



**Kent**  
COUNCIL LEADERS

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**Miatta Fahnbulleh MP**

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**Kent Council Leaders**

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20 March 2026

Dear Ministers of State,

**Expression of Interest: Devolution for Kent & Medway**

We write as the Leaders of Kent and Medway's Local Authorities to restate clearly and collectively that devolution for our region is not simply desirable, but essential. We are therefore united in submitting this Expression of Interest to secure a Kent and Medway Foundation Strategic Authority (FSA) at the earliest opportunity.

You will be aware that we have responded fully and consistently to every invitation to engage in the devolution agenda thus far, from early expressions of interest through to our bid for inclusion within the Devolution Priority Programme. At every step since, we have worked constructively with civil servants to make the positive case that devolution must be aligned with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Kent and Medway to deliver coherent public sector reform.

Kent County Council (KCC) has decided not to sign an Expression of Interest for an FSA at this time, due specifically to considerations regarding Option 1A within the LGR process. Nonetheless, KCC has emphasised that this decision is intended solely to safeguard their position (Option 1A) in the LGR process and is not intended to restrict the aspirations of councils and partners in Kent and Medway to pursue a devolution settlement.

Despite our differing views on the merits of LGR, and our mutual disappointment at not being selected previously for devolution, our partnership-working has only strengthened in the interim. Under the Minister's direction, Kent and Medway remain the only region to undertake a fully joined-up LGR process, from appointing a single strategic business partner and completing a unified options appraisal, to submitting business cases developed within a jointly governed programme built on shared financial analysis, datasets, communications, and narrative.

Simply put, we have proven, more consistently than any other area, our ability to collaborate effectively at both political and officer levels and alongside our strategic partners, and we have demonstrated how we can apply the same disciplined, collective approach to devolution. We have shown we are ready and able to deliver major reform at pace through deep, cross-tier collaboration and strong alignment with partners including health, police, fire, education, employment, and business.

Kent and Medway represents nearly two million residents in a coterminous region with a straightforward geography. Our communities range from high-growth urban centres, significant areas of rurality, to some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. This is precisely why devolution is needed to unlock inclusive growth, tackle entrenched inequalities, and ensure locally-defined investment reaches the people and places that need it most. Across Kent and Medway, we have the scale, the maturity of governance and the shared economic ambition to ensure that devolution has maximum demonstrable impact.

We are already taking a proactive collaborative approach to driving economic growth and we know that achieving devolution through a Foundation Strategic Authority will give us the levers we need to accelerate delivery. Our collective work on the Local Growth Plan Evidence Base has already been completed, assessing the relative strength of Kent and Medway's sectors against the eight nationally recognised high-growth industries. Our evidence base is clear: our strengths in agri-food, logistics, digital and energy are nationally significant. Our Spatial Development Strategy is advancing at pace, but its success requires the aligned strategic powers that only a Foundation Strategic Authority can provide.

In the context of LGR, it is critical that we have a strategic authority capable of establishing a high-level Kent and Medway framework around priorities including:

- Strategic transport and the Local Transport Plan;
- Management of critical national infrastructure including the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel;
- Economic development and regeneration including the Local Growth Plan;
- Housing and strategic planning including the Spatial Development Strategy;
- Education and skills;
- Public service reform including health and wellbeing; and
- Residual policing and fire and rescue functions

This then enables our new council(s) to focus on effective delivery and deep public service reform on the appropriate footprint.

Kent holds a uniquely important national role supporting food security, border management, resilience and infrastructure. Delivering LGR without devolution creates unnecessary risk, particularly around national infrastructure, ports of entry, transport and economic development.

Devolution is particularly important in light of the critical role Kent plays in national infrastructure and border management, and the opportunities that arise from a strategic county-wide approach being taken on economic growth, education and skills. Key local public sector partners - the Chief Executives and Chairs of the ICB, health and care partnerships and acute trusts, the Chancellors and Vice Chancellors of the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and Greenwich University which has a campus within Kent, the Chairs of the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, Business Advisory Board and Kent Chamber, the Chief Executives of Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover and the Chairs of the Kent Housing Group and Kent Developers Group - all share our concerns that reorganisation in Kent without devolution would result in a piecemeal approach and sub-optimal transformation. Kent and Medway MPs are also actively engaged and are supportive of our ambitions.

With many comparable areas already progressing devolution deals, Kent and Medway is at real risk of becoming a "*devolution desert*" without the powers, resources or national voice that others will possess. This would materially restrict our capacity to deliver growth for our residents and for the country. As Leaders from five political parties, we are absolutely in lockstep that our unique region requires and deserves a place in the next phase of devolution and the opportunity to establish an FSA at the earliest opportunity. We stand ready to work at pace with Ministers and civil servants to secure an agreement and deliver meaningful change for our communities.

We would welcome a visit from you and your officials to discuss how we can jointly realise this ambition.

Yours sincerely,

**Kent and Medway Council Leaders**

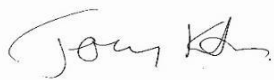
*(signatures overleaf)*



**Noel Ovenden**  
*Leader, Ashford Borough Council*



**Alan Baldock**  
*Leader, Canterbury City Council*




**Jeremy Kite MBE**  
*Leader, Dartford Borough Council*



**Kevin Mills**  
*Leader, Dover District Council*



**Jim Martin**  
*Leader, Folkestone & Hythe District Council*



**John Burden**  
*Leader, Gravesham Borough Council*



**Stuart Jeffery**  
*Leader, Maidstone Borough Council*



**Vince Maple**  
*Leader, Medway Council*



**Kevin Maskell**  
*Leader, Sevenoaks District Council*



**Tim Gibson**  
*Leader, Swale Borough Council*



**Rick Everitt**  
*Leader, Thanet District Council*



**Matt Boughton**  
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**Ben Chapelard**  
*Leader, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council*