

**To:** Kent Housing Group

**Date:** 7 February 2025

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**Topic:** To provide Kent Housing Group with a high-level briefing on Devolution for Kent.

**Decision Required:** None - For information

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## Background

On 16 December 2024, the government published the [English Devolution White Paper - Power and partnerships: Foundations for growth](#). On the same day, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon OBE MP, wrote to council leaders setting out next steps to taking the proposals in the White Paper forward, and setting 10 January 2025 as the deadline for a formal request for areas to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme.

The 16 December letter from the Minister also set out that he is minded to lay necessary secondary legislation to postpone local council elections from May 2025 for a 12-month period where this will help an area deliver both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe. Any request from the relevant Council asking the Minister to consider election postponement was also required by 10 January 2025. Any decision to postpone council elections is a decision only Ministers can make and requires parliamentary approval through secondary legislation.

## Current Position

Kent County Council and Medway Council have formally asked the government to be included in its Devolution Priority Programme (DPP). [Read the jointly-signed request from the Leaders of Kent County Council and Medway Council \(PDF, 189.5 KB\)](#).

Currently the government's plans are for a mayor and combined authority to lead on strategic issues including:

- transport
- skills
- housing
- economic growth
- environment and climate change
- health
- public safety.

In addition to devolution, the government has said it wants residents to be served by just one local council (known as a 'unitary council'). Kent currently has a two-tier model with a county council (KCC) and 12 borough and district councils. Medway Council is already a unitary council. As well as the creation of a Mayoral Combined County Authority, local government across the area currently served by all these councils would be reorganised into a number of unitary councils.

## Next Steps

Government's decision on accepting Kent and Medway on Devolution Priority Programme is expected before the end of January 2025.

If Kent and Medway are accepted on to the Devolution Priority Programme, the government will then consult residents on their views on the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority before the end of March 2025.

The government could also decide to postpone the May 2025 county council elections to help plan for a mayoral election in 2026 and consider proposals for local government reorganisation. Roger Gough, Leader of Kent County Council, has written to the Minister for Local Government and Devolution requesting the postponement of the KCC election. [Read the Leader's letter \(PDF, 158.5 KB\)](#).

Full proposals for reorganisation are set to be submitted in autumn 2025, in line with the government's timeline.

According to the government's timescales, unitary councils covering Kent and Medway could be introduced in 2027 or 2028.

## Additional Information:

- **Link to [Kent County Council - Devolution Webpage](#)**
- **County council meetings and papers:**
  - [Recording of the Cabinet meeting, 9 January 2025](#)
  - [Recording of Extraordinary Full Council meeting, 9 January 2025](#)
  - [Democracy.kent.gov.uk page for Extra council \(9 January 2025\)](#)
  - [Democracy.kent.gov.uk page for Cab \(9 January 2025\)](#)
- **Excerpt from the Devolution White Paper – page 62 - Housing delivery 3.5**

“As devolution is deepened, Mayors will play an increasingly central role in housing delivery. To support Mayors in delivering on their housing ambitions, all Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be given control of grant funding to support regeneration and housing delivery. This will be delivered as part of the Integrated Settlement in Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities from 2026/27 onwards. Further details on this will be agreed as part of the Spending Review process.

Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities currently work with Homes England through Strategic Place Partnerships – a formal partnership arrangement which brings together their respective strengths and resources. All Mayoral Strategic Authorities will now have access to these partnerships, subject to a period of joint working on pipeline development and delivery planning. However, we want to go further. In the short term, we will increase Homes England’s accountability to Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities. This will include giving Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities the ability to steer and monitor Homes England’s progress in delivering on objectives agreed through their Strategic Place Partnerships, and set out in their wider plans, and to escalate any issues to ministers. We will work with these areas over the coming months to develop the detail of how this will operate. Beyond this, the government has announced that Homes England will move to a more regional and place-based operating model to align its structures and ways of working to the government’s devolution agenda. Homes England will also work with Foundation Strategic Authorities on a targeted basis to develop a shared development pipeline and joint action plan, using a continuous market engagement approach to identify the authorities with capacity for accelerating development.

Decisions on affordable housing are currently taken too far away from Mayors’ plans. It is vital that this changes so that decisions meaningfully recognise and respond to Local Growth Plans and Spatial Development Strategies – both in Homes England’s work to encourage pipelines of bids, and in the specific decisions relating to the allocation of grant to social landlords (including Local Authorities) within the Mayor’s area. Over time, the government is seeking to move towards full devolution of funds and delivery for affordable housing. As an interim step, Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be given the ability – through their Strategic Place Partnerships with Homes England – to set the strategic direction of any future affordable housing programme in their area, including shaping the tenure mix and identifying priority sites for housing development to be supported by grant. As part of this, there will be a clear approach to ensuring responsibility of Homes England to the Mayors (recognising constraints such as market demand) and a clear framework on the specific decisions Mayors will be able to take, agreed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and to be implemented by Homes England. To support planning, this will include upfront indicative spend per Established Mayoral Strategic Authority, subject to suitable projects being identified. This will support the government’s commitment to kickstart the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation.”

- **Excerpt 3.10 Devolution Framework summary table – page 86 - Key**

(\*\*) refers to functions for which funding will be included in Integrated settlements for Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities

(^) refers to functions which apply to Combined and Combined County Authorities only.

<b>Detail</b>	<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Mayoral</b>	<b>Established</b>
<b>Funding and investment</b>			
Access to a multi-departmental, long-term integrated funding settlement**			X
Long-term investment fund, with an agreed annual allocation		X	X
Removal of gateway review from investment fund, after Gateway One complete			X
Ability to introduce mayoral precepting on council tax <sup>^</sup>		X	X
Consolidation of local growth and place funding in a single pot**	X	X	X
<b>Strategic leadership</b>			
A statutory duty to produce Local Growth Plans		X	X
Membership of the Council of Nations and Regions		X	X
Membership of the Mayoral Data Council		X	X
<b>Transport and local infrastructure</b>			
Local Transport Authority and public transport functions, including bus franchising and responsibility for an area-wide Local Transport Plan	X	X	X
Simplification and consolidation of local transport funding**	X	X	X
Removal of certain Secretary of State consents, e.g. on lane rental schemes		X	X
Duty to establish a Key Route Network on the most important local roads <sup>^</sup>		X	X

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Mayoral Power of Direction over use of constituent authority powers on the Key Route Network <sup>^</sup>		X	X
Priority for strategic rail engagement (including mayoral partnerships) with Great British Railways	X	X	X
Statutory role in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network		X	X
An option for greater control over local rail stations		X	X
A 'right to request' further rail devolution			X
Priority for support to deliver multi-modal ticketing			X
A clear, strategic role in the decarbonisation of the local bus fleet	X	X	X
Active Travel England support for constituent authority capability <sup>^</sup>	X	X	X
Formal partnership with National Highways		X	X
<b>Skills and employment support</b>			
Joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan model, with Employer Representative Bodies	X	X	X
Devolution of the core Adult Skills Fund	X		
Devolution of non-apprenticeship adult skills functions through a consolidated skills funding pot <sup>**</sup>		X	X
Central convening of youth careers provision including greater flexibility for Careers hubs		X	X
A clear role in relation to 16-19 education and training		X	X
Responsibility for developing local Get Britain Working Plans	X	X	X
Devolution of supported employment funding <sup>**</sup>	X	X	X
Co-design of future employment support that is additional to core Jobcentre Plus provision		X	X

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Embed UK Research and Innovation lead points of contact for enhanced collaborative working on innovation with Mayoral Strategic Authorities that are committed to work collaboratively on innovation		X	X
Responsibility as the accountable body for the delivery of Growth Hubs	X	X	X
Devolution of Growth Hubs funding**			X
A Strategic Partnership with the Department for Business and Trade focused on domestic growth, exports, investment, and delivery of local growth priorities.		X	X
Partnership working with Department for Culture, Media and Sport Arm's Length Bodies to maximise culture, heritage, and sport spending in place	X	X	X
<b>Environment and climate change</b>			
Devolution of retrofit funding this parliament subject to a successful transition period (see 3.7)**			X
Heat network zoning coordination role	X	X	X
Coordinating local energy planning to support development of regional network energy infrastructure	X	X	X
Green jobs and skills coordination role	X	X	X
A strategic role on net zero in collaboration with government, including on Great British Energy's Local Power Plan and Warm Homes Plan	X	X	X
Responsibility for coordinating delivery and monitoring of Local Nature Recovery Strategies^	X	X	X
<b>Health, wellbeing and public service reform</b>			
A bespoke statutory health improvement and health inequalities duty^	X	X	X
Mayors engaged during the Integrated Care Boards chair appointment process		X	X

<b>Detail</b>	<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Mayoral</b>	<b>Established</b>
Mayors as members of local Integrated Care Partnerships, and consideration for position of chair or co-chair		X	X
A role in convening partners and driving cross-cutting public service reform, including looking at areas such as multiple disadvantage	X	X	X
<b>Public safety</b>			
Mayors accountable for the exercise of Police and Crime Commissioner functions where police force and mayoral boundaries align^		X	X
Mayors accountable for the exercise of Fire and Rescue Authority functions where fire and rescue service and mayoral boundaries align		X	X
A clear and defined role in local resilience, working with the Local Resilience Forum to embed resilience into broader policy and delivery^	X	X	X