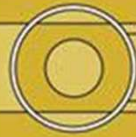


# Devolution and what it means for Royal Tunbridge Wells



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM



# Kent & Medway Devolution Overview

- **Government Initiative:** December 2024's English Devolution White Paper proposes replacing county and district councils with larger unitary authorities, each led by a directly elected mayor.
- **Kent County Council and Medway Council** applied for inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) but were not selected in February 2025.
- **Current Status:** Despite exclusion from the DPP, Kent and Medway have developed an interim plan to create unitary authorities with the final proposal due by 28 November 2025.

# Proposed Unitary Authority Structures

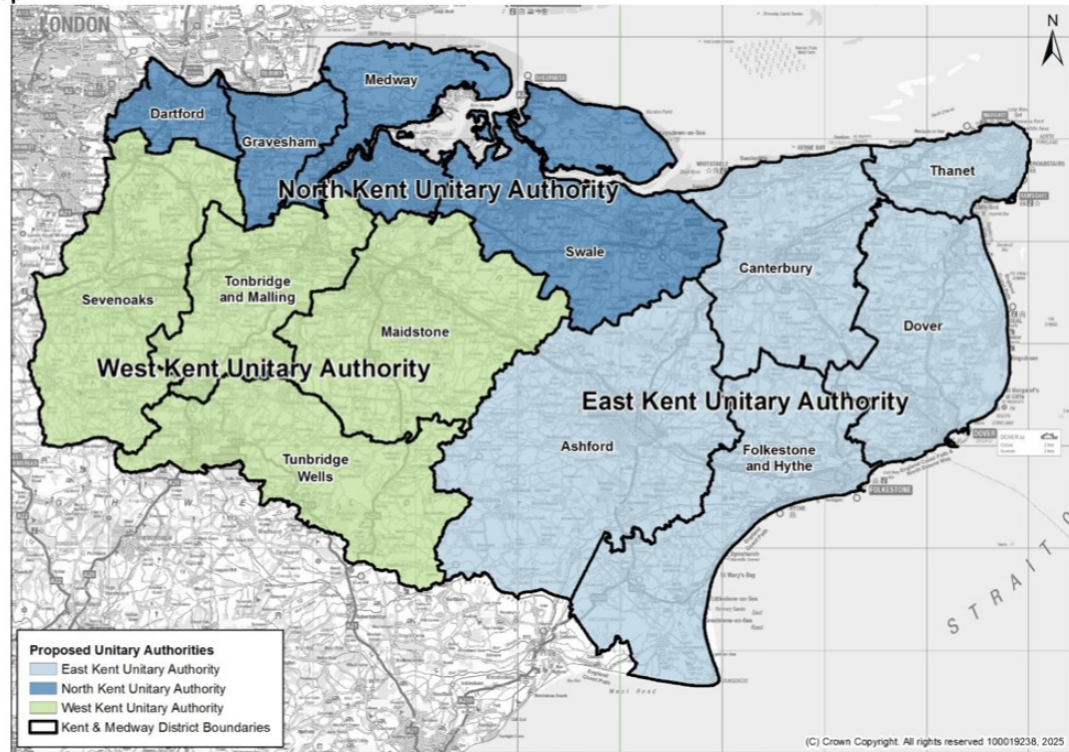
- **Reorganisation Plan:** Proposal to consolidate Kent CC and the 14 borough and district councils into three or four unitary authorities to streamline services and governance.
- **Potential Configurations:**
  - **West Kent Unitary:** Including Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, and Maidstone serving a population of approximately 557,675
  - **Alternative Option:** Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, and Tunbridge Wells, serving approximately 373,488 residents.
- **Rationale:** These configurations aim to meet the government's criteria for unitary authorities to have populations of at least 500,000 for efficiency and resilience

# 3 Unitary Authority Proposed Council Boundaries

## Section 3.1: Model 1 (Three Unitaries)

<b>Model 1 (three unitaries):</b>	<b>North</b> (Dartford, Gravesham, Medway, Swale) <b>East</b> (Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe, Thanet) <b>West</b> (Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells)
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Map



# Implication for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

- **Service Integration:** Transitioning to a unitary authority would centralise services currently divided between Kent County Council and TWBC, such as education, highways, planning, and waste management.
- **Governance Changes:** TWBC would be dissolved, with its functions absorbed into the new unitary structure, potentially reducing local representation.
- **Borough Assets** will be transferred to the unitary authority.
- **Timeline:**
  - **Interim Proposal prepared:** 21 March 2025
  - **Final Proposal Submission:** 28 November 2025
  - **Implementation Target:** April 2028
- **Community Engagement:** TWBC has established a cross-party advisory group to assess the impact and guide residents through the transition.

# Community Governance Review & Town Council Benefits

- **New Town Council Proposed:**  
As part of the wider governance reform, a **Community Governance Review** is underway looking at creating a **Town Council** to represent local interests of the 6 unparished wards post-unitary reorganisation.
- **Enhanced Local Representation:**  
A Town Council would ensure a **strong local voice** remains after TWBC is dissolved, helping residents influence local decisions on parks, events, heritage, and community assets.
- **Greater Civic Pride & Identity:**  
A dedicated town body can **champion Royal Tunbridge Wells' unique identity**, heritage, and economic priorities, particularly around tourism and town centre regeneration.
- **Improved Community Engagement:**  
Residents will benefit from **more direct, responsive engagement** on local issues, with councillors focused solely on the town area.
- **Access to New Funding Streams:**  
Town councils can **raise funds through a precept** and apply for grants, giving Royal Tunbridge Wells more control over its budget for community improvements and local initiatives.

# Community Governance Review & Town Council Benefits

Action Terms of Reference (ToR) published	Timetable 2 June 2025	Outline of action The Council publishes the CGR ToR and notifies stakeholders, clearly defining the extent of the review and consequential matters.
Invite initial submissions (consultation phase one)	2 June 2025 to 3 August 2025	The Council invites initial submissions to help formulate Draft Recommendations.
Public engagement activities	2 June 2025 to 21 September 2025	CGR awareness campaign with local briefings and meetings for CGR stakeholders.
Preparation of Draft Recommendations	4 August 2025 to 21 September 2025	The Council develops the Draft Recommendations for consultation.
Publication of Draft Recommendations	22 September 2025	The Council publishes the Draft Recommendations and commences formal consultation upon them.
Public consultation on Draft Recommendations (consultation phase two)	22 September 2025 to 23 November 2025	The Council undertakes a full public consultation on the Draft Recommendations.
Preparation of Final Recommendations	December 2025 to February 2026	The Council considers the results of the consultation and prepares Final Recommendations.
Final Recommendations published	February 2026	The Council publishes the Final Recommendations of the CGR.
The Council resolves to make the Community Governance Reorganisation Order	22 April 2026	Full Council discusses and agrees the Final Recommendations.
Community Governance Reorganisation Order made	May 2026	The Council publishes the Community Governance Reorganisation Order.