

Statement of Intent

To examine a merger of East Kent District Councils



Summary

The Leaders of Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet District Councils have undertaken a series of discussions to examine options for closer collaboration, leading to a shared view **that a merger of the five East Kent districts merits further serious consideration.**

This Statement of Intent confirms the Leaders' thinking on the purpose of a merger and the principles that would underpin evaluation of the business case.

Purpose of a potential merger

The preferred option for further investigation is the merger¹ of the **five** East Kent district councils. East Kent leaders believe that the purpose of a potential merger would be to:

1. Deliver opportunity and prosperity for all in East Kent

- Work together to enhance the economic competitiveness of East Kent with a shared focus on jobs and housing
- Build on and market key sub-regional strengths such as a high-quality natural environment and a unique Europe-facing position
- Achieve better strategic influence over infrastructure and transport decisions
- Attract younger residents who are economically active

2. Achieve better social outcomes and reduce inequality

- Improve quality of life for all residents
- Tackle deprivation and inequality throughout East Kent
- Better coordination of efforts to improve health outcomes especially for the ageing population, exploring new models of health and social care provision with partners

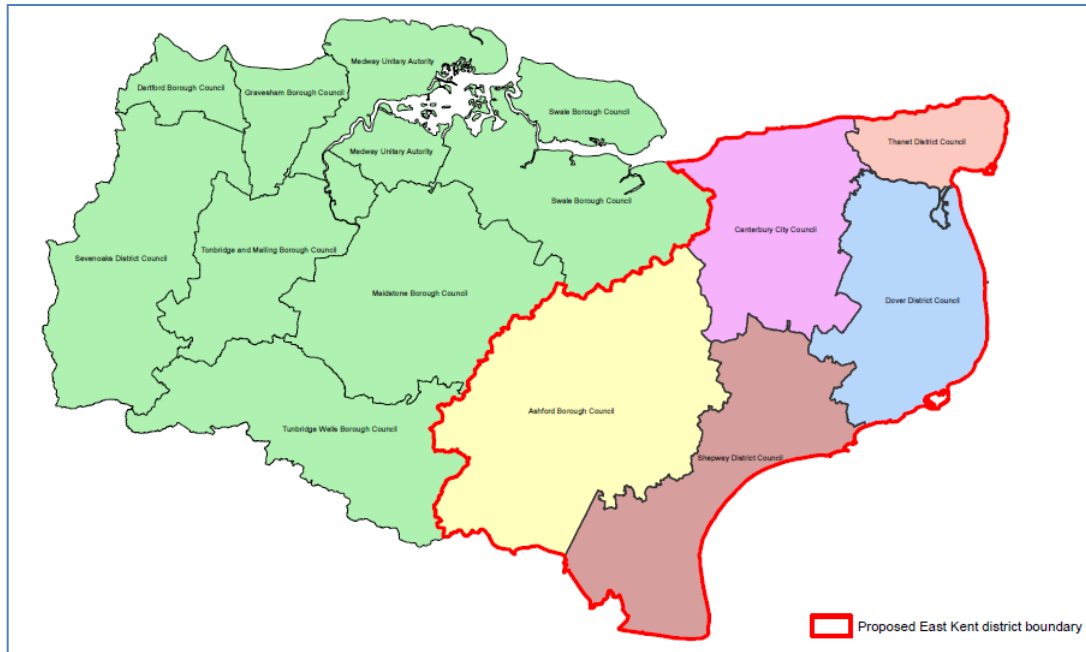
3. Improve value for money and consistency of core services

- Pool resources to achieve greater consistency, quality and value for key services such as leisure, waste collection, public realm and environmental health
- Deliver an East Kent local plan
- Achieve more resilient services through increased scale

4. Empower communities and create a platform for further innovation

- Speak with a single and louder voice with business, communities, partners and central government
- To improve democratic representation and accountability at every level by strengthening the role of town and parish councils
- Explore more commercial approaches to income generation and alternative delivery models
- Enable further service integration with partners

¹ The creation of a new unitary council for East Kent is **not** under consideration



Principles for examining the business case

Discussions between Leaders have established a number of principles that will underpin the evaluation of any business case. These are:

- Decisions about East Kent must be taken at the right level to maximise engagement and empowerment of local communities, whilst also ensuring that strategic issues are considered at the right scale. East Kent expects meaningful involvement in devolution discussions between Kent County and central government.
- Any merger would proceed hand in hand with the opportunity for devolution of appropriate responsibilities to town and parish councils to the greatest extent that is possible, practical and legally permissible.
- The identity, civic responsibilities and heritage of the districts, towns and parishes of East Kent must be respected and protected under any new arrangement.
- Further careful examination of the implications for local council tax would be required.

We recognise that any potential business case will need to satisfy the evidential requirements of the Secretary of State and / or the Boundary Commission depending upon the preferred legal route. In either case these will include;

- The need to secure effective and convenient local government
- Reflecting the identities and interests of local communities
- Community support for proposals
- Financial clarity over the implications
- Clarity on proposed changes to electoral arrangements
- Implications for town and parish Councils

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