

Parish Council draft wording for 28 November 2025 LGR submission

At an KALC extra-ordinary meeting in June 2025 executives from a range of county, borough and town councils in West Kent explained what LGR entailed and how they saw the next stage developing. Delegates were addressed about the proposed forthcoming changes under the government's LGR proposals which would lead to a new unitary authority. Under these proposals parish councils are being told that they would be more empowered and can be more proactively involved in community governance. To use the exact wording in the bill: *'...rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal Local Authorities, strengthening expectations on engagement and community voice.'*

The government has also identified Neighbourhood Area Committees as one way forward as a liaison with the new unitary authorities and this could include existing parish and town councillors on their board, as well as representatives from other community organisations.

Both suggestions have not had any qualifying information on which existing parish councillors can discuss the proposals. In essence the parishes are being asked to provide suggestions as to how they could operate with a new authority and offer proposals on what responsibilities could be transferred to parish control. At this stage we don't have a full or sufficient understanding of all the services that the current administrations at KCC and TMBC provide and what we could reasonably consider.

One point made a number of times at and since the meeting is, the importance of parish councils and how the decision-making process at ground level would be raised and especially valued; yet little guidance was given on how this would operate in practice. In none of the options for a unitary authority on the table for Kent at the moment has there been a detailed organizational structure or organogram presented which identifies where the parish council role fits in.

In relation to November 28 submission, it is appropriate and essential that parish councils are part of that submission. With a transition period from summer 2026 (when we have been told the Government decision will be announced) to a new unitary authority structure functioning by May 2028, parish councils need to be thinking strategically now about what they could and could not manage. The extra responsibilities will be huge not least because there will overall be less councillors with a larger area to cover. This means an urgency in planning ahead for what extra costs parish councils might be asked of. In the first instance parish councils will need to consider including a Transformation budget line in their forthcoming precept discussion for the April 2026 financial year.

Broadly speaking there are areas which a new unitary authority should continue to be responsible for. Services (in no particular order) such as refuse collection and recycling, highway maintenance, housing and building control, social care, parks and open spaces, car parking and leisure services are some of the more obvious key areas. But there needs to be an awareness that services not covered by the new unitary authority have to lead to more resources being provided for parish councils. These should include specific training for any new areas to be under parish council jurisdiction and office staffing, and the funds to pay for them. Power of competency should also be included in the submission with a view that clerks consider being CILCA trained if time and funds allow.

Parish Councils are operated by volunteers with full/part time careers or are retired; they have commitments such as parents, grandparents, carers and as councillors are unpaid. Current rules restrict the number of councillors a parish can have. It is often difficult to find new councillors who are able to give their time to attend a monthly meeting, take on specific responsibilities and be at other relevant council meetings (such as KALC, PPP, training, planning or other extra special interest committees). Therefore, adding extra burdens with proper resources should have been thought through by the Government and presented in time for a detailed submission at parish level to be made.

In going forward with their discussions, it would be really helpful to have a steer from the existing local authorities about how the parishes will interact with a new authority, how they will benefit in real terms and the impact upon them. With the economy in the state it is in currently, it would be unjust and inconsiderate to ask parish councils to vastly raise their precept in order to try and fund these additional responsibilities.

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on behalf of Parish Council Alliance, West Kent
Borough Green, Platt, Wrotham, Ightham, Shipbourne and Plaxtol
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