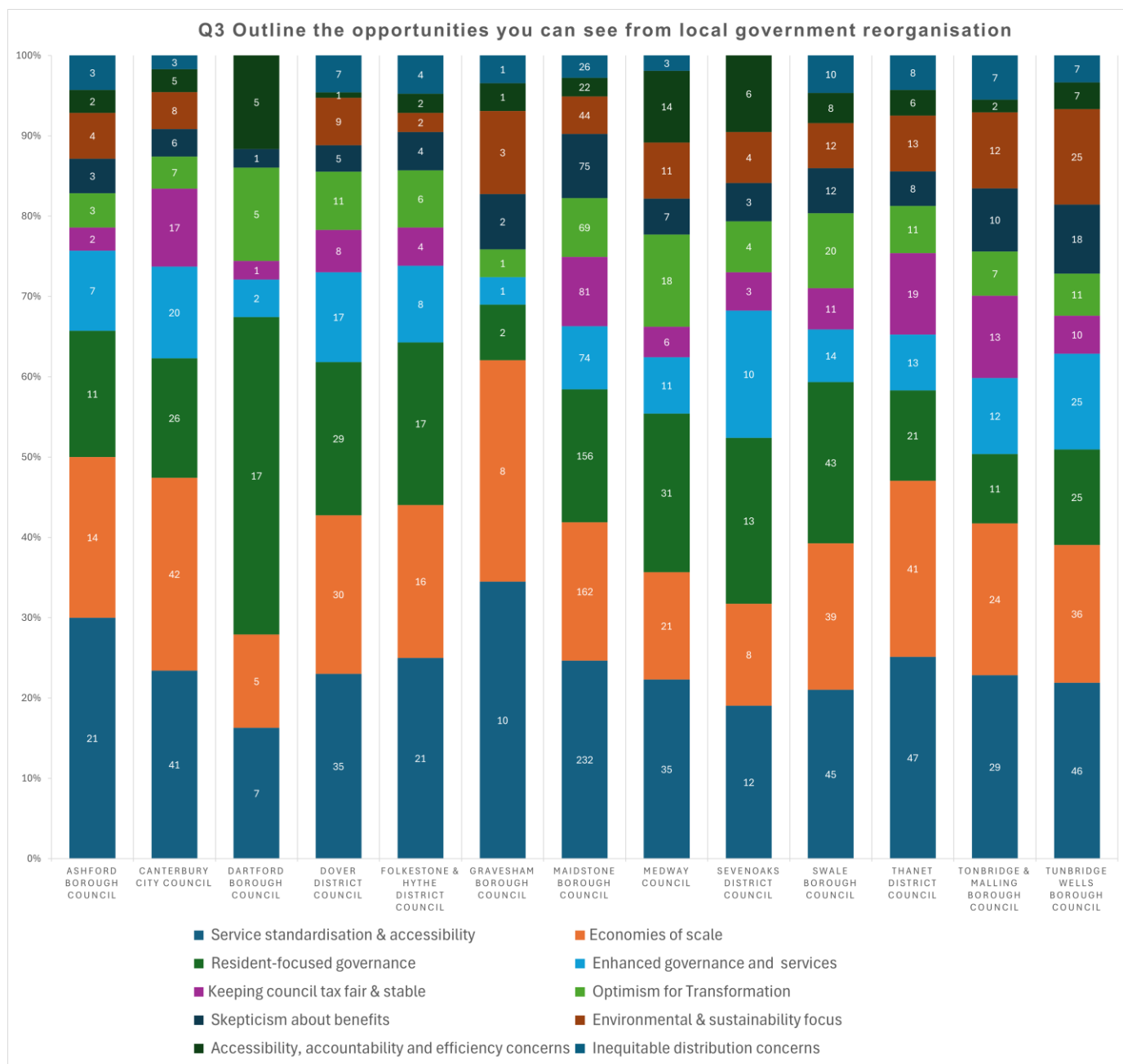
Council	Service standardisation & accessibility	Economies of scale	Resident-focused governance	Enhanced governance & services	Keeping council tax fair & stable
Ashford	21	14	11	7	2
Canterbury	41	42	26	20	17
Dartford	7	5	17	2	1
Dover	35	30	29	17	8
Folkestone & Hythe	21	16	17	8	4
Gravesham	10	8	2	1	
Maidstone	232	162	156	74	81
Medway	35	21	31	11	6
Sevenoaks	12	8	13	10	3
Swale	45	39	43	14	11
Thanet	47	41	21	13	19
Tonbridge & Malling	29	24	11	12	13
Tunbridge Wells	46	36	25	25	10
Grand Total	581	446	402	214	175

Council	Optimism for Transformation	Scepticism about benefits	Environmental & sustainability focus	Accessibility, accountability, efficiency concerns	Inequitable distribution concerns
Ashford	3	3	4	2	3
Canterbury	7	6	8	5	3
Dartford	5	1		5	
Dover	11	5	9	1	7
Folkestone & Hythe	6	4	2	2	4
Gravesham	1	2	3	1	1
Maidstone	69	75	44	22	26
Medway	18	7	11	14	3
Sevenoaks	4	3	4	6	
Swale	20	12	12	8	10
Thanet	11	8	13	6	8
Tonbridge & Malling	7	10	12	2	7
Tunbridge Wells	11	18	25	7	7
Grand Total	173	154	147	81	79

Council	Conditional support views	Survey design criticism	Personal experience	Trust & political influence	Transparency & workforce concerns
Ashford	1			1	
Canterbury	4	2	5	4	
Dartford		1	5		2
Dover	4	8	4	4	
Folkestone & Hythe		1	2	4	
Gravesham		1			
Maidstone	36	21	14	10	20
Medway	7	4	2	3	4
Sevenoaks	1	2	2	1	
Swale	5		2	4	2
Thanet	6	3	5	2	1
Tonbridge & Malling	4			3	
Tunbridge Wells	11	5	6	4	2
Grand Total	79	48	47	40	31

Council	Uncertain & no opinion	Innovation & youth engagement	Inclusion and diversity	Addressing current inefficiencies	Status quo preference	Geographic & cultural coherence
Ashford		1	1	1	1	1
Canterbury	5	2	1	2		2
Dartford	3			1		
Dover		2	2	3	1	
Folkestone & Hythe		3		1		1
Gravesham						1
Maidstone	9	5	7	6	9	6
Medway		3	3	1	2	1
Sevenoaks			1	1		1
Swale	3	2	4	2	2	
Thanet	4	6		1		
Tonbridge & Malling	1	2	2	1		2
Tunbridge Wells	5	2	3	2	2	
Grand Total	30	28	24	22	17	15

Council-level breakdown of main themes



Overview of key themes

Service standardisation and accessibility: 581 comments

Respondents saw reorganisation as an opportunity to simplify how local government works and make services more accessible and easier to navigate. Many highlighted that clearer lines of responsibility would reduce confusion for residents and staff alike and standardised process could improve efficiency and consistency. Respondents also focused on joining up related services, sharing knowledge across teams and creating an inclusive culture where staff and councillors are approachable and residents can access help without barriers.

“Streamlining overlapping administrative functions could reduce duplication and free up resources for front-line services.”

“Local government reorganisation could bring several opportunities: Simplicity for residents – one council responsible for everything, so people no longer need to work out whether it is the county or district dealing with their issue.”

Economies of scale: 446 comments

This theme captures calls for a more efficient, streamlined local government model that delivers better value for money. Participants felt that reorganisation could bring economies of scale, reduce bureaucracy and ensure fairer balance of power across areas. Many wanted to ensure that all areas are treated equally within the new arrangements.

Resident-focused governance: 402 comments

Respondents wanted governance structures to operate for the benefit of residents. They highlighted the need for councillors and authorities to remain locally accountable and engaged. Some mentioned parish councils as important in maintaining community representation. Retaining and developing experienced staff was also viewed as key to ensuring resident-focused decision-making.

“More on board with local issues. Able to focus more on residents. Be agile regarding priorities and repairs.”

Enhanced governance and services: 214 comments

Some respondents called for improvements in governance and service delivery. Strengthening areas such as planning, regulation, infrastructure, education and social services was a common focus. The overarching goal expressed was to ensure better quality and consistence of services across all areas.

“Better coordination of services – education, social care, housing and infrastructure could be planned together, leading to more effective solutions.”

Keeping council tax fair and stable: 175 comments

People wanted taxes to be standardised across areas and kept at a fair level. There was an expectation that efficiencies could help maintain or reduce costs for residents.

Optimism for transformation: 173 comments

Many respondents saw the reforms as an opportunity for positive change and a fresh perspective. Some expected the new structure to reduce administration costs and create a more efficient system.

Scepticism about benefits:154 comments

A number of respondents expressed doubts about the likely benefits of the proposed changes. Some believed there would be little or no positive impact, while others anticipated higher costs. There were concerns that promised efficiencies might not materialise in practice.

“I cannot see ANY advantages in this reorganisation. Authorities would be much more remote and we would not necessarily be governed by people we know, and trust. How can increasing the number of people in a catchment area be more productive and efficient.”

Environmental and sustainability focus: 147 comments

Some respondents emphasised the importance of a stronger focus on the environment and sustainability. Priorities included protecting natural habitats or supporting nature recovery. Some saw the upcoming changes as a chance to deliver more aspirational projects.

“Greater strategic working in particular across environmental agendas and in the context of tackling climate change.”

Accessibility, accountability and efficiency concerns: 81 comments

There were concerns that councils may be less accessible and accountable. There were worries about new layers of management creating inefficiency and distance from residents. Some questioned whether parish councils might be dissolved or sidelined in the process. Others warned of costly redundancies and limited real improvement in services.

Inequitable distribution concerns:79 comments

Some respondents were worried that the new structure might favour certain areas more than others. They questioned whether resources would be distributed fairly across the new authority. There were concerns that the process could divert funds from other local services.

“I think it will be difficult for councillors not to favour their local area over others ie a councillor living in canterbury will favour improvements there rather than say dover or deal”

Conditional support views: 79 comments

Some respondents offered cautious or conditional support for reorganisation. They acknowledged that cooperation between councils already exists and could be built upon. Others emphasise the need to carefully consider boundaries and local distinctiveness.

Survey design criticism: 48 comments

Some respondents expressed concerns about the design of the survey itself. They found certain questions unclear, ambiguous or outdated. A few said they needed more information before forming an opinion.

Trust and political influence: 40 comments

Many respondents saw this opportunity as a chance to reduce political influence in local governance. People asked to move away from party politics and focus more on practical outcomes for residents.

“This is not a for the people oriented change, it is purely political and will most likely cause significant issues for the very people they are claiming to help get a better service.”

Transparency and workforce concerns: 31 comments

Respondents raised issues around transparency, communication and workforce well-being. They wanted reassurance that staff reductions or larger services areas would not mean deterioration in service quality.

Uncertain and no opinion: 30 comments

Some respondents expressed uncertainty about the proposed changes or said they had no strong opinion.

Innovation and youth engagement: 28 comments

Respondents mentioned the need for greater use of technology and more ambitious long-term vision. Engaging younger generations in local decision-making was also seen as important.

“More apprentices to teach the young community how the council works and what we do for service users.”

Inclusion and diversity: 24 comments

Respondents asked for greater inclusion in local decision-making. They highlighted the importance of listening to disabled people and marginalised groups, ensuring diverse representation and equitable access to services.

“As a disabled resident who is passionate about shaping policy, I believe local government reorganisation presents a vital opportunity to build a more inclusive and accessible system. Many people like me want to contribute meaningfully to our communities, even if we are unable to work in traditional ways. I hope any new council structure prioritises digital accessibility, transparent decision-making, and proactive outreach to underrepresented voices. It’s essential that disabled people can contact councillors easily, attend meetings remotely, and have their concerns heard without barriers.”

Addressing current inefficiencies: 22 comments

Some asked for the removal of ineffective staff or councillors, particularly where high wages were seen as unjustified. There was a view that the current system is not operating as effectively as it should.

Status quo preference: 17 comments

A proportion of respondents felt the current system works well and should remain unchanged. Some worried that the merger might link them with less effective councils or bring inherited debts.

Geographic and cultural coherence: 15 comments

Some suggested that combined authorities should bring together areas with shared characteristics, such as coastal or urban districts. Maintaining local identity and ensuring relevant representation were key priorities.

Question 4

In Question 4, respondents were asked to outline their concerns about local government reorganisation.

A total of 1,530 out of 2,058 people answered this question.

As with Question 3, we have shortened each comment to capture the main sentiment rather than reproducing each one in full.

Some longer responses have been broken down into separate comments. This means that where several comments are listed, they may not represent the views of multiple respondents, but rather different points raised within one individual's response.

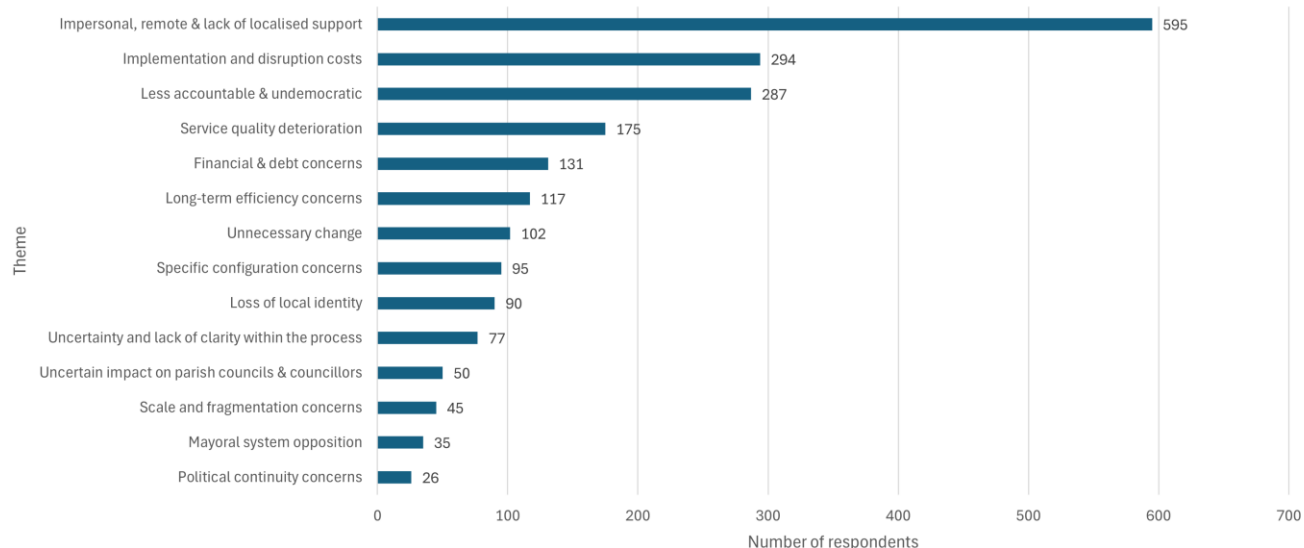
This approach ensures that the full detail and depth of feedback is captured while still allowing common themes to be identified.

The most frequently raised theme was Impersonal, Remote & Lack of Localised Support highlighted in 595 comments, followed by Implementation and Disruption Costs with 294 comments and Less Accountable & Undemocratic (287 comments).

Other recurring themes included Service Quality Deterioration (175 comments) and Financial & Debt Concerns (175 comments).

A full breakdown of all themes, along with residents' comments across specific areas, is provided below.

Q4 Outline your concerns about local government reorganisation

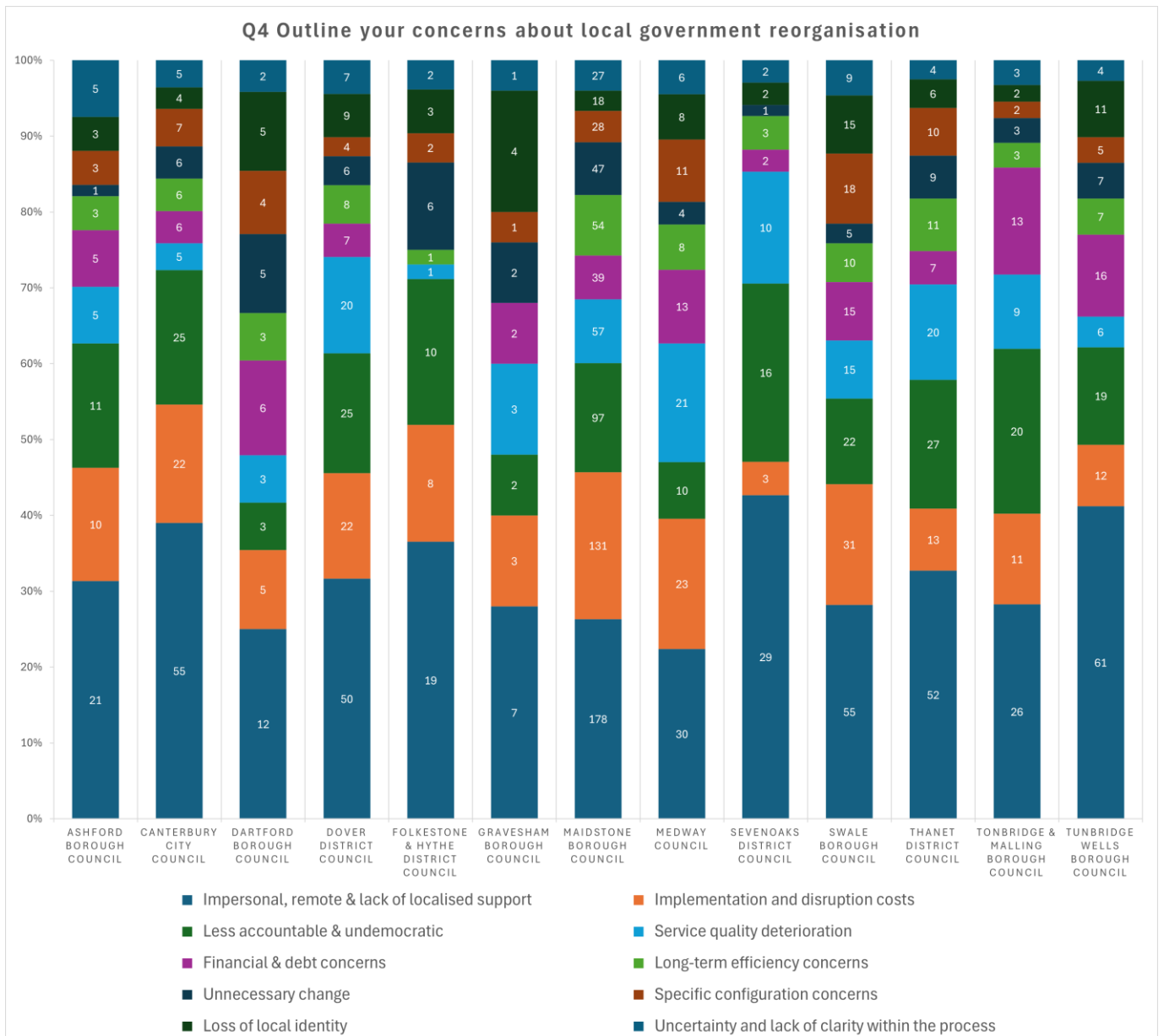


Council	Impersonal, remote & lack of localised support	Implementation & disruption costs	Less accountable & undemocratic	Service quality deterioration	Financial & debt concerns
Ashford	21	10	11	5	5
Canterbury	55	22	25	5	6
Dartford	12	5	3	3	6
Dover	50	22	25	20	7
Folkestone & Hythe	19	8	10	1	
Gravesham	7	3	2	3	2
Maidstone	178	131	97	57	39
Medway	30	23	10	21	13
Sevenoaks	29	3	16	10	2
Swale	55	31	22	15	15
Thanet	52	13	27	20	7
Tonbridge & Malling	26	11	20	9	13
Tunbridge Wells	61	12	19	6	16
Grand Total	595	294	287	175	131

Council	Long-term efficiency concerns	Unnecessary change	Specific configuration concerns	Loss of local identity	Uncertainty & lack of clarity within the process
Ashford	3	1	3	3	5
Canterbury	6	6	7	4	5
Dartford	3	5	4	5	2
Dover	8	6	4	9	7
Folkestone & Hythe	1	6	2	3	2
Gravesham		2	1	4	1
Maidstone	54	47	28	18	27
Medway	8	4	11	8	6
Sevenoaks	3	1		2	2
Swale	10	5	18	15	9
Thanet	11	9	10	6	4
Tonbridge & Malling	3	3	2	2	3
Tunbridge Wells	7	7	5	11	4
Grand Total	117	102	95	90	77

Council	Uncertain impact on parish councils & councillors	Scale and fragmentation concerns	Mayoral system opposition	Political continuity concerns
Ashford	1	2	2	1
Canterbury	12			2
Dartford	1		1	
Dover	3	2	2	3
Folkestone & Hythe		2	1	2
Gravesham		1		
Maidstone	19	23	17	9
Medway	1	2	1	2
Sevenoaks	1	1	1	2
Swale	4	2		2
Thanet	3	3	2	1
Tonbridge & Malling	1	4	3	1
Tunbridge Wells	4	3	5	1
Grand Total	50	45	35	26

Council-level breakdown of main themes



Overview of key themes

Impersonal, remote and lack of localised support: 595 comments

Residents expressed concern that larger unitary councils may become distant and disconnected from the communities they serve. Some worry that councillors representing significantly larger populations will lack local knowledge and understanding of area-specific issues, making it harder for residents to reach their representatives and have their voices heard. Comments highlight fears some areas, particularly rural and coastal communities, will be forgotten and abandoned in favour of larger urban areas. People expressed anxiety about the ability of a remote authority to address everyday local concerns, with some noting that they already struggle to contact their current MPs due to large electorates and fear this problem will worsen. The transition to larger councils is seen as contrary to the

principle of 'local' government, with comments suggesting that council offices may become physically inaccessible and service quality will decline as decision-making becomes centralised among people unfamiliar with local needs and contexts.

"If authorities are too large then councillors will have insufficient knowledge about the people they are representing and not be seen as part of their local community."

"Living in a rural area I consider that at larger authority including larger populated areas will mean our needs and wants are ignored."

"Residents will have less representation and therefore local concerns or issues will not be sufficiently represented or addressed."

Implementation and disruption costs: 294 comments

Respondents are concerned about the financial and operational cost of reorganisation, with many asking whether the promised savings will ever materialise. Comments highlight substantial anticipated expenses including restructuring, retaining and redundancy packages, IT system migrations, rebranding, new office infrastructure and external consultant fees, costs likely paid by taxpayers through increased council tax or reduced services. There is worry about service disruption during the transition period, with residents fearing delays, confusion and a decline in service quality as councils attempt to integrate vastly different systems, processes and contracts simultaneously. Comments emphasise that the reorganisation will distract staff from their core duties of delivering services to residents and that the process could take years to embed properly, meaning services will suffer during an extended period. Additionally, there are concerns about the loss of experienced staff through redundancies or voluntary departures due to uncertainty. Some respondents argue that the money and time invested in reorganisation would be better spent fixing existing problems and improving current services.

"My concerns relate to time and cost and how and the cost to Council Tax payers. With any reorganisation the short term risk is always upheaval, delays in each council dealing with Business as unusual."

"It will cost too much money to setup, money better spent elsewhere. There will be insufficient money from central government to cover all aspects of the devolved responsibilities."

Less accountable and undemocratic: 287 comments

Residents are worried that larger unitary councils will undermine local democracy and accountability. There is concern about the loss of local accountability mechanism, particularly regarding planning decisions and services tailored to specific communities, with residents noting that smaller councils currently allow for better local scrutiny and engagement. Some comments warn that without safeguards, enlarged councils could facilitate more self-serving political behaviour with elected officials less constrained by

local oversight. Respondents argue that the reorganisation represents a fundamental erosion of local democracy, transforming councils from accountable local institutions into distant bureaucratic structures where residents have minimal meaningful influence over decisions affecting their lives.

“This just feels that the ability to influence local government is being taken away in favour of over controlling, centralised bureaucrats. It feels very undemocratic.”

Service quality deterioration: 175 comments

Residents express concern that local government reorganisation will result in a decline in service quality across the board, driven primarily by cost cutting measures rather than genuine efficiency improvements. There is anxiety that essential services including social care, special educational, needs, waste collection and community facilities will suffer as budgets are spread thinner across large populations and competing priorities. Many respondents argue that any short-term financial savings from reorganisation will be offset by transition costs and the loss of established relationships and local expertise, ultimately leaving residents paying more through increased council tax while receiving demonstrated demonstrably worse services.

“I work in education in Medway, we also have pupils who reside in Kent. From my experience, current services for education (especially SEND) and social care provision are poor and do not meet need”

Financial and debt concerns: 131 comments

Respondents are worried financial reorganisation will result in well-managed councils being forced to subsidise poorly affecting councils with debts effectively affecting those areas that have maintained responsible budgeting. There are concerns about the inequitable burden this may create, with comments highlighting that some councils are debt-free and operate efficiently, while others carry considerable financial liabilities that will now be shared across all merged authorities. Respondents worry that council tax will increase as a result. Comments reflect that any promised efficiency savings will not materialise, instead suggesting that the reorganisation is a pretext for raising revenue while simultaneously cutting services, leaving residents paying more for less.

“Everything will be worse off. Things will take longer, cost more, be less efficient. You cannot just merge councils in the hopes of erasing their debts off the backs of better performing councils.”

Long-term efficiency concerns: 117 comments

Comments highlight that larger bureaucratic structures often become less efficient, with multiple overlapping departments, additional management layers and redundant roles offsetting any potential savings from consolidation. Many respondents note that service delivery tends to become slower and less responsive in larger organisations and content that reorganisation represents a false economy, suggesting it will generate higher costs

and reduced operational effectiveness compared to the current system, leaving councils vulnerable to future financial instability.

Unnecessary changes: 102 comments

Residents express frustration that local government reorganisation is being pursued despite the absence of evidence that change is needed, viewing it as reorganisation for its own sake rather than genuine problem-solving. Comments note that many existing councils function adequately and ask why well-performing authorities should be disrupted by merging with poorly managed ones. There is scepticism that reorganisation will deliver any tangible benefits to residents, with some arguing it represents ideological or political posturing rather than a practical response to identified problems. Respondents contend that the focus on reorganisation distracts from addressing genuine issues affecting communities, such as poor road maintenance, inadequate education and social care services, housing shortages and lack of infrastructure, which larger councils are unlikely to resolve.

“All councils are under such huge financial pressures at present, and services are badly under-funded (social care and potholes just being the 2 most obvious examples). What will this unnecessary reorganisation do for them? Note that all the research over decades shows that reorganisations, whether in the public or private sector, cost 2 years of lost productivity, while staff look for new roles, are appointed, and then have to learn these new jobs. How can we afford this in current circumstances?”

Specific configuration concerns: 95 comments

Residents are concerned about how proposed unitary authorities are being geographically configured, with many arguing that the suggested boundary combinations lack logical coherence and fail to reflect natural community connections or shared interests. Comments highlight that some proposals artificially put together disparate areas with incompatible needs, such as pairing rural areas with urban centres, wealthy districts with deprived areas, or inland regions with coastal communities, creating council that serve populations with different priorities and challenges. There is concern that poorly-designed boundaries will result in some areas being sidelined or disadvantaged, with inland population centres prioritised over coastal communities and wealthier regions getting preferential treatment over deprived areas. Some argue that proposed configurations ignore existing health service boundaries, employment patterns, transport links and long-established community identifies, instead following arbitrary administrative convenience.

Loss of local identity: 90 comments

Residents are worried that local government reorganisation will erode the distinct identities and characters of individual areas, towns and communities across Kent. Comments highlight that larger unitary authorities may dilute the sense of belonging and place that residents feel towards their local council area, with established district identifies being subsumed into ‘faceless’ regional structures. Respondents emphasise that the abolition of

established district councils represents the loss of a familiar institutions that have played important roles in communities for decades, and that residents will struggle to identify with abstract unitary authorities that lack geographic or cultural coherence.

“I see loss of identity [and] larger bills. A service not equal amongst areas such as roads and education. Loss of local knowledge in planning and history. Loss of local amenities being stretched and potentially sold off”

Uncertainty and lack of clarity within the process: 77 comments

Residents express frustration that the local government reorganisation process lacks transparency and clear communication about its implications, with many uncertain about fundamental details such as how ward boundaries will be redrawn, what will happen to town and parish councils and how specific services will be affected. Comments highlight confusion about the timeline and mechanics of reorganisation, with the two-stage approach of local government reorganisation followed by devolution being poorly explained, leaving residents unclear about what changes will occur and when. There is concern that decision-making appears to be driven by political agendas rather than transparent consultation with residents, with several respondents noting that government and councils appear to have already decided the outcome before launching consultations, treating public input as a merely box-ticking exercise. Residents report lacking clear information about how critical infrastructure and services such as housing, healthcare, policing, education will be managed under the new structures and express worry that councils themselves seem uncertain about implementation.

Uncertain impact on parish councils and councillors: 50 comments

Respondents express concern that parish and town councils will be burdened with increased responsibilities during local government reorganisation without receiving adequate funding, staffing or official recognition to fulfil these expanded roles. There is anxiety that some parish councils may be abolished entirely under certain proposals, or that larger town councils will be imposed that lack the local knowledge and commitment of smaller parish councils to address specific community needs.

“Less money for parishes, hard enough to get someone to help with a problem so even more detached from communities”

Scale and fragmentation concerns: 45 comments

There is concern that fragmentation will create inconsistencies in service delivery across Kent, with residents potentially experiencing post code lotteries where access to services like social care, SEND provision and recycling facilities varies depending on which authority they fall under.

Mayoral system opposition: 35 comments

Residents express opposition to the introduction of an elected mayor, viewing it as concentrating excessive power in a single individual who may lack accountability, and

understanding of diverse community needs. Comments reference concerns about personal agendas and ideologies, with respondents worried that a mayor could govern unchecked, particularly in a large authority covering diverse populations with conflicting interests. Comments highlight concerns that mayoral systems represent a mechanism through which central government diverts responsibility and reduces funding to local areas while claiming to devolve power, effectively shifting the burden onto elected mayors without providing adequate resources or oversight.

Political continuity concerns: 26 comments

Some comments indicate worry about potential shifts in particular presentation, with particular concern that reorganisation could change which parties hold influence in their local areas. Respondents raised questions about whether councillors from different political backgrounds will have the experience and shared understanding needed to work effectively together across enlarge authorities and whether reorganisation might dilute the influence of established councils in shaping how their areas are governed.

Question 5

In Question 5, respondents were asked to outline anything else they would like to tell us about local government reorganisation

A total of 981 out 2,058 people answered this question.

As with Question 3 and 4, we have shortened each comment to capture the main sentiment rather than reproducing each one in full.

Some longer responses have been broken down into separate comments. This means that where several comments are listed, they may not represent the views of multiple respondents, but rather different points raised within one individual's response.

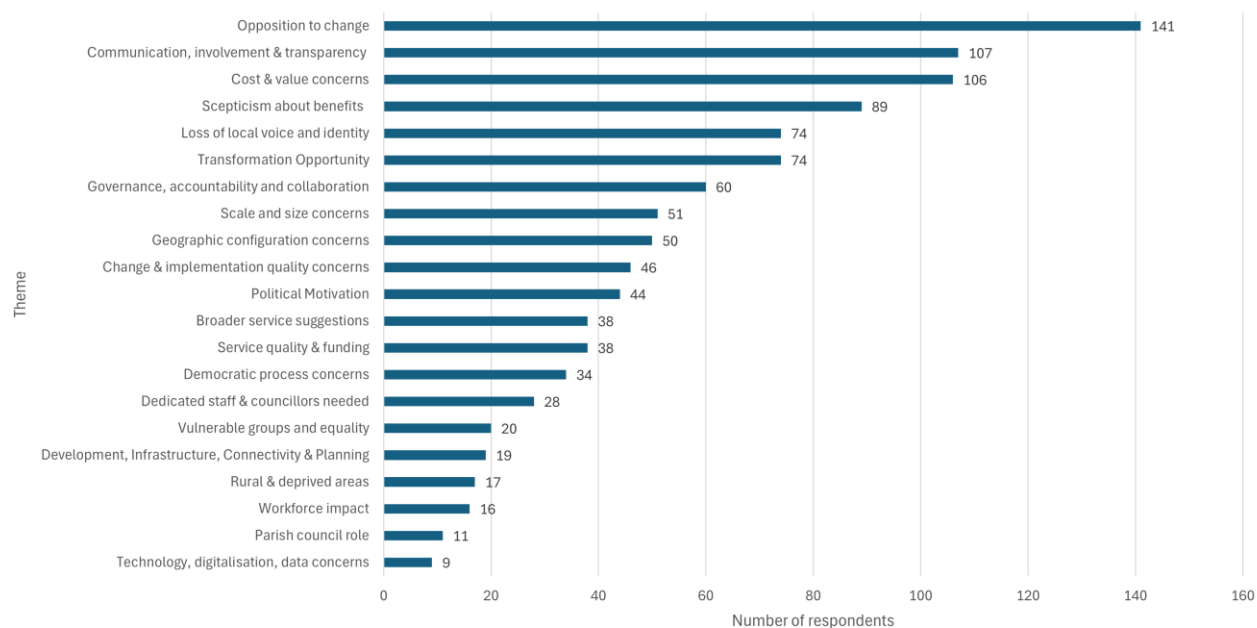
This approach ensures that the full detail and depth of feedback is captured while still allowing common themes to be identified.

The most frequently raised theme was Opposition to Change highlighted in 141 comments, followed by Communication, Involvement and Transparency with 107 comments and Cost and Value Concerns (106 comments).

Other recurring themes included Scepticism about benefits (89 comments) and Loss of Local Voice and Identity (74 comments).

A full breakdown of all themes, along with residents' comments across specific areas, is provided below.

Q5 Outline anything else you would like to tell us about local government reorganisation



Council	Opposition to change	Communication, involvement & transparency	Cost & value concerns	Scepticism about benefits	Local voice and identity
Ashford	1	4	3	1	
Canterbury	7	5	5	7	9
Dartford	10	2	2	1	2
Dover	6	8	5	6	7
Folkestone & Hythe	5	1	1	2	2
Gravesham		2	3	3	3
Maidstone	52	33	51	35	20
Medway	13	13	2	3	2
Sevenoaks	8	5	2	1	2
Swale	13	10	10	12	13
Thanet	6	8	16	6	9
Tonbridge & Malling	8	6	2	4	1
Tunbridge Wells	12	10	4	8	4
Grand Total	141	107	106	89	74

Council	Transformation opportunity	Governance, accountability & collaboration	Scale & size concerns	Geographic configuration concerns	Change & implementation quality concerns
Ashford	7	3	2		3
Canterbury	4	7	2	4	1
Dartford		3	1	1	
Dover	4	3	4	3	6

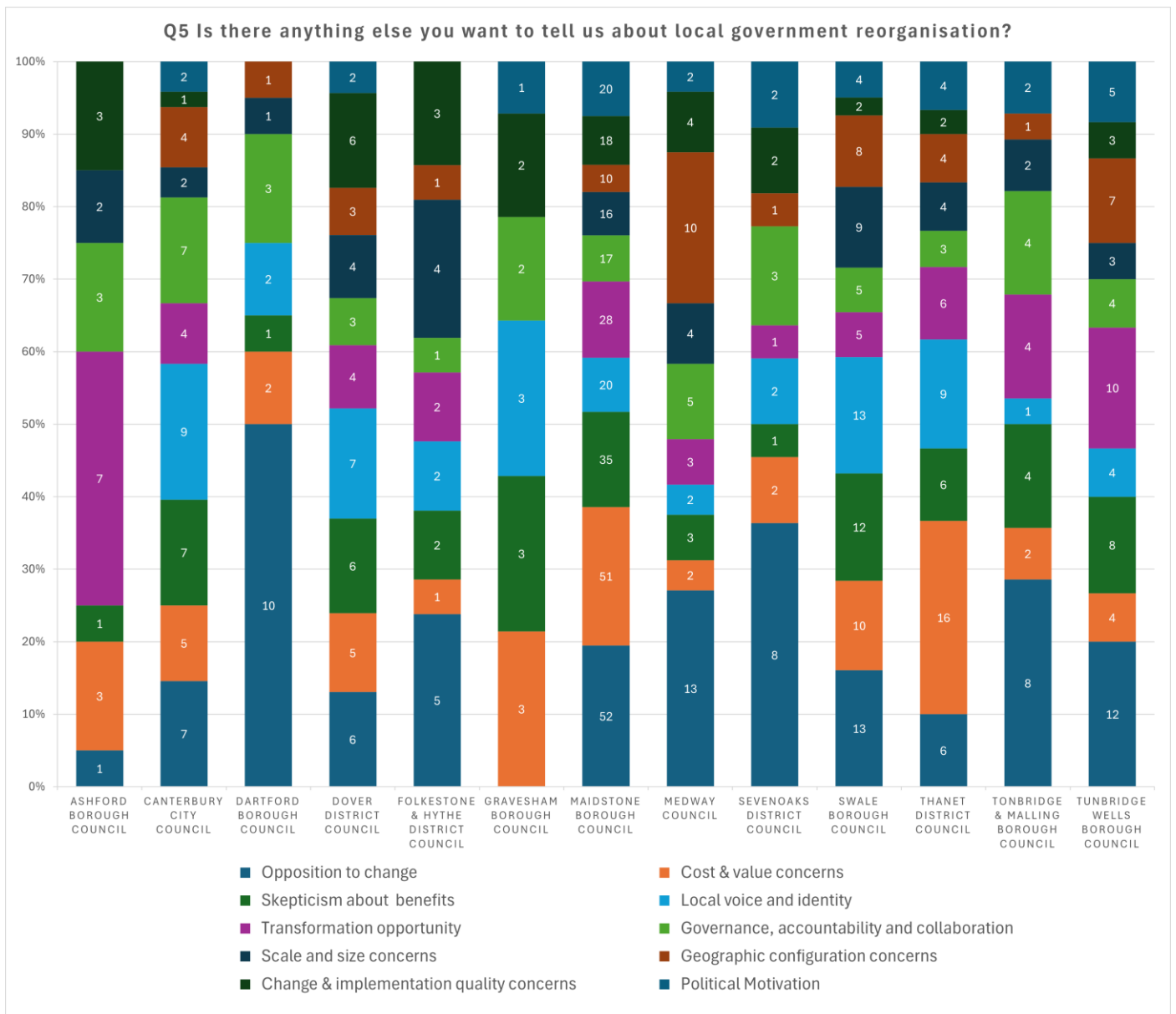
Folkestone & Hythe	2	1	4	1	3
Gravesham		2			2
Maidstone	28	17	16	10	18
Medway	3	5	4	10	4
Sevenoaks	1	3		1	2
Swale	5	5	9	8	2
Thanet	6	3	4	4	2
Tonbridge & Malling	4	4	2	1	
Tunbridge Wells	10	4	3	7	3
Grand Total	74	60	51	50	46

Council	Political Motivation	Service quality & funding	Broader service suggestions	Democratic process concerns	Dedicated staff & councillors needed
Ashford		2		1	1
Canterbury	2	1	4	2	1
Dartford		1			
Dover	2	3	3	2	4
Folkestone & Hythe		3	1		1
Gravesham	1	1		2	
Maidstone	20	17	17	16	8
Medway	2	2	3	3	1
Sevenoaks	2	2	1	1	1
Swale	4	2	2	2	2
Thanet	4	2	1		4
Tonbridge & Malling	2		4	1	3
Tunbridge Wells	5	2	2	4	2
Grand Total	44	38	38	34	28

Council	Vulnerable groups & equality	Development, infrastructure, connectivity & planning	Rural & deprived areas	Workforce impact	Parish council role	Technology, digitalisation, data concerns
Ashford	1	1				
Canterbury	2		2	1	3	
Dartford					1	
Dover	2			4		
Folkestone & Hythe						1
Gravesham	1			1		
Maidstone	7	7	6	5	4	3
Medway	2		1	1		2

Sevenoaks		1				
Swale	3	5	5			
Thanet	1		2	2	2	1
Tonbridge & Malling		4		2		1
Tunbridge Wells	1	1	1		1	1
Grand Total	20	19	17	16	11	9

Council-level breakdown of main themes



Overview of key themes

Opposition to change: 141 comments

Residents comment they oppose the changes, preferring the status quo and arguing that energy and resources should be focused on fixing current problems within existing structures rather than pursuing administrative restructuring.

Communication, involvement and transparency: 107 comments

Residents ask for clearer communication, honesty and transparency. They raise that decision makers need to do better to listen. Some criticise the consultation process as inadequate, expressing that decisions appear already made before consultation, that information is unclear or insufficient and that genuine resident input is not being meaningfully sought or acted upon. Some say they would like to be more involved and engaged with the process.

Cost and value concerns: 106 comments

Residents question whether the reorganisation will deliver promised financial savings, with widespread scepticism and transition costs, redundancies and systemic integration will outweigh any efficiency gains, ultimately resulting in higher council tax for residents without any service improvements.

Scepticism about benefits: 89 comments

Respondents express doubt that reorganisation will solve any real problems, viewing it as a change for its own sake rather than a response to genuine service failures, with many questioning why a functioning system should be disrupted at considerable expense.

Local voice and identity: 74 comments

Comments reflect concern about losing established local connections, community pride and distinct identities of towns and districts as they merge into larger impersonal authorities, with residents worried that their specific area's character and history may be erased or overlooked.

Transformation opportunity: 74 comments

Some respondents view reorganisation as a chance to modernise local government, improve efficiency and reshape services if approached thoughtfully, with potential to deliver better outcomes if leadership and planning are strong.

Governance, accountability and collaboration: 60 comments

Comments highlight concerns about how the new councils will be governed, whether different political parties and areas will cooperate effectively and whether decision making processes will be transparent and accountable to residents, with worry that political self-interest may override collaborative working.

Scale and size concerns: 51 comments

Some question whether the proposed unitary authorities are the right size, with debate about whether they should be larger or smaller than proposed and concerns that neither very large nor very small councils serve all communities effectively.

Geographic configuration concerns: 50 comments

Respondents express concern that proposed boundary arrangements are illogical, artificially combining areas with nothing in common while separating areas that naturally belong together, suggesting decisions lack understanding of local Kent geography and community connections.

Change and implementation quality concerns: 46 comments

Residents highlight concerns about the practical delivery of such a massive organisational change including risks of delays, long implementation process, IT system integration failures and unintended consequences with scepticism based on their previous experience of similar administrative undertakings.

Political motivation: 44 comments

Comments reflect concern that the reorganisation is being driven by party political agendas, particular political parties' interests, or attempts to gain electoral advantage rather than being genuinely designed to serve residents' needs fairly and impartially.

Service quality and funding: 38 comments

Respondents worry that services will deteriorate during and after reorganisation due to stretched resources, fewer staff and large areas to cover, while highlighting that lack of government funding for local government remains the core underlying problem that the reorganisation does not address.

Broader service suggestions: 38 comments

Comments include residents' broader suggestions and concerns about council services beyond reorganisation itself, such as weekly bin collections, road maintenance, policing, housing availability and others, reflecting that these core services need improvement regardless of structural changes.

Democratic process concerns: 34 comments

Comments raise questions about whether the process is genuinely democratic, whether the residents should have had a referendum and concerns that central government is imposing change without proper public consent or understanding of implications.

Dedicated staff and councillors needed: 28 comments

Comments emphasise that the reorganisation's success depends entirely on recruiting and retaining high quality committed staff and councillors with genuine local knowledge and commitment to residents, expressing concern that uncertainty will drive experienced people away.

Vulnerable groups and equality: 20 comments

Respondents raise concerns that reorganisation could disadvantage disabled people, elderly residents, deprived communities and other vulnerable groups, with worry about reduced accessibility to services and loss of tailored support during transition and afterwards.

Development, infrastructure, connectivity and planning: 19 comments

Respondents worry about how planning decisions will be made in larger authorities, whether sufficient infrastructure will be provided for new housing and whether rural transport connectivity and local services will be prioritised or neglected.

Rural and deprived areas: 17 comments

Residents raise concerns that rural communities and economically-deprived areas, particularly coastal towns and eastern Kent, will be sidelined in larger authorities, with priority and funding going to larger urban centres in wealthier areas at their expense.

Workforce impact: 16 comments

Comments express concern about job losses, staff redundancies, uncertainty affecting morale, experienced people leaving and disruption to service delivery as councils merge, with worry that vulnerable residents dependent on consistent support will be affected during transition.

Parish council role: 11 comments

Comments address uncertainty about what role parish and town councils will play in the new structure, with concern that they will be burdened with additional responsibilities without adequate funding or statutory powers, while remaining unpaid and under resourced.

Technology, digitalisation and data concerns: nine comments

Comments include worries about data security, the risk of over-reliance on AI and automation, reducing personal contact and concerns about whether councils have adequate IT infrastructure and expertise to manage complex system migrations.

5. Stakeholder submissions and engagement

50 written submissions were received. Stakeholders were asked to answer four questions:

1. What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?
2. What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?
3. What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?
4. What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Key themes

The following themes were identified:

Q1 - What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

- Local say in decisions: 14 comments
- Maximise cost savings: 14 comments
- Localism: 12 comments
- Retain local identity: 10 comments
- To clearly communicate the process: six comments
- Inequality between areas of Kent: four comments
- That new unitary boundaries align with other services like ICBs/ more rational boundaries in general: four comments
- Third sector relationships: three comments
- Council tax equality: two comments
- A non-partisan process: one comment
- Good transport links within the unitary boundary: one comment

Q2 - What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

- Pooling resources / efficiency savings / less duplication: 27 comments
- Less confusion: 15 comments
- More responsibilities for the parish councils: 12 comments
- Opportunity of devolution: eight comments
- Sharing best practices: eight comments
- Coherent spatial development strategy: four comments
- Adoption of productivity tech in new councils (e.g. AI): two comments

Q3 - What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

- Lack of joined-up thinking between districts and Kent County Council / duplication of service: 18 comments
- Unclear division of responsibilities between district councils and Kent County Council: 17 comments
- Lack of capacity to solve problems: five comments
- Weak purchasing power of DCs: two comments
- Overextension of local government: one comment

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

- Less local: 18 comments
- More remote/ anonymous: 18 comments
- Transition cost/ disruption: 16 comments
- Exacerbates East-West inequality: nine comments
- Less tailored policy: nine comments
- Sale of community assets: seven comments
- Adds more bureaucracy: six comments
- Threat to the parish: six comments
- X council area will end up subsidising Y council area, or taking on its debts: five comments
- Excuse to cut services: four comments
- Weaker third-sector links: two comments

Some stakeholders submitted general entries instead of adhering to the specified question format. The following key themes were identified:

- Less representation / democratic / accountable: five comments
- Less local knowledge: four comments
- Alignment of unitary boundaries with other services: three comments
- Civic identity: three comments
- Reorganisation sensitive to economic geography: three comments
- Efficiency: two comments
- Joined up thinking: two comments
- More consistent service: two comments
- More responsibility for parish councils: two comments
- Too much work for councils / councillors: two comments
- Transition costs: two comments
- Better spatial strategy: one comment
- Build on good relations with 3rd sector: one comment
- Opportunity of devolution: one comment
- Sale of community assets: one comment
- Savings are not realistic: one comment
- Won't save money in long term: one comment

Insights from stakeholder submissions

There is genuine recognition among many stakeholders that reorganisation could unlock efficiencies.

The health sector emphasises opportunities for better integration if local government boundaries align with Health and Care Partnership areas.

The NHS trusts see potential for more seamless joint working in social care, public health and prevention.

“...we would value geographical alignment with NHS boundaries wherever possible and reasonable. Given that poor health is so strongly influenced by social factors, alignment facilitates coordination of approach.”

Similarly, further education leaders highlight possibilities for coherent county-wide skills strategies and apprenticeship coordination that could better serve small-sized medium enterprises across Kent.

However, amongst other things, they also highlight that the reorganisation may have implications for learners with high needs.

“Ensuring consistency, equity, and adequate provision will require any new local authorities to have the capacity and expertise to properly co-ordinate and oversee High Needs responsibilities.”

Some stakeholders argue that reorganisation is about central government imposing changes that will limit electoral representation rather than deliver genuine savings.

Councillors point out that reduced councillor numbers and increased responsibilities may deter candidates and reduce local representation and loss of local knowledge amongst councillors.

There are some who oppose abolishing district councils and list risks, such as service disruption, higher costs and weaker democracy.

An Estate Manager argues that property management requires local knowledge and RICS regulations require surveyors to practice in known area and questions whether someone unfamiliar with an area can manage valuations accurately, maintain estates, or prevent loss of land through statutory rights.

Canterbury Foodbank raises concern that reorganisation could exacerbate East-West inequality by separating poorer coastal areas from wealthier western districts.

They highlight that new unitary authorities need strong, well-funded regional support to address inequalities.

There is a strong risk that unitary reorganisation will divide richer and poorer areas, so that the potential to cross-subsidise between areas of high social need (located mainly in the existing Thanet, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe and Swale districts) and richer areas (Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells) is lost.

At the same time opportunities to create high value-added employment in the poorer areas, whose economies currently rest on low-paid services (tourism, hospitality, social care) and primary sector agriculture will not exist.

A concern of equality was also raised by a councillor who questions financial sustainability for an east Kent unitary concentrating poorest authorities with highest service costs and lowest tax income.

There are concerns about resource allocation precision avoiding overlooked small, deprived areas and emphasis that local access points are essential for digitally excluded residents.

Some stakeholders from parish councils emphasise parishes provide valued highly local, responsive community services and argue community identity is vital to resident well-being.

“Parish Councils occupy a unique and invaluable position within their communities. As elected representatives who live and work within the areas they serve, Parish Councillors have a direct connection with local residents and a deep understanding of their needs and concerns.”

Some acknowledge that reorganisation could bring efficiency and clarity benefits, but stress local democracy or community identity should not be sacrificed in pursuit of these.

They also emphasise parishes need proper recognition, empowerment and funding.

There are furthermore concerns about debt transfer, calls for equal financial redistributions across new unitaries and worries that quality of services will worsen during and after the reorganisation.

Councils point out that underlying financial pressures, particularly around adult social care and children’s services are not solved by restructuring.

“The financial crisis facing local government is primarily driven by skyrocketing costs for statutory services, particularly adult social care and children's services. Reorganisation simply puts the burden for these massive, underfunded services onto the new unitary authority. There is a very high risk that money saved from merging administrative functions will simply be diverted to plug the social care gap.”

There are stakeholders who remain impartial however request early engagement once proposals progress.

They highlight need to be appropriately consulted on local plans and spatial development strategies affecting strategic road network.

Some are worried about change management process and service delivery during transition and raise questions about access, accountability, knowledge retention and leadership continuity.

“An understanding and explanation of the change management process and how services will be delivered in the interim should be a mandatory outcome of the consultation.”

There are concerns about slower response times in more bureaucratic, larger structure.

Stakeholders from housing sector are concerned about service disruption during transition, delays to housebuilding, confusion over social housing priorities and potential disaggregation of county-wide social care services.

Another respondent emphasises strategic planning and transport links as essential for housing crisis and infrastructure.

There are furthermore concerns about loss of in-house heritage expertise and local heritage services.

Multiple stakeholders worry that community assets like parks, libraries or historic building could be sold off or transferred without adequate funding or consideration of their community.

“That resources that people hold dear, such as the heritage in Canterbury or the coastal strip from Reculver to Seasalter, are not cherished in the same way in the unitary as they are in the district council.”

Several stakeholders urge that reorganisation should not be politicised and that any strategic authority must operate on genuinely collaborative principles rather than serving party political interest.

“Political neutrality: The reorganisation should avoid any political dimension, preserving Medway's functioning democracy where its political leadership reflects local views.”

We have received 50 submissions totalling over 60 pages of written feedback. Whilst this overview attempts to synthesise key themes and concerns, the full depth stakeholder perspectives is best understood by reading the full written representations, provided below.

Written submissions

County-wide stakeholders

An email was received from Kent & Medway NHS & Social Care Partnership Trust and Dartford & Gravesham NHS Trust.

Thank you for the invitation to submit responses to your consultation. My views are as follows:

For both my NHS trusts, we would value geographical alignment with NHS boundaries wherever possible and reasonable. Given that poor health is so strongly influenced by social factors, alignment facilitates coordination of approach.

The two Trusts (DGT and MFT) in north Kent/Medway are planning to integrate a number of their services to better serve the local population and work towards long term sustainability.

It would be enormously helpful to have a unitary authority covering the same patch.

The mental health trust (KMPT) covers all of K&M, but has organised services into north, east and west Kent. Again, alignment would be valued.

Social care – the limited funding, delays to hospital discharge, and inefficient processes – is a high risk area for the mental health trust in particular (but also for acute care).

Council organisation that can support coordinated approaches with health to finding solutions would make a huge difference. The question is whether this is best led from a single unitary authority for the whole county, or a place based set of unitary authorities.

The view of both my NHS Trusts is that we would probably most achieve our shared goals by the development of 3 unitary authorities: West, East and North Kent+Medway.

The team received a response from a former Kent County Councillor and district councillor.

I am speaking as a former Kent county councillor for 28 years and a Canterbury City councillor for 16 years; and also as present chair of the Canterbury Alliance for Sustainable Transport, and member of the steering group for the Action on Poverty Partnership in Canterbury District.

I welcome the amalgamation of a number of district councils in East Kent into one unitary authority. From an Action on Poverty point of view this will enable the problem of poverty to be dealt with more effectively : councillors and officers with responsibility for housing, schools, and social services will be able to sit round the

same table and be able to work out under one authority solutions to this problem, and any funding from central government will come to this single authority. However,

East Kent suffers more than districts in West Kent from financial hardship and its effects, yet does not raise as much in council tax per head as West Kent districts.

Therefore if poverty is to be tackled effectively a strong case must be made to central government for proper funding for this task.

I would prefer to have an 'East Kent', that contains Thanet, Canterbury, Dover, and Folkestone and Hythe districts , as this would produce an entity that makes sense in terms of the tasks facing it, and would mean the number of residents per councillor would be less, with a greater gain in democracy. However, I concede that the addition of Ashford district would lead to a higher 'take ' in council tax. There is an added advantage in having a larger space in the future unitary, in that this would

make more possible the creation of a new town. At present each small district must accommodate growth in the number of homes beyond what is needed by local residents, regardless of the effect on transport and traffic, and regardless of special circumstances. A larger space would enable a new town instead to be located wherever the least damage is done to the natural environment, and where it makes sense for buses, trains, or active travel to be the preferred means of transport. An additional advantage of having an East Kent unitary authority would be that transport, roads and planning would be under one authority, whereas at present they are divided between county and district. Highways and transport are an integral part of the planning process, and these services should be under one authority. There is one factor that might concern local people. They might feel that planning of new homes and businesses might damage what they think is valuable in their locality if a decision is taken by a majority of councillors representing other areas. It is vital, therefore, that before the constitution of a unitary authority each district council establishes policies which lay out what it believes to be of value in its district, of heritage or natural environment value, that should not be destroyed or compromised by future development, and that these policies should be adopted by the new unitary council.

Finally, in the Canterbury District there are no Town Councils, for Canterbury, Whitstable, or Herne Bay. If there is to be a greater number of residents per councillor in the new unitary council, then the democratic deficit must be ameliorated by the creation of three new Town Councils. An added benefit is that Town Councils for these urban areas would be statutory consultees on planning matters, which would mean that they could be guardians of the aforementioned places of protected heritage or environmental value.

The team received an email from National Highways.

Dear Sir/ Madam

Thank you for consulting National Highways with regards Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

National Highways is the government owned company which operates, maintains and improves the SRN as the strategic highway company appointed under the provisions of the Infrastructure Act 2015 and in accordance with the Licence issued by the Secretary of State for Transport.

National Highways is a statutory consultee to the planning process. It has a specific obligation to deliver economic growth through the provision of a safe and reliable SRN in line with the provisions set out in DfT Circular 01/2022: The strategic road network and the delivery of sustainable development.

National Highways already engages with all forms of local and central government, other public bodies, the private sector and the public with regards any matters relevant to the SRN. And we are committed to continue doing so in the future. Therefore, we remain impartial with regards any particular form of LGR that may be proposed or implemented. However, once proposals have progressed, we would welcome early engagement to ensure that we can continue to be appropriately consulted on/ involved in the production of Local Plans and/or Spatial Development Strategy and in the assessment of any planning applications that may impact on the SRN by virtue of the traffic associated with it or due to its location close to the SRN.

*I hope this response assists and look forward to further engagement as LGR progresses.
In the meantime, if any party has any queries regarding this response, please contact us via planningse@nationalhighways.co.uk .
Regards*

A written response was received from Medway's VCS Leaders Network.

*Dear Councillor Maple,
Many thanks for affording the Medway VCS Leaders Network the opportunity to contribute our views to the proposed Local Government Reorganisation taking place in Kent & Medway. Whilst change is inevitable, the network are pleased to be part of the conversations and very much hope to meet with you to discuss our concerns and our ideas in greater length once we know more about the plans being put in place.
Please see below a range of areas we would like you to be aware of and please rest assured we will be continuing this dialogue with the sector over the coming months:
Considerations we feel it would be helpful to know more about:*

- ICB Health boundaries also need to align – do they have NHS commitment to do this?*
- Opportunities could be realised or lost – e.g. Medway Council contracts at risk, what transparent processes in place if competitive procurement required or facilitated mergers/collaborative working needed (funded by government to get done)?*
- For consistency, will there be funding available to fill gaps in support to provide full coverage across new unitary footprints?*
- How will relationships / shared knowledge held by current local authorities be maintained?*

'Business continuity'?

- As there is no additional system funding, and savings will take time to realise, what commitment will be required of the new unitaries to do things differently/innovatively? Will things like working at place and prevention be enshrined into new unitaries' strategies?*
- What commitment/plan is there to ensure the finalised model for Kent & Medway does not deepen inequalities across the county (e.g. wealthier councils banding together)?*
- What arrangement are being considered for current discretionary arrangements between councils – e.g. Rules regarding travel support (e.g. free bus travel times) or Business rate relief impact (as it's specific to councils) e.g. galleries, charity shops?*
- Impact on existing strategic initiatives (e.g. Sport England, Marmot, Heritage)?*

VCSEF Sector specific considerations:

- Charities need to revisit their Mem and Arts if they are geographically bound.*
- Support/Capacity to build a new set of contacts/relationships within any new unitary authority.*

MVA, The Joiners Shop, Historic Dockyard, Chatham, ME4 4TZ

- Investment (e.g. event, contact information/directories, updates) in sector to support continuity in community services/support during period of change and new officers/members in place.*
- What will happen to place specific causes (eg. Creative Medway, Medway VCSLN)?*
- Mileage/travel costs might increase to service wider geographic area – smaller VCSEF may need to prepare to manage this.*
- How do we maintain the connectivity/trust held across Medway's VCSEF through any transition*

– and open the doors for more VCSEF from other areas to be part of it?

As always, the VCS Leaders Network Steering Group are happy to discuss any of the above in further detail should you have any questions or require more information.

The team received an email from Southern Housing.

Hi,

Please see thoughts from Southern Housing below on the four questions on Kent and Medway's local government reorganisation proposals.

1. What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

Minimising service disruption during the transition period

Improving service delivery for residents

Securing better value for money for the taxpayer

Designing unitary authorities that make sense geographically and support operational delivery

Impacts on relationships with key partner organisations including housing associations

Potential impacts on housing delivery as Government presses ahead with its target of delivering 1.5 million homes over the course of this parliament

Potential impacts on social housing allocations, including the application of the local connection tests and amalgamation of housing waiting lists

How local government reorganisation complements and aligns with Government's devolution proposals.

2. What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

Improved services for residents including the prospect of greater service coordination if these are delivered by a single authority

Simplification / consolidation of responsibilities currently split between upper- and lower-level local authorities meaning greater understanding of roles and responsibilities amongst the public

The potential to secure economies of scale and efficiencies with potential savings to the taxpayer

Improved collaboration with housing associations and other local stakeholders. A more consolidated model brings the prospect of clearer communication, fewer handovers, clearer accountability, and reduced duplication ultimately leading to more efficient service delivery

Aligning commissioning and procurement activity of services and systems

Aligning planning, commissioning and licensing responsibilities for supported housing

Improved strategic planning, since unitary authorities will cover larger geographies than the existing borough, city and district authorities and have full control over planning

Improved placemaking if the same authority is responsible for provision of housing and linked infrastructure including roads

Potentially greater choice of available social homes for residents depending on the nature of new unitary authority boundaries and operation of local connection tests.

3. What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

A lack of coordination between council services delivered by different tiers of local government. The current split of responsibilities between the county council and borough/city/district councils is not conducive to delivering joined up services, especially for complex issues that currently cut across different authorities' remits.

4. What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Potential problems which could be created

Disruption to service delivery during the transition period due to staff restructuring, procurement of council contracts and agreement of new policies and procedures (e.g. increased planning application times or delays to local plans)

Delays to housebuilding if newly-created unitary authorities opt to abandon adopted or emerging local plans in favour of developing their own

Confusion amongst residents on the housing waiting list over how local government reorganisation might affect their priority for social housing

Disaggregating statutory services including adult social care and children's social care which currently operate on a Kent-wide footprint could result in significant service disruption and costs

A reduction in responsiveness and local touch if the new unitary authorities are significantly larger than the existing borough and district councils (without careful design of operating structures and customer services).

Problems which will not be fixed

Pressure on local authority budgets, especially to cater for growing adult social care, special educational needs and temporary accommodation demands.

Best wishes,

An email was received from Chatham Maritime Trust.

Dear sir

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Kent and Medway. I am writing on behalf of Chatham Maritime Trust (CMT), a not for profit organisation dedicated to managing an estate of 350 acres including public spaces, supporting community initiatives, and promoting sustainable development in the Chatham Maritime area. CMT are at the heart of development and regeneration in Chatham Maritime and Medway Council are represented at board level with two permanent members.

Chatham Maritime has experienced significant regeneration and growth over the last 40 years, following the departure of the Royal Navy. Further proposals are now being considered for the redevelopment of the docks which will see further change and growth in the locality. Medway Council are central to this and their long term involvement adds knowledge and context to the overall discussion.

HOW WILL COUNCILS CHANGE?

At present the final format is unclear however it appears that Kent will move from circa 14 administrative bodies to 3 or possibly 4 unitary authorities. All mergers, corporate or otherwise are expensive and take a long time to embed systems and processes. People will be lost and expertise transferred in the exercise and the "change process" will be lengthy and difficult. With a proposed completion date of April 2028, it is inevitable that services will operate below 100% for a significant period.

An understanding and explanation of the change management process and how services will be

delivered in the interim should be a mandatory outcome of the consultation. In addition, a progress

tracker and regular updates should be published.

Additional summary queries;

1. *Access and accountability - council and community services are stretched and establishing personal contact is routinely difficult. How will this be addressed given the proposed restructuring and the potential loss of personnel. How will councils ensure staff are directly accountable with a much wider brief?*

2. *Knowledge and Expertise - the purpose of the exercise is to consolidate into a small number of unitary authorities - possibly 3 or 4. This will result in functions being commoditised e.g. planning, social care, youth work and charity involvement. How will councils retain and promote local expertise and knowledge which are vital when considering large scale development and infrastructure changes?*

3. *Leadership - continuity is vital when leading any organisation through significant change. Will leadership be established before the change process begins? How will local elections be affected if the change process overruns?*

4. *Real Estate & Infrastructure - Councils have significant real estate holdings which are often managed poorly or even overlooked. The consolidation exercise will allow councils to review and potentially dispose of assets and release funds for other purposes. Is this being reviewed as part of the exercise?*

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

1. *The Medway towns need focus, investment and commitment from local government to drive regeneration. Chatham Maritime is a great example of public/private cooperation and a tremendous success. A new unitary authority has the potential to give greater emphasis to the regeneration of Medway. It is possible however that emphasis and commitment will be "put on hold" during the change process. In addition, how will funds be ring fenced and protected given the increased demands from a larger geography? Identifying this at an early stage and making it clear will give comfort to those organisations involved with the regeneration programme.*

2. *Medway has a dedicated team of good professional officers. How will they be incentivised to remain with the new organisation? The retention of local knowledge and expertise is vital to the long term success of the proposals.*

3. *An opportunity exists to create the borough of Chatham Maritime. This could be established as part of the change programme. This would enable and support the ongoing development and infrastructure changes that are being discussed currently.*

4. *Medway has considerable heritage, represented by many popular museums and visitor attractions. In addition, Medway and other specific organisations (including ourselves) host significant events annually which attract residents and visitors and raise considerable funds for local charities. It is vital that the Medway teams are accessible during and after the change process is complete to enable these events to continue. Medway has already lost its tourism team and Visit Kent has gone bust. How will the new unitary authorities address the gap in visitor services that exist currently?*

5. *The change process itself will be the biggest cause of frustration. Communication throughout, to residents and employees alike will be key. This also offers a great opportunity to connect with residents and businesses via regular communication and interaction.*

6. *Councils need to be visible and accessible to residents and local businesses. Fears as to increases in council tax and business rates to fund the changes need to be addressed proactively. Locations; particularly HQ facilities and public access must be identified at an early stage.*

7. *The commoditisation of planning and development functions may, in the long term, have a perceived negative impact on smaller communities whose concerns may be overlooked. To counter this, the new authority will need to ensure officers are accessible and policies are clear.*

*The problems are familiar and the solutions are not new. Visibility, communication, leadership and continuity, delivered by familiar faces will all aid the process. CMT would be happy to discuss any of the above comments as part of the consultation process.
Many thanks*

The team received an email from Blueberry Homes.

*Dear Councillor Maple,
Kent Local Government Reorganisation – response from Blueberry Homes
Thank you for your letter dated 16th September to Scott Rigden of Blueberry Homes, seeking his views on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). We are pleased to reply on his behalf.
As you know, Blueberry are actively engaging with Medway Council as the local planning authority on ambitious proposals to regenerate the Old Gas Works site in Gillingham. We have been extremely impressed with how Medway has dealt with us over the course of bringing forward this ambitious project. They have been one of the most productive and forward-thinking authorities we have engaged with.
Given this, in some ways it is disappointing that Medway Council will be abolished as part of the LGR process. Nonetheless, Blueberry is happy to give its views on the questions set out in the 16th September letter as follows:
What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?
1. It is important that a new authority has sufficient resource, both in terms of capital and people, to be able to respond effectively and in a timely way to proposals that will stimulate investment in it.
2. Geography – a whole Kent unitary authority will be unwieldy and there is a danger that local knowledge would be lost. This local knowledge and expertise has been invaluable in our dealings with Medway Council.
What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?
1. Having all key services consolidated into one authority would be a positive, provided there is sufficient resource to ensure good service delivery.
2. Blueberry delivers regeneration schemes widely across Kent, so we would hope that the new authority/authorities will be open to investment and be proactive in welcoming organisations like ours and working with us to deliver our schemes.
What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?
1. In respect of our relationship with Medway, this was very positive and there are no obvious problems to be fixed. More widely, the integration of current KCC services (e.g. highways) directly into and part of a new authority could help improve coordination and speed of response.
What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?
1. There is a danger that the extensive local knowledge, expertise and proactive culture that is inherent in some existing authorities like Medway could be lost in a larger authority.
2. The ability to be able to engage with authority officers in a timely manner has been a hallmark of our relationship with Medway. A larger, more bureaucratic authority with a wider scope of responsibility could slow response times, which would be detrimental in our view.*

The team received an email from Historic England.

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway

Thank you for the invitation to share our views on plans for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Kent and Medway. We recognise this is part of a wider consultation process on LGR to inform proposals to put forward to Government. We may have further comments and views to share as proposals are clarified.

As the Government's adviser on the historic environment, we wish to ensure that protection of the historic environment is fully considered at all stages and levels of the planning process.

The creation of new combined authorities and steps that support greater devolution extend beyond our remit. So, we make no comment on the way in which different Councils may wish to work together in the creation of new unitary authorities.

That said, Kent and Medway include many sites of international, national and local heritage significance. We have worked closely for many years with councils across Kent and Medway to celebrate the area's heritage. Our engagement includes projects such as the Old High Street Intra High Street Heritage Action Zone, with over £1.6M in funding from Historic England. We continue to work closely with Medway Council and creative and community groups through further funding and project work. Historic England also funded the Heritage Action Zone and High Street Heritage Action Zone in Ramsgate.

We are working closely with Dover District Council and other partners to find solutions for sites such as Dover Western Heights and the development of Dover town centre. We have provided a grant of £168k to support the restoration of the Sheerness Dockyard Church into a vibrant community and youth training centre as well as a grant of £200k towards the restoration of the much-loved Leas Lift in Folkestone. These are just some of the examples of the work we have supported across Kent and Medway.

We have also engaged extensively across the area through our planning and listing work. This includes supporting Local Authorities in the production of new plans, advising on major planning applications and infrastructure and supporting stakeholders to achieve positive change for the historic environment. We also advise on the management of major heritage sites including the Canterbury, St Augustine and St Martin's World Heritage Site.

We value the positive relationships we have developed with councils and stakeholders across the area through all our work on Kent's historic environment, and it will be important for these to continue through any new local government structures.

Our response (in the Appendix below) to the consultation focuses on two questions in particular:

1) What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why? We will also outline some of our concerns or potential issues in this section

And

2) What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your key aspirations?

Historic England is keen to work with the new combined authorities, explore opportunities for

collaboration and provide helpful advice in line with our remit.

Please let me know if you have any queries or would like to discuss anything further.

Appendix – Historic England consultation response on Local Government

Reorganisation in Kent and Medway

1) What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

• Engagement and Relationships

As a statutory body and grant-giver, it is important that we maintain and enhance our current levels of engagement with any new local government structure to help identify, protect, and champion Kent and Medway's historic environment. We emphasise the importance of this in other points below. Our London and South East team provide historic environment expertise at a local level and would be happy to discuss further how we may support plans for reorganisation and for ongoing engagement and partnerships.

• Local Heritage Services, including the Historic Environment Record

We want to highlight the importance of local authority heritage (planning advice) services and the need for careful consideration in any proposals to combine or divide such services. Local heritage services not only support the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment but also facilitate growth that is locally distinctive, connecting people and place.

We strongly support in-house expertise on the historic environment, with conservation, archaeological, Historic Environment Record (HER) Officers, amongst others, bringing a wealth of local knowledge and understanding on matters relating to the historic environment.

Any loss of County, District/Borough or Unitary authority level historic environment expertise would represent loss of capacity and capability needed to achieve planning missions. Care should be taken not to streamline teams in such a way as to lose capacity and knowledge that would be hard to replace. Decisions will need to be taken on where both unitary and strategic authorities will obtain their historic environment advice, especially where there is a history of no conservation officers in local authorities or where advice has habitually been obtained from external consultants.

Unitary authorities will need access to the Historic Environment Record, local studies collection (libraries), and record offices/archives as important data repositories for plan making and planning decisions. Many of these are currently funded at County Council level.

We believe the Kent Heritage Service provides an exemplary service across the county, providing a collection of information that is based on the records of the county as a whole.

Further thought on how to retain and enhance current levels of service for any new unitary authorities will be needed as part of LGR proposals. Additional consideration of the Historic Environment Record is below.

Historic Environment Record

The Historic Environment Record (HER) is an essential data resource and supports effective decision-making in the planning system and more widely e.g. informing and being informed by a wide range of research programmes and projects. We welcome the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which sets the trajectory for putting HERs on a statutory footing.

Careful consideration of the management and maintenance of the HER will be crucial in LGR proposals, including provision of in-house expertise to manage, maintain and develop the HER. There are various models that might be considered when shaping combined provision of archaeological services. A Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) could provide leadership to secure and support the development of the HER, enhance public access, and improve data standards. New unitary authorities could look to shared models establishing a Trust (such as at West Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Councils) or through Service Level Agreements.

We publish related advice, such as [The Guide to Historic Environment Records \(HERs\) in England](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/guide-to-historicenvironment-records-england/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/guide-to-historicenvironment-records-england/>), which sets out how a HER host authority needs to ensure that an HER record is kept up to date with accurate information that meets the requirements

of the National Planning Policy Framework.

- *Local and strategic plan making*

Establishment of unitary authorities will not improve the historic environment in itself, this will depend on the priorities, powers and both capacity and capability of that authority to act on its own or in partnership with others. However, it can put in place opportunities for improvements.

Historic England would hope to establish joint working principles with the unitary authorities at an early stage, including how priorities will be established through the local growth plan, strategic plan, local skills plan and our input to support environmental improvements.

Historic England is a statutory consultee and has a statutory duty to assist with the development of local plans, amongst other duties. We work hard to provide a consistent high standard of response to local plan consultations as well as working proactively with planning departments between formal consultation stages to support the development of policies (both those designed to address the historic environment and those with potential to do so) and to assess site allocations for their impacts on heritage assets and the historic environment. We also assess the suitability of measures to mitigate impacts or secure benefits through conservation. Historic England would need to establish a positive relationship with new unitary

authority planning teams as soon as possible to ensure we are involved with and continue to input into the local plan process through all stages.

As new plans are produced for new unitary authorities, they should not reflect any gaps that exist in the current provision of local plans. In addition, they need to continue to reflect local aspects particular to certain locations and not become too overarching. Any future combined authority will also need appropriate access to historic environment expertise to support the development of Strategic Plans.

Experience shows that transfer of local planning to larger Unitary Authorities has resulted in larger local plans with more allocations to assess without any increase in the time for consultation. This creates a risk of inadequate assessment or the need for extensions to consultation time and therefore delay. So that we can provide the best support for new unitary authorities we will need to establish a close working relationship with their planning teams as soon as possible to help with site allocation assessment.

We would hope to establish a coordinated approach to sift, including use of the 5-steps assessment process set out in our published guidance, to ensure that we engage where we can and add the greatest value at the right time.

- *Asset Disposal*

Historic England would also have concerns about disposal of council assets that are heritage assets, without adequate consideration of the impacts for communities or planning for their ongoing management. Where new unitary councils are rationalising their estates, there is a risk of disposal of buildings and facilities that bring communities together. We foresee a potential need to work with Unitary Authorities to support Parish, Town and Community Councils in taking on these assets and would welcome early discussion of the support we could offer in terms of community asset transfer, supporting communities to conserve and manage important heritage assets and use their historic cultural infrastructure to deliver social benefits.

2) *What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your key aspirations?*

Historic England sees potential opportunities through reorganisation to support and improve local government historic environment services. We engage with many local government services including on regeneration, housing, planning, crime, health, education, estates, skills, and communities.

There may be opportunities for historic environment teams in new authorities to increase consistency in standards, responses to applications and even capacity. From our perspective access to pooled knowledge, bringing together different historic environment disciplines (archaeology and conservation) and urban/landscape designers and highways alongside planning, regeneration and other disciplines has huge potential.

There is also potential to take a more strategic overview in a larger unitary authority to identify the opportunities for partnerships to address long term issues affecting communities' enjoyment of and access to their heritage, or to achieve benefits through conservation. This might focus Historic England support in a particular location or on a particular issue across a larger area, to have a greater overall effect.

We note the government's intention to require members forming planning committees to receive adequate training, including in areas within our areas of expertise. Historic England can support this training and discussion of the form that training and accreditation could take would be very welcome at this stage.

Several other areas where opportunities exist and where Historic England can support LGR in Kent and Medway include:

- *Housing and Growth*

We see the potential to help deliver new homes and opportunities for growth to tackle some of the most pressing local issues and challenges. As with many areas, Kent and Medway has strong contrasts between areas of affluence and deprivation. Working with new unitary authorities, Historic England could support new homes and opportunities for growth in places like Medway.

- *Visitor Economy*

There are opportunities for unitary authorities to grow the visitor economy. Heritage plays a key role in the visitor economy and the vitality of cities, towns, and rural areas. Domestic and international heritage-related visits added c. £3.5 billion to the South East's economy in 2023.

Investment should capitalise on the rich heritage of the county's coastal areas, and its historic towns, cities, and landscapes. We'd hope to work with new unitary authorities to secure the legacy of our past engagement and investments. This will include developing partnerships to support Parish and Town Councils who may well take on greater responsibilities for leading regeneration.

- *Wellbeing*

We see the opportunity to deliver social benefits through joined-up approaches between unitary authorities, partners like NHS trusts and Local Education Authorities. Historic England has supported the delivery of social benefits through projects such as the High Street Heritage Action Zone (Old High Street Intra), our Heritage Schools initiative (Ramsgate), Everyday Heritage grants and social prescribing using heritage and engagement with young offenders, such as Project Rejuvenate (East Kent).

- *Skills*

There will be opportunities in the delivery of education and training through the division of local education authorities. We are concerned there is a shortage of core skills for the local economy, including for the repair and maintenance of existing building stock as well as the retrofit of traditional properties for energy efficiency. This is a drag on

economic growth and contributes to the cost-of-living crisis, where businesses are unable to expand to meet need and customers are unable to get the services to repair, maintain and improve their properties.

As Local Education Authorities will retain responsibility for post-16 education funding delivery, we would hope to work closely with them to consider how they can deliver the training that is needed, including establishing training hubs to enable small and micro-businesses to take on apprentices at Level 3 and work in partnership with the Apprenticeship Service and a future Strategic Authority with responsibility for adult skills training. We would be pleased to discuss our Historic Environment Skills and Careers Action Plan for England and how a new Local Education Authority can help deliver the workforce skills and opportunities for careers that the area needs.

- *Climate Change*

Historic England sees upgrading the energy efficiency of our historic buildings as vital to continue providing the value they bring to our communities. Whilst it is important to protect heritage assets, there is a need for buildings built using traditional technology (which currently makes up about 20% of the country's building stock) to achieve this increase in efficiency and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Past grants and incentives have focused on using standard energy efficiency retrofit measures that are suitable for buildings with cavity walls in particular.

We will want to work with new unitary authorities to support them in developing funding streams that address the needs of traditional buildings as a specific market for retrofit.

In addition, the decline in skills to repair older buildings and enhance energy efficiency contributes to the housing shortage and cost of living crisis, as noted above. Only 47% of South East construction firms surveyed had training to maintain pre-1919 buildings. Kent needs 2,620 extra full-time workers each year (Medway needs 370) to deliver net zero targets

(creating £485.8 million output; Medway £54 million output). Unitary authorities could target training to meet these needs.

The team received a written response from Citizen's Advice.

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

On the basis that Citizens Advice sits between two groups of customers: the individual clients (citizens) and the funding agencies (local govt/ other charities/ other public agencies) the key factors will be those which enable a better service to clients (e.g. scope, availability, targeting support for high risk groups) and an increased value for money for the funding agencies (e.g. reduction in debts owed/ improved financial position, increased community welfare, reduced pressure on other services). Therefore:

-

- *A defined structure and communication channel for funding/ funding bids and with LA financial stability, grants for greater than 1 year's duration to allow longer term planning, better analysis of advice trends, investment in training and reduction in administration costs for funder and recipient*

- *A consistent and standard approach to deal with Council Tax debt across the whole UA which is communicated to Citizens Advice+ a communication channel back into the UA to identify any problems/ inconsistencies/ improvements. Simpler and clearer communication about Council Tax Support and discount eligibility for clients and*

caseworkers, reducing chance of clients losing out on income or incurring debts through lack of understanding of different Council Tax scheme rules when they move areas.

- Any allocation of resources based on risk/ deprivation models should be as granular as possible e.g. at ward level, at Lower Super Output Area level or it's UA equivalent which would avoid smaller areas of need being missed by an aggregation at a larger scale. This will be particularly important for the very deprived parts of Canterbury such as parts of Barton, Northgate and Heron and Seasalter which may get overlooked when comparing Canterbury to districts that have more uniform deprivation like Thanet.

- Maintain local links and visibility to ensure issues are dealt with and identified + ensure legitimacy of new authority by showing it can pick up local issues and escalate these to the relevant depts in the UA. The loss of local council offices in Whitstable and Herne Bay has already created difficulties for residents who feel little connection with their district authority. Any Unitary Authority will need to resist the urge to cut local access points further, particularly as East Kent is such a large geographical area. We manage the Macmillan Welfare Benefits Service for East Kent and see the very real impact of people not being able to afford the travel costs across the county who feel they have no choice but to miss chemo and radio therapy appointments. If people cannot find the resources to attend life saving treatment how much incentive will there be to deal with less important issues, like Council Tax debt.

- A transparent mechanism for resource allocation which ensures equal provision of core services which in turn validates allocation of spending on social needs to particular locations: - i.e. every household gets the same waste disposal service to the same standard but spending on dealing with family support is focused on high demand locations. The recent concentration of the Local Health Alliance on Heron Ward is an excellent example of use of local data to target provision. It is hoped that the move to a larger authority will not lose this local knowledge and local impetus to help.

- Avoid digital exclusion- the loss of local offices as access points compounds this, which is added to the issues of poor reading and writing skills and English not as a first language. This is especially important as the Dept of Work and Pensions has already reduced many of its jobcentres and the roll out of Universal Credit has already marginalised many. The provision of telephone claims as a back up for those who do not have digital skills is insufficient for people to retain control as it is not backed up with paper notifications. The need for quality advice providers to help deal with this is of paramount importance. This needs to be factored into funding for Citizens Advice and other agencies who help such as the local community hubs. From the Unitary Authorities point of view access to homelessness applications and Homechoice for the digitally excluded are important things to include in local delivery points, and on the telephone, as are access to Council Tax Support, Discretionary Housing Payments and Household Support Funds. All these are schemes to help lift the

poorest people out of absolute poverty but if those in need cannot access them and sometimes do not know they exist then the UA will not be reaching the target audience and this will in turn result in debt, homelessness, poor health and crime. Clear information across all access channels for these sources of help is needed.

• Inter UA co-operation: for example, at UA boundaries, who will grit the roads for which the UA is responsible?

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

As above: -

• A reorganization leading to more stable, increased and longer-term funding will benefit both the UA and Citizens Advice clients

• A standard approach to Council Tax debt will allow debt advisers to follow a uniform process + a defined communication channel will make providing advice and support easier and quicker

• Having links/ a relationship with the Citizens Advice written into the UA's legal structure: if it is required by statute, it is difficult to marginalise. This is important as official forms always mention the help that Citizens Advice can provide.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why

In theory a larger UA should be able to benefit from synergies arising from scale i.e. greater purchasing power; combined departments IT; standard processes.

The issue will be who loses in the reorganisation (people and geographic areas)

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

If the resources/ funding given to the UA's do not match the statutory responsibilities given to them by the Central Government, very few problems will be fixed unless there are massive savings from a reorganised structure, which may mean that any contracts with consultants for work on the merger should have payment linked to results clauses.

For Citizens Advice a key issue will be to avoid being 'crowded out' by other voluntary organisations or agencies when it comes to funding and public profile: could the requirement to embed contacts with voluntary bodies be written into the new UA's legal structures and is this an issue that could be dealt with at national level directly with central government.

Another concern is that Canterbury could lose its city status. This could affect prestige and damage its reputation as a tourist destination. This could have an impact on the local economy and ultimately the finances of our clients.

The loss of city status could also affect whether we have a Lord Mayor. Canterbury has a thriving voluntary sector and the Lord Mayor and Sheriff play important roles in supporting and championing local organisations and charitable events, for example the Sheriff holds an annual event in volunteer's week and the Lady Mayoress collects for Christmas parcels.

A written response was received by Doina Foundation.

*Dear Alan,
Thank you for your email!*

I have consulted with other important members of the local Romanian diaspora, and we have put together the following answers for each question related to the new proposed system of unitary councils.

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

First and foremost, the territorial division should consider the existing economic reality and the economic potential of each Kentish region. An uneven division will end up making some administrations financially poorer, if too many economically underprivileged regions are incorporated into one division.

There is a shortage of special needs school places in Kent, some people might rely on enrolling their children in areas outside the jurisdiction they belong to. The overall SEND provision is rather poor already; this should be an area for improvement for the new councils.

The road network and transportation network infrastructure needs to be equitably distributed, to facilitate effective travel through Kent, to London or to the border with Europe in Dover/Folkestone. Each new division should be able to offer its residents equal opportunities in terms of access to jobs, professional opportunities, education and training infrastructure.

It is important to take into account how current services and their employees working for local councils and county council will be affected and how much redundancies will cost. Can such costs be avoided if existing employees are redistributed to a relevant newly formed department within the new unitary Council.

Other key factors: access to medical facilities, social housing, youth integration and professional development, the interaction with local community groups, charities, and other organisations of public interest.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

In our view, such reorganisation should also be met with a capital investment in Kent, focusing on roads, new schools, training facilities, job access, quality, accessible housing for all residents. This could potentially create new work opportunities, better opportunities for youth.

A better system of integrating and creating opportunities for youth should be implemented, particularly for those who finish school at 16 and remain economically inactive.

Ethnic minority diaspora could and should have a stronger voice in how they can be better integrated with available services.

Kent will benefit for a better strategy for foreign tourism, as currently only UNESCO protected sites, like Canterbury, or English Heritage sites (Dover Castle etc.) benefit by a lot of income from touristic activity.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Some excessive costs with the administrative apparatus and budgetary constraints will be removed, if several departments dealing with the same/similar activities are joined up.

A lot of residents often confuse what are the responsibilities of the city council, and which of the County council. This confusion will no longer be an issue, if all services are provided by one larger council, dealing with everything.

A better and more effective use of brownfield sites for home building opportunities.

A more uniform strategy for economic development and investment on a much larger scale, which could create better opportunities for the existing workforce in the county; a reduced dependency on accessing well paid jobs in London, and the creation of more well-paid jobs in Kent.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Insufficient staffing to deal with issues over a much larger area than before; the workload of some council employees will increase.

The creation of (more) inequality if some regions will be considerably less economically privileged than others.

A significant reduction in the power or influence of parish councils, when dealing with very localised issues, housing challenges, infrastructure etc.

An unequal distribution of talented human resource and economic opportunities.

A differentiation in house pricing, in some areas getting on the property ladder could become even more difficult than it is today, if a new administrative region will be considered more economically affluent, which will drive prices up.

Uneven funding could result in differences in the quality of road infrastructure.

Public services, like the police or fire and rescue, might see cuts in some areas.

How public services will be administered, like transportation network, public parking, park and ride facilities, waste collection, recycling etc. could take a long time to reorganise. Currently, some services like waste collection are managed by either private companies, or publicly owned companies.

The reorganization will be met with insufficient funding or investment.

The access to social housing could be made more difficult, as services will need to be reorganised and that could take time.

Warm regards,

The team received a written response from NHS Kent and Medway.

Dear Suzi,

Thank you for your letter and invitation to respond to the proposal for local government reorganisation in Kent. We have considered and responded to each question below:

• What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

As demonstrated in our recent Kent and Medway NHS Strategy our aim is to concentrate resources on frontline services, with a focus on sustainable and community care. On this basis our preference would be for the smallest number of unitary councils to minimise infrastructure costs and the risk of fragmenting services. Whilst acute healthcare service geographies are relatively fixed in their nature, the partnerships in which we operate offer potential for future alternative alignment with other public sector organisations.

• What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

We recognise there are significant opportunities around service delivery alignment that could be realised by the reorganisation, which could lead to reduction in costs at the same time as improvement in services.

Whilst there is a risk of greater fragmentation in services, for example public health and social care, there is also the opportunity for improved commissioning alignment for local populations. We would welcome early conversations on how these services may be aligned in future structures, particularly where joint funding and therefore decision-making arrangements will be impacted.

• What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Reorganisations offer an opportunity to consider inequalities. Recognising the link between health, economy, and other wider determinants, we would encourage leaders to consider the inequalities that exist across our population in deciding future structures and how these inequalities may be impacted.

• What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

As we have previously discussed with Kent Leaders and Chiefs, our concerns in the reorganisation process relate to the continuity of services at the same time as local government understandably considers the correct way to operate. Many of which, such as social services, are under significant pressure and need to remain a focus at a potential time of distraction. We remain committed to working with local authorities, and any future shadow arrangements, to ensure these crucial services are supported and protected.

The fragmentation of county wide services, such as public health and children's services, is a significant risk that could be created through the reorganisation.

Since the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System was established our shared partnership working has strengthened. We envisage continued engagement on the reorganisation process through our ICS System Leadership Group and our attendance at Joint Kent Chiefs.

We hope information will be shared through these routes as the proposals develop at each stage.

Recognising that governance arrangements between the NHS and local authorities are significantly different, we would welcome a discussion on how we continue engagement with all council leaders in Kent and Medway.

Yours sincerely

The team received a written response on behalf of the Further Education Leaders in Kent.

Joint Submission on Local Government Reorganisation in Kent

From: Kent Further Education: EKC Group, MidKent College, and North Kent College

As leaders of the three further education colleges in Kent — EKC Group, MidKent College, and North Kent College — collectively educating over 25,000 students across the county, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing discussions around local government reorganisation in Kent and the associated review being undertaken by KPMG.

All three colleges are rated Outstanding or Good with Outstanding features, and we have worked collaboratively to secure millions of pounds of investment in state-of-the-art skills facilities. Most recently, our partnership was recognised through the awarding of the only Construction Technical Excellence College designation in the South East — a clear indication of our shared commitment to driving skills development and regional economic growth.

However, we wish to express a firm view that any structural changes to local government in Kent must not disadvantage learners or weaken our ability to work with employers to meet local workforce needs.

Key Concerns

Travel to Learn and Student Support

Any redrawing of council boundaries must not create barriers for learners who live in one local authority area but attend their nearest or most appropriate college in another.

Current travel support arrangements — often tied to local authority boundaries — risk leaving these students ineligible for vital assistance. This could lead to inequitable access to education and limit progression opportunities for young people across the county.

High Needs Learners

We are concerned about the implications of reorganisation for learners with High Needs. Ensuring consistency, equity, and adequate provision will require any new local authorities to have the capacity and expertise to properly co-ordinate and oversee High Needs responsibilities. This is a complex area where fragmentation or loss of expertise could have serious consequences for some of the county's most vulnerable learners.

Pathways for All

We wish to highlight the importance of county-wide co-ordination of post-16 provision. The Pathways for All initiative has made a positive contribution in bringing schools, colleges, and providers together to better align the post-16 offer for learners across Kent. It has created valuable momentum towards a more coherent and joined-up system. Any reorganisation must protect and build on this progress, ensuring that learners continue to benefit from consistent and well-planned progression routes.

Learner-, Employer-, and SME-Centric Focus

Rather than framing this reorganisation solely around administrative boundaries, we urge the review to prioritise the needs of learners, employers, and communities. A new local authority structure must work in genuine partnership with colleges and employers to tackle regional inequalities, boost skills, and promote economic prosperity.

This is particularly critical for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up the majority of Kent's employers. Our three institutions are collectively the largest providers of apprenticeships in the county, often working directly with SMEs to deliver tailored, sector-specific training. These businesses are vital to Kent's economy but are often less equipped to navigate fragmented or inconsistent support structures. They need coherence, simplicity, and aligned strategies across the county to access the skills pipeline and business support necessary to thrive. A

joined-up, county-wide approach to skills and economic development would provide the clarity and consistency SMEs rely on.

Role of KPMG and DfE in Assessing Impact

We strongly recommend that KPMG, as part of its review, collaborates with the Department for Education (DfE) to assess the travel-to-learn implications of each proposed council model. This assessment should be a key input into the recommendations made to Government, ensuring that educational access and outcomes — including for learners with High Needs — remain central to the decision-making process.

Urgency Around a Kent Strategic Authority

We also note the urgent need to progress with arrangements for any future strategic authority.

Without clarity on this soon, Kent risks being placed at a significant disadvantage when it comes to building a coherent, county-wide skills infrastructure — something critical in a county of this scale and diversity.

We were particularly disappointed that Kent and Medway were not included in the early wave of recently announced devolution deals, especially given the widespread support for a Kent Strategic Authority led by a directly elected Mayor. There was clear consensus across multiple sectors and political parties that Kent was ready to take this next step. We urge decision-makers to revisit this issue with urgency, to ensure Kent is not left behind in the national push toward devolved, placebased leadership on economic growth and skills.

Conclusion

We believe the success of any future local government structure in Kent will rest not just on administrative efficiency, but on its ability to support learners, empower employers —

especially SMEs — and drive inclusive growth through education and skills. This must explicitly include a coherent approach to High Needs provision and the continuation of county-wide collaboration initiatives such as Pathways for All.

With our collective scale and reach, and as the county's largest providers of apprenticeships — particularly for SMEs — we are ready to work with local and national partners to ensure the final proposals reflect the realities of Kent's economy and support long-term success for all its communities.

We would welcome further engagement as this process develops and look forward to working with all stakeholders to ensure the best outcomes for Kent's residents, learners, and employers.

The team received a written response on behalf of Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust, East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust, Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust and Medway NHS Foundation Trust.

Dear Ms Wakeham

Thank you for your letter dated 16 September inviting organisations to provide comments on the local government reorganisation proposals for Kent and Medway. As key partners in delivering integrated health and social care services, we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important process.

We are committed to working collaboratively with local authorities to ensure that any changes support the delivery of high-quality, accessible care for our shared communities.

The trusts welcome the council's approach to reorganisation, which aligns with the government's emphasis on stronger, more efficient local governance to address long-standing challenges in public services.

Our feedback is guided by the NHS's national priorities, including the shift from analogue to digital, treatment to prevention, and hospitals to community-based care as outlined in the recently published 10 Year Health Plan for England.

Below we outline our response to the reorganisation proposals:

1. Aligning local government boundaries as closely as possible with Health and Care Partnership (HCP) areas is pivotal to improving health and care integration.

HCP areas are largely 'natural communities' with a long history of community links and citizen flows in relation to shopping, work and community activities. They reflect hospital catchment populations, long-standing GP communities and established referral patterns, offering substantial advantages for partnerships which have been built up in the HCP footprints over the last three years and which provide good foundations to build on recognising the challenges ahead. This alignment reduces fragmentation in service delivery, enabling more seamless integration of health and social care. For instance, coterminous boundaries support joint care models across services which supports user-centred care, enhanced prevention and better rehabilitation pathways. In other areas of the country (e.g. Greater Manchester) this alignment has improved population health understanding, reduced inequalities and supported efficient resource allocation by matching governance to clinical flows and community needs.

We strongly recommend prioritising this in proposals to avoid partnership hurdles from mismatched boundaries, which can hinder collaborative decision making and increase administrative burdens.

Should any other boundary changes be considered in the future we would want health and local government to work closely in partnership.

2. Impact on Integrated Care Systems (ICSs): Building on boundary alignment, reorganisation can streamline ICS operations by fostering multi-agency partnerships, including with police and fire services and the voluntary sector. The use of impact assessments on ICS footprints would ensure continuity in patients discharges, hospital avoidance, and winter pressures, leveraging HCP-aligned structures for savings and efficiencies.

3. Service delivery, workforce and community focus: Aligned boundaries would support workforce retention through joint planning and amplify community voices via the Core20PLUS5 framework, promoting equitable preventive measures like neighbourhood health centres.

Transition forums and co-hosted community engagement would support the maximising of these benefits.

4. Local differences in population health: The importance of any reorganisation recognising and responding to local differences in population health across Kent and Medway and which affects how services are designed, delivered and resourced. In summary the health boundaries in Kent and Medway will not be changing and community and acute trusts strongly support LA reorganisation that priorities boundary alignment with HCP areas to deliver sustainable, person-centred services and advance NHS shifts in delivery.

As the Kent and Medway local government reorganisation progresses, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to a shared vision that strengthens integrated care, supports our workforce, and places community voices at the heart of service design. We remain committed to working in partnership to ensure continuity, equity, and innovation across the health and care system.

Yours sincerely

General

Response received from a resident.

Hi

As a resident in Folkestone and business owner across two locations, one being in Canterbury and the other in Rainham, Gillingham. I do have experience with many facets of each council area, including Waste collection, parking, road repair and reporting, business rates, planning portals and local building control across the areas. I can certainly see a benefit for larger areas being managed by group councils as proposed, including better consistency.

I have experienced varying opinions on building control across different officers and across different areas. I have experienced difficulty using some planning portals against others as they are not all the same. I have experienced easy communications with Canterbury council over business rates and parking, not so with Medway. I have also heard that Medway council have found it hard to cover costs. I have seen a reasonably good road repaired leading to a Folkestone councillors home, while other roads in Folkestone have been left crumbling away.

I think this proposal needs to be thought through very carefully as I am sure you are doing.

On one hand you get better consistency across a larger area, on the other hand you may add extra layers to a process that may cost more money and elongate the time to get things done.

From what I have seen, a lot has been done to get where we are now with each individual council and to change everything during a financial climate as such that we are in, could be very dangerous.

This work to set up a completely new regime will no doubt be extremely costly.

So if it ain't broke don't fix it.

Is Medway council broke (I think so!) fix it first!

The worst council out of the three that I have had to deal with is Medway and they are the ones that already cover the greatest area in a way that is now being proposed.

Get Medway profitable and slick first, then I would be up for a change but if the current Medway is anything to go by then I say no.

The team received an email from a resident.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment

- What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?*

Cost savings

Clear lines of democratic accountability

Precept equality

- What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?*

Replacement of DC Local Plans by coherent development strategies for East Kent

Effective sharing of human and physical resources including IT

A comprehensive Local Authority one stop service for residents

- What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why*

No inner authority joined up thinking or service provision

Lack of staff with specialist skills in DCs

Inability of DCs to negotiate effectively with the commercial world , central govt and govt agencies

Public confusion about roles and DC /KCC squabbling

- What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?*

Public perception of remote anonymous decision making

The team received an email from a Senior Pastor.

Dear Canterbury City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Kent and Medway.

We appreciate the aim of streamlining services and creating efficiencies; however, we have several concerns that we believe need to be carefully considered.

- 1. What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?*

Local knowledge and relationships: Smaller local councils often have an in-depth understanding of their communities, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups and local charities. This knowledge allows for tailored responses to local issues, which could be lost under larger unitary authorities.

Impact on voluntary and charitable organisations: Many small charities rely on close working relationships with their local councils for support, partnership, and referrals. A larger, more centralised structure risks creating distance and barriers to this support.

Accessibility and representation: Residents value councils that are approachable and understand their unique community context. It is vital to ensure that local voices are not drowned out in a bigger, more bureaucratic system.

2. What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations? Streamlining services may create opportunities for improved efficiency and potential financial savings.

If structured well, there could be opportunities for cross-district collaboration and sharing of best practices.

3. What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Duplication of services and confusion about which tier of local government is responsible for certain functions could be reduced.

Larger councils may be able to pool resources to tackle county-wide issues such as major infrastructure or environmental challenges.

4. What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation, and why?

Loss of community connection: A centralised structure risks weakening the strong local partnerships that currently exist between councils, community organisations, and charities.

This may reduce the effectiveness of local responses to issues such as poverty, housing needs, and food insecurity.

Reduced support for small charities: Without close links to decision-makers, small charities making a big impact locally may struggle to access support, recognition, and resources. This could lead to their decline, which in turn would negatively affect the communities they serve.

One-size-fits-all approach: Large unitary councils cannot be expected to have the same depth of understanding of local needs across all areas. This risks leaving certain communities overlooked or underserved.

Access and accountability: Residents may feel more disconnected from decision-making, with fewer opportunities to engage with local representatives who truly understand their area.

In summary, while the potential financial savings of LGR are acknowledged, we strongly urge that local knowledge, accessibility, and the vital role of small charities and community groups are not overlooked. The strength of local government lies in its ability to respond closely, quickly and personally to community needs—something we fear will be diluted by reorganisation.

The team received a written response from a family business.

Dear Councillor Maple,

I am responding to your kind invitation, written on 16 September 2025, to provide views on the proposed reorganisation of local government in Kent and Medway.

I really appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this process, informed by the English Devolution White Paper (December 2024), and ongoing proposals for unitary authorities. In my feedback, I have tried to follow the framework you have provided. If you would like clarification of, or an explanation to, any of my points, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will be happy to engage further.

I am not an expert in local government so prefer to keep my views at the 'guiding principle' level rather than diving into specifics. However, some of your framework does ask for more directive or detailed observations, which I have tried to provide.

The over-riding context of this feedback is that Medway Council has, over the years, built a reputation among the business community for being forward-looking, proactive and a good partner in economic life.

Key factors to take into account and why. Guiding principles of a reorganisation

- *Political neutrality: The reorganisation should avoid any political dimension, preserving Medway's functioning democracy where its political leadership reflects local views. For years Medway was Tory run, more recently the local people have put their trust in Labour. This reversal is a sign of a well-functioning local democracy, and it mustn't be re-engineered in anyway which risks the suspicion of gerrymandering. The behaviour of local authorities has a material influence on business investment decisions because of the nature and quality of provision such as education, certainty (and / or sanity) on planning and infrastructure, licensing decisions and many important factors businesses consider as they make commercial decisions. This is all underwritten by stability and solid governance which the suspicion of gerrymandering could undermine.*

- *Productivity and efficiency: Changes should target the delivery by local government of the same or more services with fewer resources. This, should also be framed in the context of a ruthless assessments of whether functions should indeed be delivered by local government anyway, or whether they ought to be handled by the private sector, or, if the private sector will not participate, whether they should be offered at all.*

While I understand 'efficiency' is consistent with government criteria for cost savings through unitary models, cost should not be the guiding light. Productivity is the key to our economic well-being.

- *Balanced economic makeup: New authorities should oversee demographically, commercially, and socially balanced areas to avoid skews which unbalance policy and services and could hinder equitable growth.*

- *Technology integration: In keeping with the theme of productivity improvements, the reorganisation should evaluate opportunities for technology to replace functions. However, we're all aware of the perils of technology which appears to be a panacea but turns into a costly white elephant. Such an evaluation should have clear guide rails setting hurdles regarding immediate availability and ease of implementation to avoid disruption and cost over-runs.*

Opportunities to be realised and aspirations

- *Organic economic growth: A new organisation should be structured in such a way as to have the authority and capability to incentivise growth through devolved powers over skills, transport, and infrastructure, as per the White Paper. The result should be a Medway which can offers a business environment incentivising investment in Medway, delivering wealth and jobs and taxes.*

- *Enhanced productivity: Delivering more with the same or fewer resources as the economy grows, clearly offers opportunities to reinvest in services critical to future economic growth such as education, infrastructure and housing.*

- *Deeper devolution: Following a reorganisation, there should be a drive towards evermore meaningful powers in investment, control over infrastructure, health integration and matters such as climate resilience to empower local decision-making.*

Problems that could be fixed and why:

- *Sclerosis: Our community has become too reliant on the public sector to provide services across too many areas of life. The public sector is not capably of answering this desire and needs to take a bold step back, to let the community to step up and help itself.*

Among many other areas of life, we now routinely expect the authorities to care for our relatives when they become elderly, drive our kids to school and feed them breakfast when they arrive. We have lost sight of the balance between providing a real safety net to protect the truly vulnerable and providing services to people so they don't have to struggle, even though most people can manage with some effort and perhaps some discomfort.

The public sector, self-evidently, cannot meet this need. And the private sector, self-evidently, cannot fund the public sector in its heartfelt attempts to do so. And, ironically, by trying to oversee the community, we are probably failing to truly protect those who really need help.

Restructurings and reorganisations offer important opportunities to fundamentally reassess to root purpose of service offerings and their delivery.

The LGR is a generational opportunity to reshape local public sector provision of services and, with it, how our community operates, grows and cares for itself.

Problems that could be created or not fixed, and why. Risks:

- Transitional disruptions: Even the prospect of a reorganisation can create significant productivity decreases across an organisation as it becomes inward looking and its employees stricken with uncertainty. This can be further exacerbated as implementation begins, and the organisation becomes distracted and adjusts. Both of these risks need to be carefully planned for and mitigated.*

- Loss of local representation: Larger local governments risk detachment from communities, which risks appearing increasingly bureaucratic.*

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- Added bureaucracy: The reorganisation must avoid the risk that in the service of being developed consensually, it doesn't achieve its aims and instead creates layers of bureaucracy. For this exercise to deliver in the medium term, there will be short term losers. The project must predict who they will be and be proactive in confronting and embracing this reality. It must avoid at all costs the instinct to compromise. If it does it will leave us worse off, potentially increasing costs without benefits—ensure transparency and performance metrics.*

- Unaddressed costs: If productivity and service delivery / viability assessments aren't ruthless, savings may not materialise; this may require independent audits and assessments from outside the public service sphere.*

I hope this all makes sense and is taken as a positive and useful contribution.

Thank you for considering my views; I wish you and your colleagues the very best as you work on this complex but crucial topic. I look forward to receiving updates.

Yours sincerely

The team received an email from a resident.

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

What are the benefits to the current local communities that this change will create? As someone who lived in Canterbury for many years but who now lives in Dover, I can see that the challenges and positives faced by the different areas are very diverse. I can't see how a resident in Canterbury will relate to a resident in Dover and vice versa. This also relates to Thanet residents. A thorough explanation of the benefits that are hoped to be achieved by this reorganisation needs to be explained clearly to the residents of each potential unitary council.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

I don't know what the opportunities are. In everything I have read so far, the only opportunities I can see benefit is a cost saving, I haven't seen anything that shows a benefit to individuals who live in the community.

What I would like to see is cleaner and more biodiverse roadsides that travel through the county, not stopping at one council boundary.

A better more streamlined approach to rubbish collection and recycling.

A fairer parking payment structure that is felt across the unitary area and is a reflection of who is using the parking and why. The parking charges in Canterbury are ridiculous and are punitive to those who want to enjoy the theatre or a night out.

A joined-up approach to attracting tourism to the area would be beneficial. The Dover area has much to offer the tourist, but it is hard to see anything positive about the area in local or national press/tourism sites. Use the connection of people visiting Canterbury to get them to come to Dover and see what is on offer here.

For Dover not to become a carpark during every school holiday as the Town Centre is used as a place for traffic to queue. Locals cannot traverse the area easily, or at all, during these times.

Better transport links to enable people to travel around the unitary areas. Have you tried to get a straightforward train from Deal to Canterbury?

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Better communication and a joined-up approach around housing and homelessness.

Better signposting for visitors and residents alike as to what is outside of their own postcode.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Locals not feeling listened to or able to know where to go to get help. As a resident of Dover, I know to call my local council offices if I need my rubbish collecting or to report an issue, if the council becomes bigger how do I know someone will be able to listen to me and help me?

The communication around this to the local residents is key. It needs to be clear and concise and not bound up in jargon or 'council talk'

Residents of a wealthier council might feel like they are losing out to a poorer neighbour, this would lead to discontentment.

The team received an email response from residents.

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Kent and Medway - Public Consultation Response

I am writing in response to the consultation regarding the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Kent and Medway. I am firmly opposed to this reorganisation and wish to express my serious concerns about the direction and implications of these proposals, particularly as a resident of Medway - an area that already functions effectively as a unitary authority.

Below are my views in response to the consultation questions:

1. What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

Local Identity and Autonomy: Medway has operated successfully as a unitary authority for almost 30 years. It has its own identity, governance structure, and local priorities that differ significantly from the rest of Kent. Any attempt to merge or alter this risks diluting local democratic control and undermining the distinctiveness of Medway.

Financial Impact on Residents: One of my primary concerns is that council tax in Medway is currently lower than in many areas of Kent. Merging with higher-tax areas could result in an unjustifiable increase in council tax for Medway residents. This would be deeply unfair, especially during a cost-of-living crisis.

Service Efficiency and Delivery: Medway already delivers all local services as a unitary council. This is efficient, familiar to residents, and locally accountable. There is no clear evidence that breaking or merging this structure would improve service delivery. On the contrary, it risks service disruption and increased bureaucracy during and after the transition.

Democratic Representation: Larger, merged authorities often mean fewer councillors representing more people, which reduces access to local decision-makers and diminishes community voice.

Cost and Disruption of Reorganisation: The scale and cost of reorganising multiple councils, systems, and staff structures are enormous. Public money should be spent improving services, not dismantling and rebuilding functioning governance models.

2. What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations? I do not believe significant opportunities will be realised through this reorganisation, especially for Medway.

If anything, Medway already enjoys the supposed "opportunities" being promised through LGR, such as streamlined services and local accountability. Our current system works.

My aspiration is to protect Medway's current governance, avoid the risks and costs associated with change, and focus on improving the quality and responsiveness of local services within the existing structure, not redesigning it from the ground up.

3. What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

For Medway, I do not see any problems that this reorganisation would fix.

Proponents of LGR may argue that a single-tier system is simpler or more consistent, but that already exists in Medway. Therefore, this reorganisation fixes nothing for us. Instead, it creates unnecessary upheaval.

If there are inefficiencies in the two-tier structure elsewhere in Kent, then perhaps that should be addressed within those areas. It should not require restructuring Medway, which is already operating under the model being promoted.

4. What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Reorganisation could create a range of new problems, including:

Loss of Local Control: Medway residents would have less influence over decisions affecting them if we are merged into a larger unitary body. Our priorities may be sidelined in favour of larger population centres elsewhere in Kent.

Higher Council Tax: As already mentioned, Medway residents could be forced to subsidise higherspending areas. This is not only unfair but regressive.

Disruption of Services: Changing governance structures risks major service disruption, from housing to education, waste collection to planning permissions. There's also the potential loss of local expertise among council staff.

Staff Redundancies and Costs: Reorganisation could lead to staff redundancies, costly contract renegotiations, IT and infrastructure overhauls, and the financial burden of transition. These costs are rarely recouped and can take years to settle.

No Guarantees of Better Outcomes: There is no compelling evidence that larger councils deliver better outcomes. Bigger doesn't necessarily mean better, it often means more distant, less personal, and harder to navigate.

In Summary

This proposed reorganisation is being driven by abstract ideas of efficiency and consistency, without proper regard for local identity, community needs, or the success of existing models like Medway's. Rather than "fixing" anything, it risks increasing costs, diluting accountability, and damaging well-functioning councils.

I urge the government and participating councils to exclude Medway from any structural changes, maintain its unitary status, and focus instead on supporting genuine improvements in service delivery where they are actually needed.

Sincerely,

The team received a LGR questionnaire.

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account & why?

LGR is a complicated, massive body of work is the timeframe long enough to undertake this process and maintain vital services.

How will council services be maintained whilst the reform is underway.

How much will the LGR cost and where will this money come from.

Will the perceived benefits be greater than the cost of this work.

That the cost of this work will result in a reduction of council services which will disadvantage our communities.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

Hopefully members of the public will have more autonomy with elected mayors and officials. This in time could help to repair confidence in local government. Although I think it should be noted this will not help restore confidence in politicians at a national level.

It is an opportunity to save costs through management savings, but consideration needs to be given to adequate resources levels.

I think it is an opportunity to adopt best practices across unitary areas.

I would like to work on a Major Project Team in the organisation although I believe that Dover District Council are the only LA that have one presently. I don't want to work along way from where I live and be expected to drive along for work.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation & why?

If one unitary is responsible for an area it is easier for members of the public to understand. This could result in greater accountability for each unitary as there is no one else to 'blame'. It could also reduce time spent between organisations about who is responsible for what and lack of accountability.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation & why?

The proposed unitary authorities will cover large geographical areas. In my opinion this will result in a lack of local knowledge and understanding. Unitary organisations still need to ensure that they are available at a local level. Otherwise, they are not accessible by local people and appear remote and not accountable. This could be contra to the aims of the LGR as I understand them.

Reorganisation into large areas and reduction of estate/offices also creates a potential problem for staffing resources. As members of staff may be unable or willing to drive long distances for work. This could result in a loss of staffing and valuable experience that could make it difficult to maintain vital council services.

The team received an email from a Councillor.

*Hi,
It's becoming clear that this is an attempt by central government to impose changes that will further limit the representation for the electorate.
It was first suggested many years ago, cost saving and economies of scale where sited, it's since be proved that this is very unlikely to be the result.
The imposition of a politically imposed Mayor will still further undermine the respect for local government.
Funding is and has been for many years the problem.
Rearranging deckchairs without a properly costed funding solution will in my view lead to more expense and a much less effective local government.
It's clear from conversations I have had, most councillors will not be putting themselves forward for election to this new body as the reduced number of councillors and the vastly increased responsibility will mean that most will need to become full time politicians.
This will limit the people coming foward and I suspect the new councillors will be mostly retired or independently wealthy people that do not represent the demographic of their ward.
Disadvantaging ethnic minorities and the less wealthy.
Back to the good old days?*

The team received a response from a Councillor.

*Hi Alan,
Thanks for this opportunity to respond.
I am not in favour of the reorganisation that is looming.
Like many others, I feel the representation for our local communities will be reduced significantly. Councillors in the unitary will be so widespread that they will have little or no knowledge of local issues, of local people and of local history of difficult areas and situations.
Councillors will have to be full time, and need a 'wage' to allow them to spend the time needed to carry out their duties, or, have to be retired or independently wealthy and do not need to go to work to earn a living.
My personal worry is what will happen to the Civic team.
The Sheriff has a long history in Canterbury. King Edward IV's charter in 1461 gave Canterbury the status of a County separate from Kent forever. Richard Carpenter became the first Sheriff that year, collected taxes and undertook some police functions. He had powers of arrest and presided over public executions.
It was a local government reorganisation in 1974 that Canterbury lost it's County Borough status, and many of the Country's Sheriffs were abolished. Luckily for us Canterbury's Sheriff remained. Today it involves representing the City at functions, as well as other Civic duties.
Shortly after, the Queen granted us a Lord Mayor.
So how will the City's Sheriff and Lord Mayor be elected, who by, and who will they be responsible to?
They should remain and be relevent to the City, and to the District's residents.
Who will organise their diaries?*

Would it be the vast new Unitary? Could they be independent of the Council and be run by the Shrievalty association and the Mayoralty?

The 'National Association of City and Town Sheriff's of England and Wales' (NACTSEW) is trying hard to help the 15 Towns and Cities in England and Wales to maintain their Sheriffs, and we have a meeting in Lichfield the last weekend in September. The contact there is Andy Swinburne and Xena Dion (I can provide email addresses if required). I understand they have already written to you, but unfortunately did not receive a response from Canterbury.

It will be Canterbury's turn to host the NACTSEW AGM weekend in 2030, and Canterbury's Shrievalty Association is saving hard to help fund this. All 15 Sheriffs are invited to the weekend and it is a spectacle to behold. A parade of the Country's Sheriffs in their robes parading through the City to the Cathedral an amazing sight.

Sorry this is a long reply, but along with others, this is something we are worried about and isa huge chunk of Canterbury's history that could be under threat.

Thank you,

The team received an email from a Ward Councillor.

Hello,

Thank you for the letter recieved on Wednesday.

Below are my responses to each question with my initial thoughts.

I have thought about through the framework of my own priorities, so there is more I could say on this, but this is my response for now. I am very concerned about using strategic planning and transport links on a wider scale to connect people to more places of value, build sustainable homes and vital infrastructure and bolster local growth. It is also important to me that we maintain local representation and community cohesion.

My answers:

Key factors:

Strategic planning

- Essential for driving growth and improving living standards.*
- We are in the midst of a housing crisis with crumbling infrastructure.*
- So, we have to get this right.*
- Ensuring that planning can be conducted effectively on a larger scale.*
- Ensuring that all areas in the unitary are good strategic fits in planning terms.*
- E.g. that all areas have suitable provision of brownfield land to develop that will meet the housing needs of the entire area in the unitary boundary.*

Transport links

- Essential for so many people – workers, students, pensioners, etc.*
- We need to ensure bus routes between places remain strategically viable.*
- Where are the hotspots? Surely, Canterbury due to the universities, hospital, city centre*

and WHS. How can we ensure direct links to surrounding places both within and outside the unitary boundary?

- Are there opportunities to amend bus routes so that not all buses go through Canterbury, so if someone is travelling from Folkestone to Margate, for example, there is a direct bus route?*

- Strategic transport links connecting economic hotspots, areas of amenity and public services could be a gamechanger for local growth.

Sense of place and community cohesion

- We have to ensure local stays local.
- People love their homes and are embedded in their communities; they don't want to share space and representation with people they have no local ties or connection with. There are no similarities between Ashford and Broadstairs, for example.
- Would it be right for people in Dover to be led by someone from Romney Marsh, for example? It's not great as it is with us in Canterbury being led by a councillor from Maidstone; this is something we could fix.
- What about site visits? Would councillors on the planning committee in Dover be expected to visit proposal sites in Whitstable and then debate/vote on them? What do they know about it? They have no local knowledge. And wouldn't it be stressful travelling that far for the site visit?
- The smaller and closer to local communities the unitary's can be, the better.

Opportunities and aspirations:

We have an opportunity to strategically link planning projects, so that sustainable, brownfield land is unlocked to meet the housing needs of a larger population of people. Also to use Section 106 money from developments to fund vital infrastructure projects across a wider area.

We have an opportunity to link economic hotspots, public services and areas of amenity with strategic transport connections across a wider area. Unlocking potential for more direct bus routes that will open up places like the universities in Canterbury, Eurotunnel in Folkestone, port in Dover, seafront in Margate, etc. to more people and in doing so create opportunities and drive growth.

Problems fixed:

We can unlock more housing for more people.

We can break down the barriers to new vital infrastructure.

We can bolster local economic development.

We can connect more people to places of value.

Resources and opportunities can be spread more equally.

Problems created:

Lost sense of community.

The local becomes not local anymore.

The logistics become harder to facilitate (e.g. commuting).

Elected representatives will lack local knowledge.

Best Regards,

The team received an email from Canterbury Foodbank.

Dear Cllr Baldock

Councils in Kent and Medway – change is coming

Thank you for your letter of 16 September about local government reorganisation. On behalf of Canterbury Food Bank I would like to express our concern about the proposed changes. If the priorities are to be administrative efficiency, identity and historical links, as they are at present, it is difficult for the reform to avoid a grouping that separates the poorer eastern parts of Kent from the richer western parts. This will exacerbate inequality and make it harder address poverty.

It is absolutely essential that government ensures that adequate resources are made available for the reforms and that these are targeted on the areas of highest social need. One vehicle for such a change might be a strong well-funded Regional Authority able to

intervene and to establish a positive programme for economic growth across the new unitaries.

I have grouped our more detailed comments under the headings in your letter.

- What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?*

Current inequalities between different areas in Kent in resources and in social need are key. These affect both demand for many local government services and the capacity for councils to raise resources. They are also a major factor in the potential of an area to develop high-quality jobs.

- What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?*

We aspire to live in a more equal and caring Unitary within a more equal and caring country. This requires a strong well-funded regional agency backed up by central government legislation to ensure that inequalities between and within unitaries are addressed and that appropriate resources are directed to the poorest Unitaries. Current plans will not achieve this. There is a strong risk that inequalities between local government areas will be exacerbated.

At the same time, Unitary reorganisation offers opportunities to co-ordinate local government services, particularly across housing, homelessness and social care and also between local government housing and NHS provision.

- What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?*

Inequality between different parts of Kent could be addressed but only if this is made a policy priority and if the resources are available to do so.

- What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?*

There is substantial variation between different areas in Kent in terms of resources and social need, and in terms of the potential to create high value-added productive employment. There is a strong risk that unitary reorganisation will divide richer and poorer areas, so that the potential to cross-subsidise between areas of high social need (located mainly in the existing Thanet, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe and Swale districts) and richer areas (Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells) is lost.

At the same time opportunities to create high value-added employment in the poorer areas, whose economies currently rest on low-paid services (tourism, hospitality, social care) and primary sector agriculture will not exist. Generating real growth requires the strategic injection of substantial resources. Unitaries will be in a weaker position than KCC to attract and deploy such funds.

Yours sincerely,

A written response was received from CT5 People's Forum.

*Local Government Reorganisation- response to Canterbury City Council (CCC)
Consultation from CT5 People's Forum*

1. Key factors to be taken into account

We feel that the key factors will include

- Ensuring the new arrangements are clear and transparent for the public, that people know who is responsible for which services, how they can influence how services are delivered, and how and to whom they can complain if things go wrong.*
- There is clear accountability and democratic representation.*
- There is strategic coherence at county level, so that functions such as transport and economic development can be managed over a large population area; but that also decisions on most functions are taken at the*

most local level possible.

- There is cost efficiency and minimal duplication.

2. Opportunities and aspirations

The current two-tier system of local government is confusing for the public. There is lack of accountability, and the arrangements give rise to duplication and consequently additional cost. As an example, it is currently unclear who is responsible for local issues such as roads, pavements and footpaths, and traffic. The existing Kent County Council (KCC) is particularly remote, and its Councillors not able to be held to account properly at the local level.

There is a real opportunity to make local government more local and more relevant to local people, but this can only be achieved if the establishment of new Unitary Authorities is accompanied by new Town and Parish Councils established on an equitable basis, covering the whole population.

3. Problems to be fixed and why

As stated above, existing problems of confusion, lack of accountability and remoteness can be fixed, but only if the right arrangements are put in place – effective Unitary Authorities accompanied by Town and Parish councils to run services which should be truly local.

4. What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why

There is a significant risk that the new Unitary Authorities will be too remote from the public, as is the existing KCC, and therefore really difficult for citizens to influence. The reduction in the number of councillors risks creating a democratic deficit, hence the need for town and parish councils. The existing Parish arrangements need rationalising, many are too small to have efficiency and impact.

There is a feeling in some areas, including within central government, that Area Committees may avoid the risk of the UAs becoming too remote from the local population. As set out, we do not feel that Area Committees will be able to bridge the democratic deficit, as they will have little power or influence, and so are more likely to become simply talking shops, and no substitute for properly elected Town and Parish Councils.

There is also risk that the reorganisation could lead to the loss of assets which local people hold dear, such as public buildings and community centres, libraries and cultural centres, and open spaces. These assets need to be protected, and where appropriate passed on to local communities, either through community ownership, community organisations and Trusts, or through Town and Parish Councils.

A further issue which will not be fixed by reorganisation alone is the level of funding and debt for local government across East Kent. We must make sure to avoid existing Councils passing on deficits to successor organisations; and also that the new UAs do not pass on debt and liabilities to Town and Parish Councils.

We also do not feel that the proposal from the existing leadership of Kent County Council for a Kent wide UA has merit, as it will not solve the problems of democratic deficit and remoteness from local communities; rather, it will make them even worse than under the current arrangements.

To mitigate these problems and in particular the risks CCC should hold a borough-wide Community Governance Review prior to the new arrangements being established; as leaving them to be fixed by the successor authorities will make them unlikely to happen.

The team received an email from a Councillor.

Hello,

Please find my responses to the letter you sent recently.

1/What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

a/ financial stability and resilience of the new unitary – at the moment an E Kent unitary will concentrate the poorest Tier 2 authorities with the least Council Tax income per household and with the highest adult and children's social services costs and the highest SEND transport demand per household together. How will the new unitary be financially sustainable?

b/ avoiding increases in Council Tax - it's unclear that the new unitary will deliver the cost savings that have been suggested, even within seven or eight years. Residents have been equally clear that they do not want to see higher costs. Obviously, we need to see the KPMG cost/benefit analysis, but this will be a major negative of the reorganisation if it cannot deliver savings for everyone with better services.

c/ how is local democracy maintained and protected? – without full parishing in Canterbury district, it remains concerning that the towns, city and unparished areas will have less representation than any other part of East Kent. I am not convinced, from what I have heard so far about community assemblies, that these are a good alternative to parish or town councils. The main objection to full parishing seems to be over the charging of a precept. In terms of ensuring residents are properly represented when Tier 2 authorities are abolished, we shouldn't see the charging of a precept as an insurmountable obstacle.

d/ When are we getting devolution? – a really key plank of local government reorganisation is devolution and having an elected mayor for Kent in charge of strategic decisions such as economic growth, transport, infrastructure, law & order, and public policy. This needs delivering very quickly after May 2027. Without this final plank of LGR, it will be very difficult for these changes to work as originally proposed.

e/ Ensuring the retention of key staff to ensure resilience

2/ What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

That a very efficient system of local government is created that provides good services at lower costs. A modern system of supplying statutory services across former Tier 1 and Tier 2 authorities with a greater degree of self service and automation. Using AI, where applicable, to manage and run services. Enabling elected members to focus on policy development rather than primarily reporting

system failures (such as faulty pavements or missed bin collections) on behalf of residents. Therefore being able to reduce the numbers of councillors.

Freeing up local government with greater autonomy from Westminster to make better decisions on how they supply services to residents.

Devolution and the creation of a Kent-wide mayor will have better oversight across the county and will enable a better focus on economic development and job creation across the unitary areas. At the same time at the Tier 4 level, residents should have much better accountability and involvement in very local decisions.

3/ What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why

The confusion caused by not knowing which tier of local government is responsible for which statutory duty. Who clears weeds on the pavement? Who fixes bus shelters? The annoyance caused by issues falling between the two authorities and no-one taking responsibility for sorting the issue out.

Simpler reporting structures that could be introduced rather than using two systems as we have currently. I am sure we all have examples of the confusion caused by not

knowing which authority is responsible for which statutory duty. The ability to remove the obfuscation caused by having too many layers of local government.

4/ What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Not meeting expectations - that people think they will be getting better local services and better democratic representation at a lower council tax, but their expectations are not met or they believe they were promised something better that failed to be delivered. I think overselling the benefits of LGR to people is a big problem, without ever having a realistic chance of meeting people's expectations.

Democratic deficit – a potential problem is the creation of a bigger democratic deficit as accountability is reduced dramatically and that people lose their access to the decision makers that they have now.

Loss of expertise and poor management systems - that it will take too long for the unitary to bed in and short cuts will be taken to address delays in service delivery rather than ensuring the best service delivery systems are implemented. For instance, that an East Kent Housing disaster is recreated.

Staffing – that the best and most able staff are lost in the process as they become disenchanted by yet more reorganisation and disruption. That the best and most experienced councillors are also lost because anyone in full employment will struggle to make day-time council meetings.

Poor finances - the risk is that reorganisation will not improve delivery of key services because the underlying problems are fundamental and unsolvable merely through local government reorganisation but need much greater reform of services and greater funding by government itself.

Delaying devolution - That full devolution is delivered late and the benefits of having an elected mayor in Kent working with the unitary councils is delayed or missed.

Failing to address inequalities and localism - that local government reorganisation does not address inequalities or deliver bottom up decision making, but instead it is fundamentally a ruse for government in Westminster to have greater control over what should be local decisions.

That resources that people hold dear, such as the heritage in Canterbury or the coastal strip from Reculver to Seasalter, are not cherished in the same way in the unitary as they are in the district council. That decisions are made to dispose of assets that will be disruptive to communities or that investment in key buildings and facilities is not maintained as it is now.

That we lose the city status of Canterbury and with that the civic roles of Lord Mayor and Sheriff.

Kind regards,

The team received an email from a Councillor.

Local Government Reorganisation

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

· The impact of LGR on accessibility of councillors to the electorate. With district level structures removed, it leaves some unparished areas for example vulnerable to feeling removed from those who run their local services and are at risk of their voices not being heard on local issues.

· The division of Kent into unitary authorities should recognise affinity with areas with similar issues whilst considering the financial impact of areas of East Kent having greater deprivation.

· The public is still somewhat unsure about how reorganisation will work and what benefit it will bring them- they expect high quality services and for any changes to improve efficiency and not burden residents with any additional costs.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

· Improvements in efficiency have the potential to reduce costs for the authority and the taxpayer.

· Greater accountability and improved decision making – local authorities know their residents' needs better than more removed authorities or national Government.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

· Bringing service delivery together should remove confusion for residents about which authority looks after which service and for the councils it has the potential to improve how elements work together – for example district authorities delivering waste collection services and county authority running the recycling centres to name just one.

· Time wasted by things being bounced between authorities should be removed from the outset.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

· There could be decreased accessibility of local councillors to their electorate if they are covering a wider area with greater responsibilities.

· If unitary authorities move to daytime meetings, it could mean the diversity of councillors is much reduced and we could lose a lot of expertise and passion for local services from those who work full time or who have other responsibilities.

· Assets looked after by district councils may be lost. Parish councils may need support to take on and look after important community assets.

· Structural changes will not solve financial challenges and some authorities could continue to struggle to address them.

· Canterbury district is steeped in history and tradition with the future of civic roles uncertain under unitary authorities.

The team received a response from Spring Lane Neighbourhood Centre.

Hi

I apologise for getting back past the deadline, but I was waiting on some feedback. I have

received the following:

Spring Lane Neighbourhood Centre youth group ages 11-18 years.

Q1.

Save money by getting rid of bosses that aren't needed.

More people that we can talk to face to face instead of doing everything online.

More people to talk to young people about what they need.

Have a young persons contact in the Council.

Q2.

Save money

Better communication if there is more people on the ground.

More money for young people and for Neighbourhood Centre.

Give staff more money so they stay in the job.

Q3.

Not going to change.

Would it change?

Will there be job losses and will we lose the centre?

*Will we have money for young people?
Will there be more services for young people?
Spring Lane Veterans Hub*

Q1.

Raise awareness of Armed Forces Veterans.

Publish more about what the Armed Forces Covenant is and the achievements of the Veterans Hub.

Q2.

Save money to be spent on services that are needed e.g. waste, homelessness, community services.

Give staff the credit they deserve for their work.

Spend more time promoting Armed Forces Veterans.

Q3.

Armed Forces Veterans will get forgotten about more.

Will it change?

Will there be job losses?

Will we still have the Neighbourhood Centre as a hub?

Dover

The team received responses from a member of staff at Dover District Council.

LGR Questionnaire

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account & why?

LGR is a complicated, massive body of work is the timeframe long enough to undertake this process and maintain vital services.

How will council services be maintained whilst the reform is underway.

How much will the LGR cost and where will this money come from.

Will the perceived benefits be greater than the cost of this work.

That the cost of this work will result in a reduction of council services which will disadvantage our communities.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

Hopefully members of the public will have more autonomy with elected mayors and officials. This in time could help to repair confidence in local government. Although I think it should be noted this will not help restore confidence in politicians at a national level.

It is an opportunity to save costs through management savings, but consideration needs to be given to adequate resources levels.

I think it is an opportunity to adopt best practices across unitary areas.

I would like to work on a Major Project Team in the organisation although I believe that Dover District Council are the only LA that have one presently. I don't want to work along way from where I live and be expected to drive along for work.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation & why?

If one unitary is responsible for an area it is easier for members of the public to understand. This could result in greater accountability for each unitary as there is no one else to 'blame'. It could also reduce time spent between organisations about who is responsible for what and lack of accountability.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation & why?

The proposed unitary authorities will cover large geographical areas. In my opinion this will result in a lack of local knowledge and understanding. Unitary organisations still need to ensure that they are available at a local level. Otherwise, they are not accessible by local people and appear remote and not accountable. This could be contra to the aims of the LGR as I understand them.

Reorganisation into large areas and reduction of estate/offices also creates a potential problem for staffing resources. As members of staff may be unable or willing to drive long distances for work. This could result in a loss of staffing and valuable experience that could make it difficult to maintain vital council services.

The team received an email from Dover District Council officer.

The questions are:

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

Not all services can be run from a central point. Property is local knowledge based therefore it would be very difficult for someone from one area to take over another area. Under RICS rules and regulations Chartered Surveyors should practice in an area known to them where they have knowledge of the subject, so in theory until someone knows an area they could be going against the rules of their professional body. There is not a one size fits all for all the services within the Council. I am sure property is not the only subject where local knowledge to ensure compliance with the Local Government Act is necessary. To show best value you will need to know the area etc.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations? Not sure for property as In my opinion local knowledge is key. Aspiration to keep a managed estate to keep income coming in to support other services.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why? From a property point inaccurate valuations losing income and capital receipts. Lack of local knowledge could lead to in correct advice being given. Having too large an area could mean the estate cannot be fully supervised and land could be lost by statutory rights.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why? Making an area too big will make it difficult to manage for travel times and lack of knowledge of the local areas and values. Mistakes will be made on values that could lead to loss of income or legal issues. This will not fix the lack of staff to deal with the estate properly it will compound the problem by having travel distances increased etc.

A response was received from Worth Parish Council.

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals. As a Parish Council, we wish to ensure that the interests of our residents and community are fully considered in any changes.

1. Key factors to be taken into account

Local representation and accountability – any new unitary model must ensure that smaller communities like Worth retain a clear democratic voice, and that decisionmaking does not become too remote.

Service delivery at the local level – Residents are most concerned with the reliability and quality of everyday services such as waste collection, planning, housing, highways maintenance, and community safety.

Cost-effectiveness and efficiency – While efficiency is a government aim, savings should not come at the expense of service quality or local access.

Clear communication with residents – One of the biggest frustrations for residents is confusion about responsibilities. Any new system must improve clarity rather than complicate it.

2. Opportunities

Joined-up services – A single organisation could improve coordination across housing, planning, transport, and social services.

Simplified system – Residents could benefit from a clearer, more direct point of contact for all council services.

Potential to strengthen parishes – LGR could be an opportunity to devolve more powers and resources to parish councils, enabling decisions to be made even closer to communities.

3. Problems that could be fixed by reorganisation

Duplication of effort – Some areas currently see overlap between district and county functions.

Public confusion – A unitary model could reduce uncertainty about which council handles which service.

4. Problems that could be created or remain

Loss of local identity and voice – Larger unitary councils risk centralising decisions and leaving smaller communities overlooked.

Access to services – If local offices and service points are closed, rural and smaller communities could find it harder to access support.

Parish role under threat – If parishes are not properly recognised, there is a risk that the lowest tier of local government becomes marginalised.

Conclusion

Worth Parish Council believes that while LGR may bring opportunities for simplification and efficiency, it must not be at the expense of local democracy or community identity.

Any new model should ensure that Parish Councils are supported and empowered, not sidelined. We therefore urge that the role of parishes be considered central to any reorganisation proposals.

The team received an email from a Councillor.

My responses are:

I believe the proposed changes carry significant risks and could do real harm to the quality of local services, democratic accountability, and the health of our communities.

Below are my responses to the four questions you have asked:

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

Democratic Accountability: The primary concern must be preserving local representation.

Abolishing District/Borough Councils would drastically reduce the number of Councillors, meaning each Councillor would represent thousands more residents. This risks creating a democratic deficit, where local voices struggle to be heard.

Continuity of Services: Social care, waste collection, planning, and housing services are essential for residents and businesses. The risk of disruption during a major reorganisation must be treated as a critical factor

Financial Prudence: Reorganisation has a very high upfront cost. Experience from Dorset and Buckinghamshire shows transition costs can run into tens of millions of pounds, and promised savings take many years to materialise, if at all.

Community Identity: Kent is large and diverse. Rural, coastal, and urban areas have very different priorities. Any solution must protect the ability of local councils to respond to local needs.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations? While I understand the government hopes for efficiency and simplicity, these aspirations could be realised without dismantling local councils. Opportunities that could be pursued instead include:

Expanding shared services: District councils already share waste collection, planning, and housing services in many areas. This model could deliver savings without losing local decision making.

Strengthening Town and Parish Councils: Giving more power and funding to the most local level of government would bring decision-making even closer to residents.

Modernising Kent County Council: Streamlining KCC functions and improving collaboration with Districts could achieve efficiencies while avoiding the huge risks of structural upheaval.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

The problems often cited — “confusing structures” and “duplication” — can be solved without abolishing local councils:

Confusion for residents: Better communication and joined-up service portals can solve this without forcing a reorganisation.

Cost pressures: These are a result of sustained underfunding of local government, not inefficiency. Structural change is unlikely to solve this and could make it worse in the short term.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Reorganisation could create more problems than it solves:

Service disruption: The sheer complexity of merging 14 councils’ IT systems, staff structures, and budgets will inevitably disrupt services. Vulnerable residents who rely on social care, housing support, or safeguarding cannot afford this uncertainty.

Loss of local expertise: Staff redundancies and restructuring will drive away experienced officers, leaving gaps in knowledge and weakening service quality.

Higher long-term costs: Harmonising staff pay and terms usually increases costs, offsetting projected “efficiency savings.”

Weaker democracy: Larger Unitaries will have fewer councillors and more remote decision making, leaving rural and coastal communities feeling ignored.

Community disengagement: Abolishing local councils risks eroding civic pride and participation.

Residents need to feel connected to the decisions affecting them.

In conclusion, the proposed abolition of District/Borough Councils and creation of large Unitary Authorities would be the biggest change to Kent’s local government in nearly 50 years. It carries serious risks of service disruption, democratic deficit, financial overspend, and a loss of local identity.

I urge you to lobby the Government to consider alternative reforms such as shared services, strengthened Town/Parish Councils, and targeted streamlining of KCC. These

approaches could deliver efficiency and clarity without sacrificing local democracy and community responsiveness.

The team received an email from Woodnesborough Parish Council.

Dear sir

The Woodnesborough Parish Council have reviewed and discussed the questions posed and below is our response.

The key factors that we believe should be taken into account are that there would be a loss of local representation in things such as planning should the authority be based too far away.

We are a very small council but still wish to be involved in working for our community with support from the unitary authority.

The problems fixed by having unitary authorities would be perhaps a better financial position and eventual cost savings.

Problems created by LGR would be less accountability to small councils like ours and thus to the community, a loss of local representation and transparency. We need some sort of contact on a close enough level for the unitary authority representative to have a working knowledge of the area and the problems associated with it. Also we are concerned that some councils are being asked to pay for publicly owned assets in order to take them into public ownership instead of the title being simply transferred.

This feels like just an excuse to make money at district level.

Thank you for your attention

Yours

The team received an email from an individual officer from Dover District Council.

In response to the communication requesting answers to 4 questions:

1. What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

a. No nepotism for organisations keeping staff in post rather than looking across organisations for talent.

b. Service levels being maintained or improved is key.

c. Identifying best practice for a larger organisation and using it across the organisation. Event spreading this across neighbouring unitaries.

2. What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

a. Greater use of talent for officers in organisations who can now be looked to move across a larger organisation.

b. Reduction in the use of agency staff to cover, larger organisation team to fill holes.

3. What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

a. Less elected members

b. Streamlined management

c. Mirrored organisation teams and wage levels.

4. What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

a. Older experienced staff looking to leave and obviously an escape of knowledge from organisations.

b. Any move to centralise teams could move staff away from their communities.

Regards,

A written response was received from Sholden Parish Council.

Dear Colleagues,

Local Government Reorganisation: Request for input from the Leader of Dover District Council

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals. As a Parish Council, we wish to ensure that the interests of our residents and community are fully considered in any changes.

1. Key factors to be taken into account

Local representation and accountability – any new unitary model must ensure that smaller communities like Sholden retain a clear democratic voice, and that decision-making does not become too remote.

Service delivery at the local level – Residents are most concerned with the reliability and quality of everyday services such as waste collection, planning, housing, highways maintenance, and community safety.

Cost-effectiveness and efficiency – While efficiency is a government aim, savings should not come at the expense of service quality or local access.

Clear communication with residents – One of the biggest frustrations for residents is confusion about responsibilities. Any new system must improve clarity rather than complicate it.

2. Opportunities

Joined-up services – A single organisation could improve coordination across housing, planning, transport, and social services.

Simplified system – Residents could benefit from a clearer, more direct point of contact for all council services.

Potential to strengthen parishes – LGR could be an opportunity to devolve more powers and resources to parish councils, enabling decisions to be made even closer to communities.

3. Problems that could be fixed by reorganisation

Duplication of effort – Some areas currently see overlap between district and county functions.

Public confusion – A unitary model could reduce uncertainty about which council handles which service.

4. Problems that could be created or remain

Loss of local identity and voice – Larger unitary councils risk centralising decisions and leaving smaller communities overlooked.

Access to services – If local offices and service points are closed, rural and smaller communities could find it harder to access support.

Parish role under threat – If parishes are not properly recognised, there is a risk that the lowest tier of local government becomes marginalised.

Conclusion

5. Sholden Parish Council believes that while LGR may bring opportunities for simplification and efficiency, it must not be at the expense of local democracy or community identity. Any new model should ensure that Parish Councils are supported and empowered, not sidelined. We therefore urge that the role of parishes be considered central to any reorganisation proposals.

Yours Sincerely

The team received an email from Deal Town Council.

Dear Consultation Team

Further to the email we received from the Leader of Dover District Council which asked that we answer the following questions and send them directly to you by 9am on Monday 6 October.

Please see below the response from Deal Town Council.

1 What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

1. Democratic Accountability: The primary concern must be preserving local representation.

Abolishing District/Borough Councils would drastically reduce the number of Councillors, meaning each Councillor would represent thousands more residents. This risks creating a democratic deficit, where local voices struggle to be heard. This could be avoided to some extent if parish and town councils were properly empowered and funded.

2. Continuity of Services: Social care, waste collection, planning, and housing services are essential for residents and businesses. The risk of disruption during a major reorganisation must be treated as a critical factor

3. Financial Prudence: Reorganisation has a very high upfront cost. Experience from Dorset and Buckinghamshire shows transition costs can run into tens of millions of pounds, and promised savings take many years to materialise, if at all.

4. Community Identity: Kent is large and diverse. Rural, coastal, and urban areas have very different priorities. Any solution must protect the ability of local councils to respond to local needs.

5. Significant capacity building will be required for parishes to extend their local services. Some councils will need more paid staff with a wider range of skills.

6. Parish and Town Councils may need to form clusters for procurement purposes.

2 What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

1. Strengthening Town and Parish Council's: Giving more power and funding to the most local level of government would bring decision-making even closer to residents.

2. The Town and Parish Councils could take on some very local services which residents are concerned are getting little attention at present.

3. Councils should be given the opportunity to take on key assets. This can be a negative as well as a positive as many more volunteer hours may be needed to make these cost effective. Many council owned assets are money pits.

4. Some local services will be dropped as neither the unitaries or the parishes will want them, to the detriment of our communities.

5. The need to review and update legislation relating to Town and Parish Councils.

3 What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

1. Confusion for residents: Better communication and joined-up service portals can solve this without forcing a reorganisation.

2. Cost pressures: These are a result of sustained underfunding of local government, not inefficiency. Structural change is unlikely to solve this and could make it worse in the short term.

3. Local people will feel they have more power in deciding very local priorities.

4. People will be clearer about who does what and where they can complain to.

5. Local residents may be more willing to participate in consultations such as local Plan developments if they feel more control lies in their hands.

4 What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

1. Service disruption: The sheer complexity of merging 14 councils' IT systems, staff

structures, and budgets will inevitably disrupt services. Vulnerable residents who rely on social care, housing support, or safeguarding cannot afford this uncertainty.

2. Loss of local expertise: Staff redundancies and restructuring will drive away experienced officers, leaving gaps in knowledge and weakening service quality.

3. Higher long-term costs: Harmonising staff pay, and terms usually increases costs, offsetting projected "efficiency savings."

4. Weaker democracy: Larger unitaries will have fewer councillors and more remote decision-making, leaving rural and coastal communities feeling ignored. A single unitary for Kent would lack democratic legitimacy.

5. Community disengagement: Abolishing local councils risks eroding civic pride and participation. Residents need to feel connected to the decisions affecting them.

6. Taxes will still need to be raised – there are no savings to be made when town or parish councils take on more services.

7. The economies of scale the unitaries may create will be negated at the lower level if and when parishes take on more

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes

The team received an email from Temple Ewell Parish Council.

Good afternoon

Our Parish Council discussed the content of an email from the leader of Dover District Council at our meeting earlier this week. We have the following responses:

What are the key factors that should be taken into account and why?

Finance: the financial positions of all District Councils across the whole of KCC (plus Medway) should be merged with the funding re-allocated equally to the new Unitary Authorities. This will ensure an equal and fair start for all the authorities.

Boundaries: The new Unitary Authorities should have boundaries that make geographical sense as opposed to concentrating entirely upon the population numbers. This may mean amending current boundaries (possibly splitting some existing District Council boundaries). Such amendments will ensure geographical logic in the make up of the new authorities.

What opportunities could be realised by re-organisation and what are our aspirations?

Geography: restoring sensibility by allocating towns and particularly villages to their nearest town/city and relevant Unitary Authority (as an example, Capel le Ferne is on the edge of Folkestone, yet is within the Dover District Council boundary).

Finance & Funding allocation: These should be equally divided between the new Unitary Authorities; currently there seems to have been a significant bias towards the districts in the West of Kent.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Finance & Funding - issues as mentioned above could be fixed by equal allocation of funding to the Unitary Authorities at the outset. The Eastern part of Kent seems to have suffered for many years compared to West Kent.

Merging a number of District Councils into a new Unitary Authority should make cost savings in the longer term through reduced duplicated job positions.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation & why?

Initial difficulties could be created from a lack of understanding of new areas that staff are unfamiliar with.

Localised regulations may differ within the councils allocated to new authorities and there will be a need to combine rules & regulations to standardise within the new authority.

Kind Regards

Medway

The team received an email from Cuxton Parish Council.

Good Afternoon,

Please see Cuxton Parish Council comments on proposed LGR...

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

The size of the unitary authorities is not as important as the ability to deliver quality services, online, face-to-face and via appropriate and helpful resident representatives.

Residents do not want to be paying off the debts of other borough councils, or those incurred from instigating LGR. Will figures be released on this?

If Council tax rates increases, services should improve or maintain - not worsen.

Waste removal schedules are very important to residents.

Council boundaries should be maintained, when they are amalgamated into larger entities to ensure that the knowledge / plans etc that have been established between local areas / villages and their LA's, are transferred to the new unitaries.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

Possible long term cost savings

Ability to rethink/ rehire Ward Councillor equivalents with measurable performance management structures and actual accountability.

More cohesion between areas.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Instances that require cooperation between two or more councils will be fewer, allowing for faster progress and fewer mistakes.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

In spite of the intention, the larger authorities could easily become be less accountable to local residents unless there are proper plans for local engagement. If this is to include increasing the responsibilities of parish councils, this must also include a package of extra resources, funding and training.

If existing boundaries are moved, inequity will be created for the areas that are reallocated into a new unitary, that has no experience with them, their needs or issues.

Specifically, the proposal for dividing Medway, Gravesham and Dartford down the M2, will place the most southern parts of those areas, including Cuxton and Halling, in the minority and therefore at a complete disadvantage.

The Lower Thames crossing funding, communication, cooperation and project work etc would now all be focussed on one authority, the 'North', according Medway's preferred proposal, yet the Cuxton A228 is one of the most negatively affected roads in or around the project area -

Cuxton & Halling must remain with the rest of Medway, in the North, so that our interests are represented in those critical discussions.

Clearly, Cuxton Parish Council would like to remain with the rest to Medway, in new groupings to ensure the most effective continuity of service.

With kind regards,

The team received a written response from Frindsbury Extra Parish Council on their behalf.

Dear Vince Maple and Medway Council

Re: Consultation on Proposed Local Government Reorganisation

Frindsbury Extra Parish Council has reviewed your recent correspondence and the accompanying information regarding the proposed Local Government Reorganisation. Councillors welcomed the initiative's stated aim to strengthen relationships between Parish and Town Councils and principal authorities. However, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight that, at present, the engagement between Medway Council and Parish Councils is limited and not functioning effectively.

Representations from Parish Councils are often not acknowledged or taken into meaningful consideration.

Parish Councils occupy a unique and invaluable position within their communities. As elected representatives who live and work within the areas they serve, Parish Councillors have a direct connection with local residents and a deep understanding of their needs and concerns. This grassroots insight is a critical resource that is currently underutilised within the existing governance structure.

Councillors also expressed concern that the current model in Medway is not working as effectively as it should, and that the proposed reorganisation may risk widening the gap between different levels of government for much of Kent. Therefore, any future model must ensure a significantly stronger collaboration between Parish and Town Councils and the unitary authority.

Given that Medway is already structured as a unitary authority with Parish Councils, a structure now being proposed for other parts of Kent, we believe Medway has the opportunity to serve as a pathfinder, demonstrating how meaningful engagement with Parish Councils can enhance local governance.

We urge that Parish Councils be recognised as key partners in the new model, with a clearer role, greater involvement in decision-making, and a stronger voice in matters affecting their communities. One specific example of this disparity is that, unlike in other parts of Kent, Parish Councillors in Medway are not permitted to speak at Planning Committee meetings to represent their local communities. This restriction limits the democratic process and prevents local perspectives from being fully considered. We strongly recommend that this practice be reviewed so that Parish Councillors in Medway are afforded the same rights and opportunities as their counterparts elsewhere in Kent.

We hope these points will be taken into account as part of the consultation process, and we look forward to seeing a more inclusive and collaborative model emerge that truly reflects and serves the interests of all residents.

Kind regards

Sevenoaks

The team received an email from Swanley Town Council.

Thank you for inviting our comment. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is the most significant change in local government for 50 years, and it will have a direct impact on the people we represent. From our perspective, the following points are key:

Local identity and accountability: Swanley residents must feel decisions are made with their interests at heart, not by a distant authority. Any new structure must retain strong links to towns and parishes.

Community assets: Parks, car parks, play areas, and open spaces are central to daily life in Swanley. Safeguarding these for community use, not just commercial return, is essential.

Financial clarity: Promises of savings must be realistic. Councils need fair funding to deliver services, not just reorganisation.

Transition planning: We cannot afford disruption to frontline services. Clear communication with staff and residents will be vital.

Simpler, clearer services: At present, residents often don't know if the county, district, or town council is responsible. A unitary system could make this clearer.

Joined-up planning: Transport, housing, and health services could be better coordinated across a larger area.

Local empowerment: With the right devolution, towns like Swanley could have greater control over community assets and local services.

Duplication and confusion: Ending overlap between county and district functions would help residents and save time.

Uneven standards: Services vary across Kent. A unitary model could create a more consistent level of provision.

Loss of local voice: Large unitaries may become too remote, weakening the influence of towns and parishes.

Asset control: Without safeguards, local facilities could be centralised or sold, rather than managed for community benefit. Asset protection through transfers is essential to LGR's success.

Short-term disruption: Restructuring risks service interruption, staff uncertainty, and IT/finance system failures.

Underlying funding: Reorganisation alone won't solve the wider financial pressures on local government.

For Swanley, success depends on protecting community assets, ensuring genuine local accountability, and creating structures where our town will have the freedom to deliver directly for residents.

Kind regards,

A response was received from Sevenoaks Town Council.

Dear Cllr Hogarth

Re: Local Government Review in Kent

Thank you for your letter dated 18th September 2025 circulated to all Town and Parish Councils.

Please see below on behalf of Sevenoaks Town Councils responses to the following queries:

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

- There is likely to be a general public confusion about the reorganisation. Most members of the public do not fully understand the current roles and responsibilities of councils, and it will take some time to adjust.*
- The re-organisation should consider all levels of local government including the most local tier of town and parish councils who are at the hyper local level.*
- Preservation of identity, Town and Parish Councils provide ultra local services,*

protecting local assets (many of which were originally 'gifted' to their communities) and safeguarding the character of their parish. By delivering services that reflect the unique needs and character of the local area these councils can enhance the quality of life for residents and foster a sense of community pride and cohesion.

- Transition planning should be for the benefits of residents and not a tick box for councils and auditors.*

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

- Sevenoaks Town Council believes it has a good track record of managing local assets*

and believes where possible local community assets should be managed locally with community involvement and utilising local knowledge.

- Sevenoaks Town Council believes the transfer of Community Assets should be considered as a 'package'. Some of the assets will be income generating and some only having outgoing costs. The aim is that the overall 'package' will be cost neutral to both the new Unitary Council and the local taxpayer.*

Locality advises - It is actually common for transfer proposals to include what are called 'counterweight' assets, which are assets intended to generate income that would support the maintenance of other loss-making assets (like parks and playgrounds).

- Where town and parish councils exist, these can create their own Neighbourhood Forum thereby reducing resources for duplicating with the creation of another entity if needed.*

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

- There could be an opportunity to address outstanding matters and assets responsibilities from the 1974 re-organisation.*

- If promoted well locally there might be less confusion for example there are currently two 'Sevenoaks' councils. Often people do not know which tier of council provides which service.*

- Financial efficiency and local economy growth by community assets being operated locally using local resources.*

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

- Local Control and decision making by elected members could be lost or at best heavily diluted e.g. democratic deficit.*

- Community Asset protection – without safeguards, local facilities could be centralised or sold, rather than managed for community benefit. Asset protection through transfers is essential to Local Government Review success.*

- Many communities especially those with a Neighbourhood Development Plan currently receive 25% CIL funding. When considering which authority receives CIL in the future 25% should remain with the town and parish council (local community) who will be taking the brunt of impact of developments.*

I hope these comments are useful to you.

Yours sincerely

The team received an email from Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council.

Good Afternoon,

I have added below the Parish Councils response to the letter attached regarding the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Kent and Medway.

1. What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

A key factor which should be taken into account is that any reorganisation must not result in a more expensive structure. Cost-efficiency should remain a priority to ensure value for money for residents. Equally important is community identity. Local connections to services, support networks, and community resources are vital to the wellbeing of our residents. These links must not be diluted or lost in a larger, more centralised structure.

We also believe that ward sizes must remain manageable. Councillors need to be able to represent their constituents effectively, and this becomes increasingly difficult if wards are expanded too far.

Finally, there must be clarity and fairness in how financial matters—such as existing debt, assets, and council tax responsibilities—are split across any new unitary authorities.

*2. What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?
There is a chance it could eliminate confusion over which council is responsible for which services.*

We also see an opportunity for Town and Parish Councils to take on greater responsibility for their local areas. However, this must be accompanied by appropriate funding. Devolution of powers without the necessary financial support would place an unfair burden on smaller councils.

We would also like to see greater weight given to the views of Parish Councils in planning decisions, recognising their close connection to the local community.

3. What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

At this time, the Council has not identified any specific problems that would be resolved solely through reorganisation.

4. What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

We are concerned that reorganisation could lead to duplication of services rather than their simplification. Without careful planning, overlapping responsibilities may persist or even worsen.

The high cost of social care is unlikely to be reduced through structural changes alone.

Finally, we are concerned about how the county will be divided. There is a risk that some new unitary authorities would encompass a disproportionate number of deprived areas.

This could create significant inequalities in service provision and financial sustainability.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation and trust that our views will be taken into account as the process moves forward.

Kind regards,

The team received an email from Hartley Parish Council.

Good morning.

I write with reference to your letter dated 18th September 2025 regarding the Kent & Medway LGR.

Please see Hartley Parish Council's responses below:

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?:

Hartley Parish Council believes that any proposals for LGR in Kent & Medway should ensure that the new authorities are closely in touch with residents needs and should be highly connected with and responsive to resident needs and aspirations. At the moment residents generally understand the geography of their current District Councils, so there

is a danger that combining well known and, in some cases, historical areas into new larger authorities might make them seem less well defined and more remote. What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations? Two key success factors must be that any new arrangements are more efficient and cost effective.

Removing a tier of local government has to result in better provision of services and increased value for money or it will have been a waste of effort. Therefore any new proposal should be costed and the proposed savings quantified.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

The provision of local services under the current two tier model can be confusing to residents who are often unsure which services are currently provided at County or District level. Our parish office frequently advises residents where and how best to pursue their queries or concerns. Any new unitary model must be designed to ensure clarity in this area and to make it easier and quicker for residents to raise and seek resolution to any queries they may have about service provision.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Hartley Parish Council is concerned that the role, status and added value of the Parish Councils should not be lost or diminished in the reorganisation process. Parish Councils provide a very local and highly responsive service to their communities having locally staffed offices and councillors resident in the communities they serve.

Kind regards

An email was received by Eynsford Parish Council.

Dear Sir/madam

My council has considered the questions posed and has agreed the following responses:

1. Key factors

The biggest factor will be financial – we the reorganisation reduce costs?

2. Opportunities

The opportunity to have more local people involved and to create better working relationships with parishes.

3. Problems Fixed

Problems that could be fixed would be lack of transparency. We hope the new structure will provide more clarity for residents.

4. Problems Created

The new organisations could be too big to deal with local problems and local connections (e.g. with current district council) will be lost.

Thank you

Swale

An email was received from Hernhill Parish.

Hello,

Following the full council meeting last night, Hernhill Parish Council have the following responses:

· What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why? costs and

unclear as is the community impact. There is still a distinct lack of information in order for the Council to answer the question.

· What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations? Again, there is not enough information for the council to be able to answer the question.

· What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why? Again, there is not enough information for the council to be able to answer the question.

· What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why? Again, there is not enough information for the council to be able to answer the question. The Council has concerns that depending on the model chosen that historical connections with East Kent will be eroded.

Kind regards

A written response was received by the team from Tonge Parish Council on their behalf.

Dear Louise.

LGR Review - Response of behalf of Tonge Parish Council

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why?

The primary factor is how a larger, more distant principal council will affect the parish's ability to represent its community effectively. Decisions on local issues like planning, highways, and amenities risk being made by councillors and officers who lack direct, granular knowledge of the parish. Even considering that the parish voice would be considered, it risks being so remote that its impact would be inconsequential.

Parish councils rely on their status as statutory consultees. The LGR process must guarantee that this status is not diluted, but instead empowered, and that the new unitary council has clear, well-resourced mechanisms for engaging with the parish council network.

Further key factors include financial and asset management and clear communication throughout the process to ensure a smooth service transition.

The LGR process appears to have been initiated to save money by devolving local assets and service delivery downwards.

In terms of financial and asset management, if new unitary councils look to shed liabilities by transferring assets such as parks, community centres and public toilets to the parish level, while this increases local control, it also shifts the financial and maintenance burden to the parish. It is imperative that parish councils must complete their own thorough financial assessment and ensure that any asset transfer is matched by an appropriate multi-year funding agreement for any new service delivery to protect the parish council's financial stability. It also raises the subject of remuneration on the part of Councillors. A parish councillor is a voluntary position and requires, in most cases, a small amount of time to resolve challenges faced. If parish councillors are to take on the extra responsibilities and be the first port of call for the residents of their area, it might be a consideration of the government to provide a small remuneration for councillors to prevent the position becoming undesirable and councils unsustainable.

Even when tending a new contract with a service provider it can be complex and risks service disruption. A new unitary council should ensure a single point of contact for the parish, that is effective, and ensures that its internal functions are streamlined.

Confusion over who is responsible for which service can lead to local issues being ignored during the transition. It would be beneficial to the parish to be

mediating with the new authority's shadow executive/implementation teams early on to understand the new organisational chart and escalation pathways for local service issues, with a focus on maintenance of existing service levels where they meet specific local needs.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

Localised service delivery, funded by the unitary authority (through delegation or less undesirably, via a precept increase), A parish council could ensure services remain locally responsive and tailored to community needs. The devolution process could grant town and parish councils the right to take on services with guaranteed, sustainable funding (not just one-off grants).

Strengthening Local Democracy and Community Engagement. Since a unitary authority covers a much larger population and geographic area, there is a risk of losing local identity and accountability. The parish council could position itself as the single most effective voice for residents at the grassroots level.

Parishes could be recognised as essential statutory partners in the new unitary's governance, not just consultees. This should include representation or guaranteed engagement in key unitary decision-making groups, such as those governing environment, planning, and community assets.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

In the two-tier system, Parish Councils and their residents often face confusion over which authority (County or District) is responsible for a specific service. This often leads to services being missed or residents being bounced between two different councils. The LGR creates a single point of accountability in the new unitary authority. This is simpler for the Parish Council to deal with, as all major services now sit under one roof.

The split of powers between county and district councils can cause services to be delivered in a disjointed way, often leading to gaps or duplication. A unitary council, by merging all functions, aims for integrated service delivery. For the Parish Council, this means that a single conversation with the unitary authority can cover all local impacts of a major development or allow for more holistic service agreements.

In terms of assets, the new authority is likely to establish formal devolution frameworks to offload non-strategic assets and services to the parish councils, allowing the local community to gain greater local control and dedicate funding to the things that matter to the residents most, like parks, libraries, and public halls.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

There is a risk of becoming "lost" in a large unitary authority. The new unitary authority is a "mega-council," typically serving a population of 500,000 across a vast geographic area. A parish council risks losing its established lines of communication and influence with the previous, smaller district council. The assumption would be that the unitary authorities focus will be on strategic, high-cost services like social care, education, and large-scale infrastructure. Local issues that are the parish council's core concern could be seen as minor distractions by a remote authority leadership whose priorities are miles away.

The new unitary authority will need to harmonise policies and standards across the entire new area. A single policy for planning, waste collection, or leisure facilities may be adopted to achieve efficiencies of scale. This "one-size-fits-all" approach disregards the unique needs and local identities of individual parishes. What works for a dense town in the north of the county will not necessarily work for a rural

village in the south. The parish council's role as the voice of its community could be undermined when local circumstances are ignored for the sake of administrative simplicity.

The process of creating a unitary authority could carry an increased risk of service and asset Transfer Without Funding. If the unitary authority is under pressure to deliver the promised financial savings, a keyway to do this would be to transfer responsibility for non-statutory "discretionary" services and assets (like village halls, public toilets, or playgrounds) down to the parish councils without the appropriate funding. While "devolution" can sound like empowerment, it could result into unfunded mandates. The possibility that parish councils could be forced to either take on an asset or service (and raise the local precept to cover the running costs) or see it cut entirely, is still unclear. The new arrangement, in this way, would simply shift a financial burden from the larger authority to the smallest and least resourced one.

Despite best efforts, an amount of administrative disruption and delayed decision making should be expected. The creation of a new unitary authority is a massive, complex, and time-consuming process involving merging all staff, IT systems, contracts, policies, and organisational cultures of the former county and district councils. This transition period (which could last for years) may be marked by uncertainty, staff turnover, and an internal focus within the unitary authority. The parish council could experience planning applications taking longer, partnership discussions being shelved, and key contacts repeatedly changed, causing significant delays and friction in the delivery of essential local projects.

LGR is a structural change, and it is hard to vision how it would address the underlying financial and democratic issues common to all local government. The financial crisis facing local government is primarily driven by skyrocketing costs for statutory services, particularly adult social care and children's services.

Reorganisation simply puts the burden for these massive, underfunded services onto the new unitary authority. There is a very high risk that money saved from merging administrative functions will simply be diverted to plug the social care gap. The parish council's community-focused services will remain at risk of cuts or downward pressure for transfer, as the fundamental financial problem has not been solved by central government.

The most acute danger to parishes is the collapse of local democracy itself due to the unmanageable pressure placed on volunteer councillors. Shifting to a single unitary authority creates an immediate and detrimental change in the operating environment for parish councils. The greatest problem is the sudden and overwhelming increase in the workload placed on volunteer parish councillors and their usually part-time clerks. Along with concerns already raised, such as unfunded mandates in the transfer of assets and services, there is also a considerable administrative burden, which would then fall on the shoulders of volunteers. A far cry from the typical low-key matters that they are accustomed to, parish councillors risk becoming disillusioned, burnt out, and resign en masse when faced with the workload of running what is effectively a mini-district council. When seats become vacant, recruitment is in danger of becoming nearly impossible because prospective candidates are immediately put off by the sheer volume and complexity of the new, mandatory administrative duties. This leads to a parish council collapse where the council is unable to form a quorum, making it dysfunctional or placing it under the direct control of the distant unitary authority. If it collapses, residents lose their statutory right to have a local, organised voice in the decision-making process, and

the remote unitary authority is likely to be unpopular with the public, as the loss of parishes will see a deterioration of local life. Public services delegated down to the parish tier will cease to function and we would see assets, relied on by the community close, contributing to an increase in the already visible democratic deficit. The low voter turnout and public disengagement are problems across all tiers of local government. Creating a much larger council area with fewer, more distant elected councillors (larger wards) will likely further dilute local democracy. Resident will find their unitary councillor more difficult to reach, and the complexity of the new mega-council's structure may confuse the public more than the current system does. The parish council will remain the only tier of government that is truly close to the community, but the reorganisation may do nothing to empower them with the financial autonomy and resources needed to reverse the wider democratic deficit. In short, the current parish councils may become the face of local government but, will probably not have the funding, power and resources to tackle the issues that residents bring to them.

Yours sincerely

Tunbridge Wells

The team received an email from Parish Clerk for Rusthall Parish Council.

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for your letter dated the 22nd September 2025 regarding the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Kent and Medway. Rusthall Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to provide views at this stage for consideration. We would like the following to be taken into account Local identity and accountability:

Any new unitary structure must ensure that the voice of local communities, particularly parishes, is not diminished within a larger governance framework.

Accessibility of services: Residents value ease of contact with their council. Larger authorities risk creating distance between the decision-makers and communities. Maintaining local presence and responsiveness must be a priority.

Financial sustainability: Whilst efficiency is ultimately an aim, the costs of transition and ongoing viability of unitary councils must be transparently assessed.

Partnership working: The role of parish and town councils as the first tier of local government must be safeguarded and strengthened.

Opportunities that reorganisation could realise

Simplification of structures may improve public understanding of where responsibility lies.

Efficiencies of scale could free resources for reinvestment in frontline services. Reorganisation offers an opportunity to formalise stronger collaborative frameworks with parish and town councils.

Problems that could be fixed by reorganisation

The current two-tier system causes confusion for residents because they are unsure which authority is responsible for particular services.

Duplication of back-office functions may possibly be reduced, delivering potential savings.

Problems that could be created or may not be fixed by reorganisation

Loss of local focus: Larger unitary councils could be perceived as remote, making it harder for residents to influence decisions affecting their community.

Transitional disruption: The process of dismantling existing structures risks diverting resources and attention from service delivery in the short to medium term.

Efficiency assumptions: Promised savings may not fully materialise, particularly if local access points and community engagement mechanisms need to be retained.

In Conclusion:

Rusthall Parish Council believes that while there are potential benefits to reorganisation, these must be balanced against the risk of weakening local accountability and connection. We urge that any new arrangements should:

1. Place community voice at the heart of governance.

2. Preserve the role of parish and town councils.

3. Guarantee accessible, high-quality local services.

We thank you for including us in this consultation and look forward to continued engagement as plans develop.

Best wishes,

The team received a written response from Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council.

What are the key factors to be taken into account and why?

o The current structure is described as creating "a serious amount of waste and inefficiency," with substantial disconnects between local authorities that have been starved of funds by successive governments.

o Rural Areas have a serious democratic deficit Vs urban areas, due to higher population density in towns.

o Specific failings cited include poor north-south transport, the stripping of services from rural towns, an inability to provide expected NHS services, lack of local pre schools and secondary Schools and extensive unmanaged road closures.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations

o Our aspiration is for the rural area to gain a stronger voice and avoid being marginalised by urban centres like Tunbridge Wells, Ashford, and Maidstone.

o We advocate a new "rural unit" based on natural community and service links (e.g., school catchments), rather than existing administrative lines. This unit would include at least 13 parishes, including Cranbrook, Goudhurst, Sandhurst, Hawkhurst, Benenden, Marden, Biddenden, and Staplehurst, ie the whole of the rural Weald

o The area's rural population (70,000-80,000) should command significant influence if its representatives collaborate effectively, avoiding party-political divisions.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why

o Education: The reorganisation is seen as a prime opportunity to address the damaged education provision by establishing a much-needed new secondary school to serve the Weald. Maps created by the group show that logical school catchments already cross current council boundaries.

o Healthcare: There is a clear opportunity to push for more localised healthcare, such as establishing outpatient clinics (e.g., sexual health) and enhancing facilities like the Cottage Hospital in Hawkhurst.

o Transport: A major aspiration is to create an integrated and coordinated public transport system. This would improve access to services and activities, particularly for young people, and address the current lack of school transport. It would also avoid school buses being caught in 'pinch points' wasting hours of time.

o Efficiency and Best Practice: A move to unitary authorities should improve services such as recycling/refuse collection though standardisation

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by Reorganisation and why?

- *Key concerns centre on the significant financial risks, particularly inheriting massive debts from outgoing councils, the high cost of the transition itself, and the potential for new authorities to sell local assets to cover these costs.*

- *A drastic reduction in local representation (to one councillor per 7,000 residents), the drawing of illogical ward boundaries that could split communities, and the centralisation of key services like planning, making them remote and unaccountable.*

- *The failed shared planning service with Tunbridge Wells/Maidstone/Swale (operated out of Maidstone). The main problem (which did not get better over the years it was operated) was too much work, too few staff and poor training and staff retention. It was expected that by amalgamating, staffing costs would reduce but they found they needed at least as many staff as previously employed and their lack of local knowledge made matters even worse. The service did improve considerably when it was brought back to local TWBC control, with people with local knowledge making planning decisions (Not the Parish Councillors - they are too close!)*
- *Parking and Revenue: Sale of car parks and loss of free parking would kill rural towns.*

- *There is concern that revenue from local parking fines, which currently goes to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, will be absorbed into a central "black hole" with no benefit to the local community.*

- *Local Assets: The group expressed a strong desire to secure local ownership and control over community assets, such as the Regal and Tanyard car parks, and questioned the future of properties with long leases, like the museum.*

- *Historical Records and buildings: A major concern was raised about the fate of local historical records and documents currently stored by KCC in Maidstone, with fears they could become inaccessible after the reorganisation. Cranbrook Windmill, owned by KCC is used in much of KCC publicity.*

- *Increases to Parish Precepts are not capped, we fear this may be exploited by a future unitary authority, if they try to palm off services without the required funding.*

The team received a written response from a Councillor.

Dear Sirs

Response to Devolution Goudhurst.

We request some flexibility in your response timeline to allow for the conclusions of the meeting being held in Goudhurst Tuesday 7th with all our neighbouring parishes to be reflected in a considered response.

The key issues meanwhile would be:

- *We would give priority to ensuring effective delivery of services (which absence is a huge complaint) over a cost savings, which we do not believe likely.*

- *We would give priority to ensuring effective local democracy by making sure elected councillors properly represent and reflect the views and priorities of their electors, with smaller electorates, which is only possible with single member wards.*

- *Wards should be constructed from like communities. The issues faced in rural areas are not well understood in the towns, so rural communities should not be added on to town wards to meet the required ward size,*

but grouped with like parishes. Democracy is not just about numbers and political advantage, it is about how best to serve communities.

- Democracy is enhanced where people recognise it, their representation and it appears to be working. With large Unitary Authorities service delivery becomes remote. To overcome this wherever possible the Unitary should be organised to best deliver its administration nearest to different communities and recognising the difference between town, towns and rural. The Planning Committees should be split into town (or towns) and rural so that councillors are deciding on issues known to them.*

- Children and families tend to know each other, especially in rural areas, and together with their local schools tend to be the foundation of their community cohesion. Every effort should be made to ensure education and primary schools are local and for secondary busing of children for over 40 minutes away from their communities avoided. Better a number of secondary schools rather than a few vast, remote "factory" schools.*

- Good education and a commitment is the basis of our countries future so needs to be enjoyed not endured. Secondary education should give equal weight to vocational training as academic with equal merit.*

- We object to the Medway proposal which, apart from other flaws, arbitrarily splits our and neighbouring parishes away from Tunbridge Wells into a different region, without any consultation with us and the affected communities.*

We will add to these remarks following our KALC Area meeting on Tuesday 7th Oct, so please extend the deadline for response..

P.S. We agree with the majority of the Cranbrook submission below

Cranbrook submission below.....

What are the key factors to be taken into account and why?

- o The current structure is described as creating "a serious amount of waste and inefficiency," with substantial disconnects between local authorities that have been starved of funds by successive governments.*

- o Rural Areas have a serious democratic deficit Vs urban areas, due to higher population density in towns.*

- o Specific failings cited include poor north-south transport, the stripping of services from rural towns, an inability to provide expected NHS services, lack of local pre schools and secondary Schools and extensive unmanaged road closures.*

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations

- o Our aspiration is for the rural area to gain a stronger voice and avoid being marginalised by urban centres like Tunbridge Wells, Ashford, and Maidstone.*

- o We advocate a new "rural unit" based on natural community and service links (e.g., school catchments), rather than existing administrative lines. This unit would include at least 13 parishes, including Cranbrook, Goudhurst, Sandhurst, Hawkhurst,*

- Benenden, Marden, Biddenden, and Staplehurst, ie the whole of the rural Weald*

- o The area's rural population (70,000-80,000) should command significant influence if its representatives collaborate effectively, avoiding party-political divisions.*

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why

- o Education: The reorganisation is seen as a prime opportunity to address the damaged education provision by establishing a much-needed new secondary school to serve the Weald. Maps created by the group show that logical school catchments already cross current council boundaries.*

o Healthcare: There is a clear opportunity to push for more localised healthcare, such as establishing outpatient clinics (e.g., sexual health) and enhancing facilities like the Cottage Hospital in Hawkhurst.

o Transport: A major aspiration is to create an integrated and coordinated public transport system. This would improve access to services and activities, particularly for young people, and address the current lack of school transport. It would also avoid school buses being caught in 'pinch points' wasting hours of time.

o Efficiency and Best Practice: A move to unitary authorities should improve services such as recycling/refuse collection through standardisation

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by Reorganisation and why?

- Key concerns centre on the significant financial risks, particularly inheriting massive debts from outgoing councils, the high cost of the transition itself, and the potential for new authorities to sell local assets to cover these costs.*

O A drastic reduction in local representation (to one councillor per 7,000 residents), the drawing of illogical ward boundaries that could split communities, and the centralisation of key services like planning, making them remote and unaccountable.

o The failed shared planning service with Tunbridge Wells/Maidstone/Swale (operated out of Maidstone). The main problem (which did not get better over the years it was operated) was too much work, too few staff and poor training and staff retention. It was expected that by amalgamating, staffing costs would reduce but they found they needed at least as many staff as previously employed and their lack of local knowledge made matters even worse. The service did improve considerably when it was brought back to local TWBC control, with people with local knowledge making planning decisions (Not the Parish Councillors - they are too close!)

o Parking and Revenue: Sale of car parks and loss of free parking would kill rural towns.

- There is concern that revenue from local parking fines, which currently goes to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, will be absorbed into a central "black hole" with no benefit to the local community.*

o Local Assets: The group expressed a strong desire to secure local ownership and control over community assets, such as the Regal and Tanyard car parks, and questioned the future of properties with long leases, like the museum.

o Historical Records and buildings: A major concern was raised about the fate of local historical records and documents currently stored by KCC in Maidstone, with fears they could become inaccessible after the reorganisation. Cranbrook Windmill, owned by KCC is used in much of KCC publicity.

o Increases to Parish Precepts are not capped, we fear this may be exploited by a future unitary authority, if they try to palm off services without the required funding

An email was received from Horsmonden Parish Council on behalf of the Parish Council.

Apologies but we were unable to get our answers back to you by 6th October as our PC meeting to discuss this has only just been held .

Hopefully the answers in bold below can still be included in your findings:

- What are the key factors you think should be taken into account and why? **The Parish Council do not wish to see any reduction in representation at Ward Level .***

- What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations? **It will be easier for parishioners to know who to contact and there could be some efficiencies in staffing***

- *What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why? There could be fewer Chief Executive salaries to be paid resulting in a saving .*
 - *What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why? The Unitary Council's will be encumbered with debt from day one – not only inherited debt from existing councils but also the debt incurred by the cost of the reorganisation procedure as the government has not set aside sufficient funding for this . Many of the buildings and assets they take on will be in a poor state of repair and need money spent on them . If the unitaries don't want to upkeep them, who will take these assetson ? There could be less accountability .*
- Best wishes*

Additional stakeholder engagement

Parish and town representatives' engagement event (23 September 2025)

This section summarises the perspectives of parish councils and community representatives on local government reorganisation (LGR) in Kent.

The views were gathered in facilitated discussions across four groups, each addressing the same four questions.

Full details of the feedback, by group and question, can be found in appendix A.

The feedback highlights both the perceived risks and potential opportunities associated with reorganisation, with recurring themes around representation, accountability, fairness, identity, and resources.

1. Key Factors to be considered

- Equity and fairness: Strong concerns were raised about affluent and deprived areas being grouped together, with a risk that deprived areas may be disadvantaged. Fair distribution of resources was repeatedly emphasised.
- Geography and identity: Participants highlighted that geography should not be the sole driver of reorganisation. Cultural identity, history, and existing community synergies were seen as equally important (e.g., coastal towns sharing challenges). Canterbury's historic significance and other unique identities should be preserved.
- Representation and accountability: Lack of town councils in Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable was seen as a gap in representation. Concerns were expressed that larger unitary councils could dilute local voices and weaken accountability.
- Financial considerations: Uneven debt burdens and risks to local assets were seen as critical issues requiring careful management. Questions were raised about how costs will be allocated and who ultimately pays for reorganisation.

- Clarity of purpose: Participants questioned the rationale behind reorganisation, expressing scepticism about whether a coherent, evidence-based case has been made.

2. Opportunities and Aspirations

- Stronger local voice: Participants saw potential for improved mechanisms for communities to be heard, through co-production, forums, or strengthened parish/town councils.
- Dynamic leadership: The possibility of a directly elected mayor and clearer leadership was viewed as a potential advantage if accountability mechanisms are clear.
- Economies of scale: Larger unitaries could enable efficiencies in back-office services, contracts, and procurement, as well as recruitment and retention of specialist staff.
- Strategic capacity: Opportunities were identified to engage more effectively with regional and national bodies (e.g., NHS, Highways Agency, Transport for London).
- Joined-up policy making: Participants saw scope for more coherent approaches to planning, environmental management, transport, and infrastructure, particularly in east Kent.
- Asset protection and community autonomy: Some groups noted that reorganisation could create space for communities to take greater control of local assets and services.

3. Problems That Could Be Fixed

- Streamlining and efficiency: Reorganisation could reduce duplication (e.g., logos, branding, back-office administrative costs) and improve data consistency.
- Clarity of services: A single point of contact for residents was seen as a potential benefit.
- Fairer allocation of resources: Standardised policies and budget-setting mechanisms could lead to more equitable outcomes across Kent.
- Improved collaboration: Stronger joint working between councils and with external partners was seen as a positive outcome.
- Strategic planning: Joining strategic and operational functions under one authority could support more coherent planning and infrastructure delivery.

4. Problems That Could Be Created or Left Unresolved

- Loss of local accountability: A recurring concern was that decision-making may feel more remote, and residents could struggle to identify who is responsible.
- Democratic deficits: Risks were highlighted around areas without town councils, unequal treatment of parishes versus towns, and potential disengagement of future councillors, particularly young people.

- Economic and social inequalities: Fears that west Kent could dominate budgets and planning decisions, leaving east Kent disadvantaged, and that deprived areas may remain under-served.
- Disruption and risk: Concerns about staff uncertainty, loss of experienced councillors, and the risks of multiple reforms (creation of unitaries, devolution, transformation of services) being implemented simultaneously.
- Practical challenges: Questions remained unresolved about splitting debts, managing assets, and ensuring effective provision of adult social care and education.
- Community identity: Participants feared dilution of local identities and potential alienation of communities from decision-making.

Conclusion

While there is recognition that reorganisation could improve efficiency, strategic planning, and community engagement if well designed, there are strong concerns about fairness, accountability, and loss of local identity.

Participants stressed the need for clarity of purpose, robust financial planning, and mechanisms to protect representation and ensure deprived areas are not left behind.

Appendix A: All flipchart responses

What are the key factors you think should be taken into account in the re-organisation and why?

Group 1 (VD)

- Concern some areas may be lumped together - deprived areas may be grouped together and affluent will prosper. Deprived areas may struggle and not have as much focus on them.
- Geography – will it work? Every council is a different size.
- It shouldn't be dictated by geography - just because we are neighbouring councils does not mean we are similar and councils like Thanet, Dover and Folkestone (although they are not necessarily neighbouring councils) will have more in common than others.
- There is a difference in areas in terms of identity, some have different cultures and history and it's important these are preserved.
- What may be suitable somewhere, may not be suitable elsewhere.
- It's important there is an equitable distribution [of wealth]
- There is deprivation in coastal areas, but they may be able to learn from each other and lead to best practice. Coastal areas often face similar issues and could support each other.

- Canterbury needs to keep its name and history and identify / there is a historic importance.
- Medway could be with Swale, Folkestone with Thanet.
- There should be synergy in between areas. Dover, Thanet synergy around housing for example.
- We should be proud of each area and how they are unique and what makes them special.
- It may be impossible to give all the detail to the government about possibilities and opportunities and the job may feel too big especially in Kent, given the size of the county.

Group 2 (MR)

- Some don't understand the coherent, evidenced-based idea behind reorganisation in Kent. Haven't heard anything compelling that stacks up.
- Some areas will be more affluent than others. For example, Canterbury will be with Thanet in all options and this may adversely impact those in the current Canterbury district.
- Concerns about a lack of consistency in general when it comes to reorganisation.
- Disconnection - there is a risk that people will feel disconnected from their new unitary. The group felt it was important to keep a sense of community and a less-local unitary may not have so much of a sense of shared identity. There was a feeling that a mayor of Kent would be even more distant than the current setup and that with elected members having a larger area to serve, these would also be more distant.
- Rural and built-up areas in the district are different. Perhaps these should be treated differently during this process?
- Concerns about the lack of town councils in the urban areas of the district. There are few examples across Kent of towns without town councils.
- Funding is a key factor. Clusters of proposed councils will have far greater debt than others (Tonbridge and Tonbridge & Malling have none, Ashford and Canterbury have £100m+, for example).
- How will services be shared out, especially in light of funding issues.
- Assets are a key factor. There is a perceived danger that assets won't be as protected in a unitary and that they could potentially dispose of them.

Group 3 (MA)

- Local representation based on local areas
- Access to local councillors
- Lack of town councils in Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable means less local representation and inconsistency compared with the rest of Kent. This is a concern.
- Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) will require resource so there is an impact on the taxpayer even if this is deemed a town council alternative.

- The county split is a concern. West Kent is affluent while East Kent is less so. Resources should therefore be allocated based on needs.
- With the expectation of devolution in the future, how will unitaries hold the Mayor to account? There needs to be clear accountability for actions/policies.
- Planning is a key factor. Local decision making is needed and we need to avoid too much centralisation.
- There is a similar issue with the Local Plan process whereby it is likely to be 'infrastructure-led' which has pros and cons.

Group 4 (NL)

- Has any financial analysis happened to look at all of the proposals? Have you thought about fairness and how you will protect the poorer/deprived areas?
- What is the purpose of the reorganisation?
- Communication - how will we discuss planning issues? How will we be part of new authority? How will we be listened to?
- We feel it dilutes our identity.
- Dislocation - fan services centrally - where will services be located? Canterbury?
- Accountability - much more difficult to hold Cllrs to account.
- Who will pick up the issues that exist before we move to the new authority?
- Who is paying for this?
- What will the role of our communities be? Not many people/residents understand LGR / devolution is happening.

What opportunities could be realised by reorganisation and what are your aspirations?

Group 1

- For public to be heard – if rep is made by organisation council should listen to people.
- Something about how we will ensure communities are heard and that there is a feedback loop? Co-production.
- Take control of communities / assets we want to maintain and have a bit of autonomy.
- There are opportunities which could be unlocked.
- With autonomy, there will be accountability for people to deliver.
- There could be an opportunity for joint working / listening to each other and working together.
- We can create district forums.
- Mayor status – it's big enough to support that.
- Look at best practice ie Manchester and Andy Burnham and his leadership style and what is working there.
- Proactive – there is a need for dynamic leadership.

- We can bring in more people with skills and assets who want to help their communities. Reframing of what it means to live somewhere and contributing there.

Group 2

- All areas could have a town/parish council which are treated equally. This could be an opportunity for a coherent, local coordination of services that are currently the responsibility of numerous bodies (roads, schools, planning etc.).
- An opportunity for properly funded and financed local government.
- An opportunity for the unitary to pay for services that parishes currently fund, such as sports pitches and parks. All things that are currently under concurrent function funding (CFF).
- Gives local people the opportunity to prioritise and find those things that are important to them.
- Could be more capacity to protect assets and spaces
- Local government issues may be moved to the appropriate body. For example, all healthcare services could be moved to the NHS and not be council responsibilities.

Group 3

- There will be a bigger staff pool. Recruitment and retention could be improved. More specialists may be able to be employed (as opposed to those responsible for a plethora of areas/services) and there could be less competition for staff between local authorities.
- Economies of scale could be realised, especially with back-office functions. Things like corporate services, contracts and procurement.
- Opportunity for more strategic planning with big players such as Transport for London and the Highways Agency.
- Devolution could be an opportunity. The mayor's ability to articulate and influence on behalf of Kent and our places will be key.
- Opportunity for councillors to think creatively in the time they have left within the current council.
- Opportunity to put bigger teams together to plan for bigger budgets.

Group 4

- The opportunities will depend on the geography that is settled upon.
- Could be more joined-up policies such as environmental, cultural and social services.
- Transport and travel could be improved with something like network east Kent which could be responsible for rural locations and better/improved connections.
- Specific east Kent coastal issues could be overcome/improved including port, Eurostar and airport issues that are ongoing.
- Stour river network more joined up and easier to solve issues.
- Herne & Broomfield would like an opportunity to review assets.

- Opportunity for a holistic approach in joining up east Kent.
- There is support to include Ashford in the east Kent unitary due to the synergies with these opportunities and Ashford borough.

What problems could be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Group 1

- We could develop better relationships and learn from each other.
- There is currently a waste of resources – ie multiple logos mean multiple people being paid to do a job that could be done by one person / having one brand and consistency.
- Data integrity and collection
- Set budgets for each area, fair distribution.
- Standardised policies leading to community safety.
- There would be only one person to contact - single point of contact to streamline issues and challenges.
- Parish areas to become wider areas with wider reach.
- Some currently pay more than others, so equal distribution of wealth and money.
- People part of the system for a long time will need to 'step-up their game' to ensure they can fulfil their roles.
- Upskilling of existing workforce.

Group 2

- Appropriate providers for services would be a more coherent mechanism for local government (healthcare/social care being provided by the NHS, for example).
- Existing county services (such as education and roads) might feel 'more local' once they are housed in a smaller unitary.
- Opportunity to have two more equal institutions – unitaries and parishes/towns.
- Possible a single point of contact for all issues as the unitary progresses.
- Service provision could be fixed where there are currently issues.
- Could fix issues with inconsistencies in local government currently such as parish council sizes.
- An opportunity to create and share best practice with others.
- Economies of scale could be fixed in services such as planning.

Group 3

- Planning – a more strategic and cohesive approach but there is a concern that local input would be reduced. Will decisions still feel 'local' and at a local scale?
- Joining up the county council and city council would mean strategic and operational will be in the same unitary. Staff can better collaborate under one organisation.
- Local Plan – scope to focus on rural areas with good transport links and high needs.

Group 4

- Infrastructure – hidden infrastructure such as sewers and drainage could be improved by working more closely with our partner water companies, for example.
- Highways and transport could be improved with the removal of silo working and improved collaboration.
- An opportunity for transparency and honesty. Want to talk in pounds rather than billions of pounds.
- Breaking down barriers in terms of working together. Fostering better working relationships. Looking at the needs of all areas and focusing on the services that need prioritising.
- Opportunity to reorganise health and social services by pooling resources and budgets/finances. Improved economies of scale and more power together.
- Results in studies of other areas that have been through this would be helpful.

What problems could be created or will not be fixed by reorganisation and why?

Group 1

- Local accountability – decision making may be more remote, our voice becomes more diluted so it would be harder to identify who is responsible for decisions and services that affect lives. Responsibility is then spread across larger structures and less visible.
- Local issues, like a bus stop in a village could be overshadowed by regional priorities.
- There may be competing demands for investment.
- Areas of deprivation may end up in the same or worse situation, if they are not a priority.
- General public does not feel to be involved in decision making, so what if we create systems they are not happy with / how do we make sure they understand the importance of the current live survey?
- Attracting the right talent / people for senior positions. Need good leaders.
- Some companies may need to tender again, live canenco, it will create competition and may become difficult.

Group 2

- There may be a democratic imbalance
- The distance people will have to travel to reach services will be increased
- There could be an economic imbalance with west Kent more affluent
- How will debt burdens be split? Will these be shared and how will the county council's debt be split?
- This won't fix people's faith or view in local government.
- Planning may get more remote and further away from the priorities of the new council.

- Parish councils will be treated unequally to town councils. There isn't currently equality in how they are treated.
- Local Area Plans can't easily be created in unparished areas and will be even more difficult in a unitary.
- This process has nothing to do with reforming key services, as it should do.

Group 3

- Less local representation – NACs will need proper traction if they are to represent local interests (effective co-option) but the group remain sceptical.
- Adult social care and education within smaller unitary councils could potentially mean bigger problems.
- Will education accelerate to having more trusts?
- Budgets may be squeezed and smaller councils are less able to absorb shocks.
- Engaging with the health system and integrated care system may be more difficult with a greater number of councils.
- Current health boundaries may not remain so new relationships will need to be built.
- West Kent cannot be allowed to dominate the budgets and planning decisions. East Kent must be heard.
- Everything new at the same time including new unitary councils, possibly a new mayor. High risk and potential for chaos.
- Staff are unsettled.

Group 4

- Misinformation.
- Unparished areas are less democratic and won't get things done.
- Where will the representation be? Need a town council or the community won't have a voice. There needs to be a desire for this – residents need to understand what all this means to them.
- Lack of identity in local areas. Whitstable is Whitstable, Tankerton is Tankerton.
- Council representatives – massive move to select the right candidates to represent all residents. This needs to be fair and transparent.
- Parish councillors have no remuneration, although clerks are paid. Difficult to entice new parish councillors because of this.
- Perception that many experienced councillors will be lost as a result of local government reorganisation.
- Parish councillors need to understand what the role entails
- There is a danger that local people who want to get involved (as parish councillors, for example) will feel alienated and young people will not want to get involved in local politics and they may be polarised.

6. Conclusion

Residents and stakeholders recognise that reorganisation could deliver genuine benefits: streamlined administration, clearer lines of responsibility, potential economies of scale and improved strategic coordination with NHS and regional partners.

Service standardisation and accessibility emerge as genuine opportunities, with many viewing reorganisation as a chance to simplify how local government operates.

However, some residents remain unconvinced that promised financial savings will materialise given substantial transition costs and worry that efficiency gains will be offset by service disruption and loss of experienced staff.

Concerns about reduced accountability and weakened local democracy were common, with many emphasising the importance of retaining accessible, community-focused governance.

Residents with disabilities or long-term health conditions highlighted the need for inclusive and responsive services and for continued opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives.

There is concern that large unitary councils will become distant and disconnected from communities, with residents struggling to reach representatives or have their voice heard.

Residents worry that councillors will lack local knowledge or area-specific issues and that rural and coastal communities risk being overlooked in favour of larger urban areas.

Residents rank their ability to influence decisions as highly important and worry that this will diminish in a reorganised structure.

Parish councils highlight that community identity and local knowledge are essential to resident wellbeing, concerns that extend to fears about lost heritage expertise, potential sale of community assets and diluted local oversight over planning and service decisions.

There is also a common thread amongst stakeholders: the risk that reorganisation will deepen East-West inequality.

Poorer coastal areas could be disadvantaged if separated from wealthier districts. There are concerns that underlying financial pressures in social care and children's services will remain unresolved, with stakeholders questioning whether reorganisation addresses root causes or redistributes existing problems.