



Serving You

21st March 2025

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister for Local Government &
Devolution
Ministry for Housing, Communities &
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2 Marsham St
London SW1P 4DF

Councillor Vince Maple
Leader
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Dear Jim

Many thanks for the opportunity inviting Kent and Medway local authorities to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation in our region. A joint submission has been sent to you today from all 14 of us and we remain committed to your deadline in November for the submission of a fuller proposal meeting the criteria you set out in your letter of 5 February 2025.

Despite our initial disappointment that we were not selected to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme, all 14 councils have continued to work together in a collaborative way to advance the business case for the establishment of unitary authorities in Kent and Medway and our response sets out the progress made so far along with a number of issues that we would welcome further advice and guidance on from your department.

What is clear to us in Medway are the strong benefits of moving to a unitary system in our region. Medway Council has been a unitary authority since its establishment in 1998 and the benefits for residents and our communities are very clear and well understood locally. The financial challenges we have experienced in recent years due to our size has undoubtedly resulted in us having to make a number of difficult choices and therefore the opportunity to expand into a larger authority with the benefits it would bring make sense to us.

Over the coming months we will be working with colleagues in the other Kent authorities to present proposals on the optimum number of unitary authorities that would work best for the region of Kent but we have jointly agreed that a single or dual authority would not be in the best interests of local democracy and serving local needs given the size of our county.

Medway's preference would be for four authorities, not least because with a population of nearly 2 million people this would work out at around the target population number of 500,000 for each authority whilst ensuring that local democracy can stay truly local and that the interests of our residents can best be served. However further work will be taking place in the coming months.

It is clear in early work that it is likely that across the region that some of the 13 existing district / borough / unitary boundaries may not be followed in final proposals recognising how the region has changed over the past 50 years but of course this is one of many issues which will be looked at between now and November.

We will also be ensuring we engage closely with local people, partners and other stakeholder as we shape our proposals ensuring they understand the opportunities and changes local government reorganisation will bring and that their views inform the development of our final proposals. Our first event takes place in Medway on 2 April. As a council we have already taken reports to both our full council and cabinet on the issues of devolution and local government reorganisation, and I've included those for your reference.

The proposals for local government reorganisation in Kent and Medway could mean the end of Medway as a single unitary authority with its own unique identity. Whilst we support the proposals for amalgamation of council areas into the new unitary authorities across our region, this will be a significant loss of our identity that we have worked hard to build up in the past 27 years. Indeed, we now have an entire generation and more, as well as businesses and other community organisations who refer to their home place as Medway and this could be damaged by the changes which would of course be very disappointing.

In early January I wrote to Baroness Taylor to ask that consider the exceptional granting of city status for Medway that we have applied for at every opportunity since the creation of Medway Council in 1998. With nearly 290,000 residents, our rich heritage, landscape and £7 billion economy, we are a city in all but name and I would be most grateful if this could be given further consideration as we work towards the creation of the new unitaries. I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

In the meantime, I would like to thank you and the MHCLG team for all the support you have been giving to Kent and Medway and look forward to welcoming you to our region in the very near future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Vince Maple', written over a horizontal line.

Cllr Vince Maple
Leader, Medway Council