

Public information statement by the Campaign for Democracy in the Canterbury District about Local Government Reorganisation

Local Government across England is being radically overhauled by central Government, including in Kent. That means big changes for all our local councils. How does this affect you? We try to explain...

What's happening to Canterbury City Council? It's likely that from May 2028 the City Council, along with Kent County Council, Medway and the other eleven District Councils in Kent, is being abolished.

Why do you say "likely"? Because, as you'll read below, a lot of the detail hasn't yet been sorted out. That's why this is a good time for you to let your current Councillors and MPs know your views.

Then who will collect my bins? A small number of new, larger, Councils will be set up across Kent which will combine all the functions that the County and districts currently carry out. They are known as Unitary councils. There will probably be three or four of them. There will also be a Mayor for the whole of Kent, whose job we'll explain below.

Why? Central Government policy is aiming to devolve more functions away from Whitehall to the regions. That's already happening across most of England, and everywhere in the south-east - except Kent, where change has been delayed.

Will the new Council be based in Canterbury? No one knows yet where the new Council will be based, but it is unlikely to be in Canterbury because we don't have

enough office space, nor a Council chamber which is large enough.

So where will it be? Sorry, that's another unknown. It hasn't been decided yet which areas will be in each new Unitary Council, and the existing Councils don't all agree. But because the aim is to have about 500,000 people served by each Council we can be fairly sure that Canterbury, Thanet and Dover at least will form the core of a new "East Kent" Council, with the possible addition of Folkestone and perhaps parts of Swale (Faversham). A system with just three Unitary councils in Kent would add Ashford to that grouping.

That seems very large. It is – over 660,000 residents at the start, with up to 100,000 more people in the next ten years. Many people think that it is too big to be practical.

Surely there would be hundreds of Councillors then? No. The Government is looking for no more than 100 Councillors in each Council. That means that there will be far more residents represented by each Councillor than we have at the moment.

How will that work? It is likely the new Unitary Council will have to use the existing County Council divisions as the basis for the Councillors' seats, because they are the only ones which have (more or less) the same resident base across the different Districts. The idea seems to be that each existing single County seat will have two Unitary Councillors.

What's the effect of that? The central city part of Canterbury would have four Councillors rather than eleven; Whitstable and Herne Bay would have six rather than thirteen.

And those Councillors are going to deal with everything that KCC and the City



does now? That's the idea. The new system will add roads and transport, education, and both adult and children's social services, to everything that the districts already do.

What will happen to our museums, arts centres, playing fields and other assets? In theory they will all be transferred to the ownership of the new Unitary council. It's important to make sure that they are protected and can continue to succeed.

But will those Councils actually have time and money to manage my local services? That's the biggest of all the big unknown questions. Many people are concerned that with the pressures and costs of setting up the new Unitary Councils, and the rightful need to focus on social services and get everything ready, the small local activities which matter to most people will not get the attention or funding they need.

Could they ask Town and Parish Councils to pick up some of that work?

They could, and that's happened in other parts of England. But Canterbury, Whitstable and Herne Bay don't have Town Councils, and our Parish councils don't have the money, skills or capacity at the moment. So there could be a problem at least in the short term which could threaten the future of some of our local community centres, sports clubs, pre-schools and so on.

Could we have new Town Councils to plug the gap? Yes, many people think that new Town Councils should be created so that every part of the District has equal representation. But at the moment the City Council doesn't plan to do that, even though almost every other Council in East Kent is working to make sure they have Town and Parish councils across the whole of their area.

I've heard that Canterbury's Lord Mayor might be abolished. That's an issue

many people are concerned about. But if there was a Town Council for Canterbury then that might be a home for the Lord Mayor. And of course if Whitstable and Herne Bay had Town Councils it would be possible to reinstate the Mayoral roles they lost in 1974.

But I thought there was going to be a Mayor for the whole of Kent? Confusing, for sure. There will be a Kent Mayor whose job would be a bit like the Mayors of London, Manchester and the West Midlands. Those have been very successful in providing a high level strategic vision for things like transport and housing allocations and economic growth. That's what the Government wants a Kent Mayor to do, and it's where the "devolution" of powers from Central Government would happen – which could bring extra money for Kent.

Wow. That's a lot of changes. When do I get a say? Now. The whole process is quick and the existing Councils are trying to consult people, but time is tight as they have to tell Government their preferred solution by the end of November. The best way to have your say is to write to your local Kent and City Councillors, and your MP, now.

And I notice you've stopped saying "likely" and "maybe" and "probably". Yes, because there is no question that this is all going to happen, and quickly. The exact details will be known by early in 2026, and elections for the new Councils and Mayor could be held in May 2027. Probably.

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