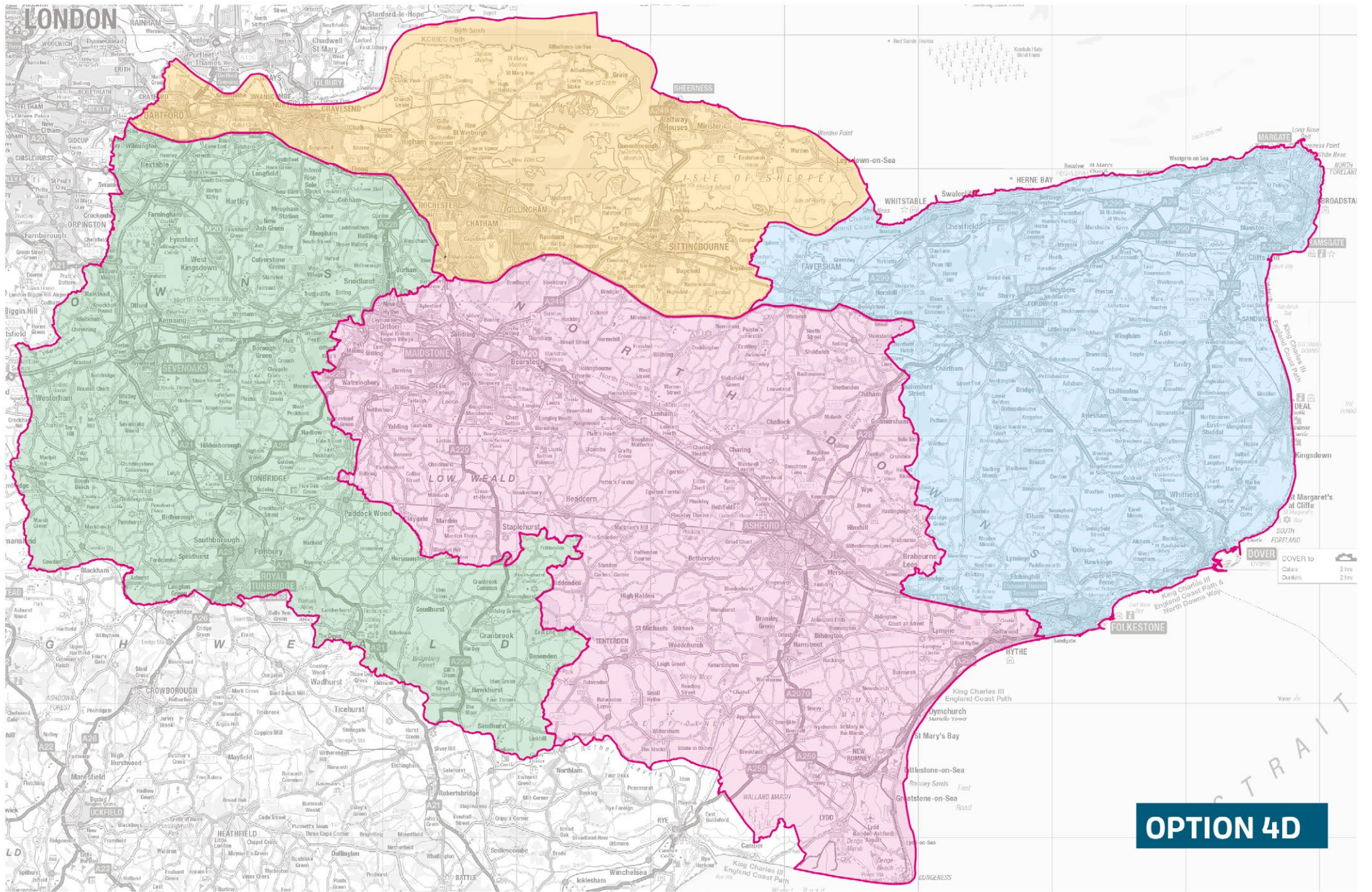


# KENT AND MEDWAY LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION STATUTORY CONSULTATION RESPONSE





**OPTION 4D**

# 1

## Does the proposal suggest sensible economic areas and geographies?

**YES** **Option 4D** proposes four unitary authorities for North Kent, West Kent, East Kent and Mid Kent, structured around functional economic geography rather than legacy administrative boundaries. This is fundamentally different from minimal-change or over-centralised alternatives. The geographies are credible and sensible because they:

- Align with established transport corridors (M2/A2 Thames Gateway, M20/HS1 growth corridor, A21 corridor and coastal economy).
- Reflect real travel-to-work patterns and housing market areas.
- Create balanced authorities within the 375,000–625,000 population range recognised as viable in recent LGR programmes.
- Avoid creating one disproportionately dominant authority.

Kent spans more than 75 miles geographically. A single-unitary model would risk over-centralisation and remoteness. Option 4D instead combines coherence with manageability.

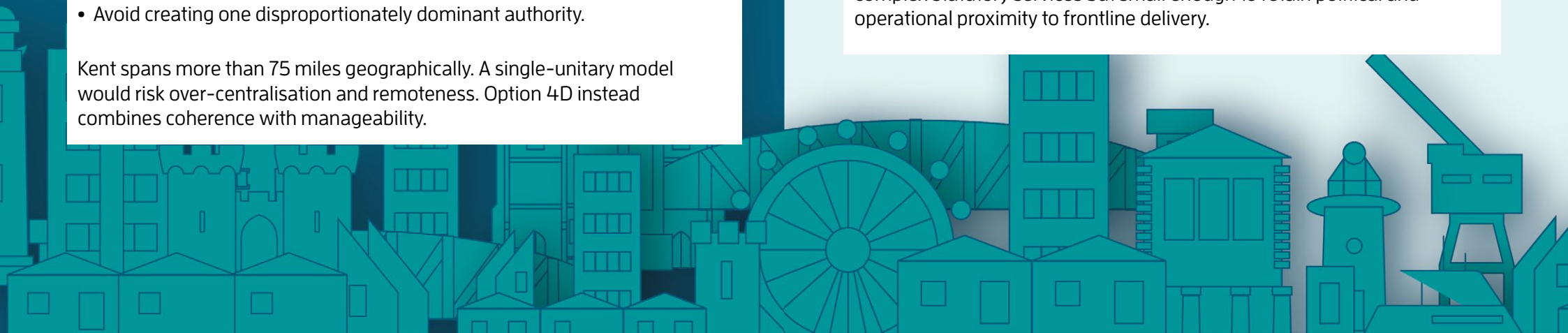
# 2

## Will the structures in the proposal be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?

**YES** **Option 4D** directly addresses the weaknesses of the current two-tier system of fragmented accountability, duplication, blurred responsibility and delayed decision-making. It is designed for delivery, not simply reorganisation. It improves outcomes by:

- Establishing clear single-tier accountability within each geography.
- Consolidating housing, planning, public health, adult social care and children's services within single organisations.
- Enabling genuine place-based service reform.
- Improving decision-making speed and transparency.

The four-authority configuration is deliberate. It is large enough to sustain complex statutory services but small enough to retain political and operational proximity to frontline delivery.



# 3

## Is the proposal the right size to achieve efficiencies and withstand financial shocks?

**YES** Financial modelling indicates recurring annual savings of £18.9m–£34.6m with a payback period of 7.9–14.5 years. However, the strength of **Option 4D** lies not only in savings but in structural resilience. It:

- Creates balanced tax bases and population sizes.
- Distributes financial risk across four viable authorities.
- Integrates demand drivers (housing, prevention, public health) with statutory services.
- Avoids concentration of financial exposure within a single mega-authority.

Evidence from elsewhere shows very large, over-centralised models risk remoteness, reduced accountability and operational overstretch. The balance of 4D provides both operational grip and strategic capacity and reduces system fragility.

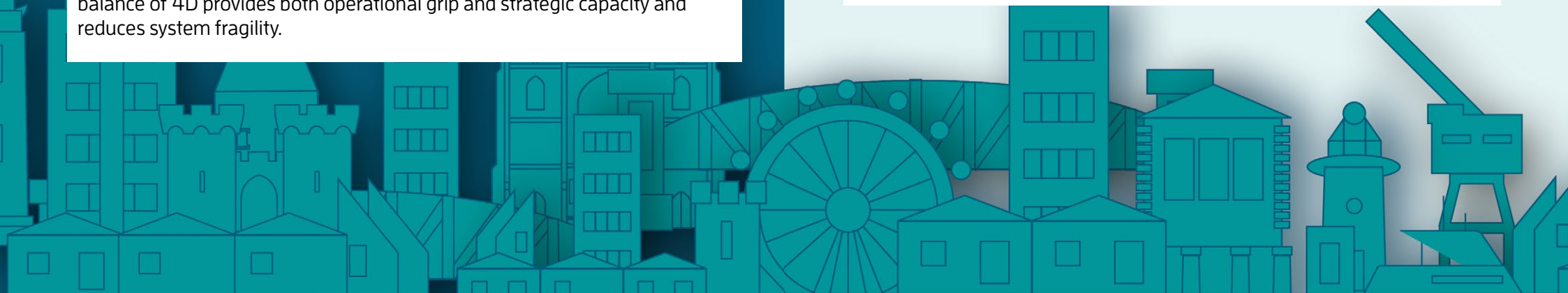
# 4

## Will the proposal put the area on a firmer financial footing, particularly given that some councils in the area are in receipt of exceptional financial support?

**YES** **Option 4D** removes structural duplication across 14 councils and aligns budget responsibility with service delivery accountability.

By integrating housing, homelessness, public health and social care within each unitary authority, the model enables prevention-led approaches that moderate long-term demand growth.

This structural alignment strengthens medium-term financial planning and system-wide sustainability.



# 5

## Will the proposal deliver high-quality, sustainable public services?

**YES** **Option 4D** creates the structural conditions necessary for service transformation, not merely administrative consolidation. It enables:

- Early intervention and prevention.
- Coordinated safeguarding and integrated SEND pathways.
- Joined-up housing and social care strategies.
- Stronger place-based commissioning.

Experience from work supporting refugee children illustrates the importance of manageable scale and local leadership. Locally developed initiatives promoting independence, wellbeing and community integration were possible because leadership and commissioning operated close to communities. Option 4D preserves that proximity while retaining sufficient scale for resilience.

# 6

## Has the proposal been informed by local views and will meet local needs?

**YES** **Option 4D** reflects engagement feedback and preserves historic civic centres including Canterbury, Maidstone and Medway.

The proposal aligns governance to recognisable communities and functional geographies rather than institutional boundaries. This ensures the new structure reflects people and place rather than preserving existing organisations for their own sake. Local feedback demonstrates that communities do not primarily define themselves by historic administrative structures, but by economic function and place. The proposal reflects a clear and coherent geography:

- **North Kent:** a growth corridor linked to the Thames Gateway, Medway towns and major infrastructure.
- **West Kent:** prosperous and knowledge-based, with strong links to London and innovation clusters.
- **East Kent:** coastal and serving as a gateway to continental Europe, with distinct maritime and visitor economies.
- **Mid Kent:** the historic heart of the county, centred around Maidstone and traditional civic institutions.

This functional taxonomy reflects how residents experience place, how businesses operate, and how services are increasingly configured. The proposal therefore aligns governance to lived geography rather than preserving institutional boundaries for their own sake.

# 7

## Does the proposal support devolution arrangements?

**YES** Option 4D is devolution-ready. It explicitly:

- Supports a Mayoral Strategic Authority model.
- Ensures balanced representation across Kent and Medway.
- Avoids dominance by a single large authority.
- Provides a credible platform for transport, skills, housing and economic development powers.

The four balanced authorities create a stable and proportionate base for future devolution arrangements, through the establishment of credible authorities capable of taking on transport, housing, skills and economic development powers. A single unitary authority risks distorting strategic balance and weakening devolution viability.

# 8

## Will the proposal enable stronger community engagement and the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment?

**YES** Option 4D strengthens democratic accountability by maintaining councils of manageable scale. It combines strategic capacity with democratic proximity, a defining strength compared to larger, more centralised alternatives. It:

- Improves councillor-to-resident ratios compared to larger consolidation models.
- Enables neighbourhood and area governance structures.
- Keeps decision-making closer to residents.



# 9

## Does the proposal sets out a strong public services and financial sustainability justification for boundary change?

**YES** Option 4D sets out a clear, evidence-based public service and financial sustainability justification for boundary change.

Local government reorganisation is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. It should be judged not on short-term administrative convenience, but on whether it establishes the right structures for the next 30–50 years. Option 4D does not simply adjust legacy boundaries; it reimagines them in light of contemporary economic geography, infrastructure patterns and public service delivery. By challenging existing boundaries, we challenge existing ways of working, and will use this moment as a catalyst for whole-system public service reform.

The justification for boundary change is grounded in three core principles: Public service integration, Financial sustainability, and Long-term structural resilience

Alignment with partner public sector geographies strengthens integration, simplifies governance, and supports whole-system reform. Getting the boundaries right now creates the structural conditions for sustained collaboration and innovation across the public sector.

# 10

## Summary

### Option 4D:

1. Is the only proposal that simultaneously achieves scale for resilience and locality for accountability.
2. Replaces fragmented two-tier governance with four clear single-organisations responsible for housing, social care, public health and safeguarding.
3. Will prevent over-centralisation while avoiding the fragility and risks inherent in very small councils.
4. Aligns decision-making with real economic geography, travel-to-work patterns and housing markets rather than legacy administrative boundaries.
5. Creates the structural conditions for prevention by integrating demand drivers such as housing and public health with high-cost statutory services.
6. Is the only configuration that is both operationally deliverable on day one and capable of supporting a Mayoral Strategic Authority and devolution.
7. Improves financial sustainability not primarily through savings, but through risk distribution, service integration and demand management.
8. Retains democratic proximity to communities while having sufficient capacity to deliver complex services such as children's social care.
9. Enables genuine whole-system public service reform rather than administrative restructuring by aligning boundaries with NHS, emergency services and economic geographies.
10. Represents the most proportionate, resilient and future-proof structure available to Kent and Medway.