

Sevenoaks District Council Leader's Report
13 March 2025

As might have been predictable, Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has come to dominate the thoughts of Councillors and Officers.

The application for Kent and Medway to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme was rejected by the Minister and shortly after that all 14 Kent councils received a letter requiring them to start working on LGR.

From the District's point of view, I am initiating a series of Task & Finish Groups to examine the implications and opportunities presented by LGR. It is my intention that SDC will lead down the various thought paths and set a model for others to follow.

LGR will be costly to accomplish and may increase risk of service failure. Most of all, SDC is financially strong, which is not something that can be said of other councils across the county. Nevertheless, we have been told to do it or it will be done to us. My expectation is that the final model, which must be fully defined by November 2025 will leave the national government with an impossible choice because modelling already shows that any new arrangement will not be financially sustainable and they apparently "have no money".

The approach I am taking therefore must take into account the possibility that the LGR project will collapse. The SDC T&F groups may well identify real opportunities to improve services and/or reduce cost through sharing services, regardless of LGR, so I hope in the end the effort will be worth it.

There will be a presentation on LGR at the annual Sevenoaks Town Meeting which takes place this at 7pm on Monday at the Bat & Ball Centre. If you are interested, please come along.

Of more immediate interest, SDC finalised its budget for 2025-26 with an increase of 2.99%. It is a balanced budget and the council remains fully funded for a period of up to 10 years.

This week also agreed a further adaptation of the Waste and Recycling Strategy to ensure alignment with changing regulations which come into effect in April 2026. Change is coming and SDC will be communicating with residents on this. Based on a detailed survey of residents, most of the changes will be popular but even when changes work for most, there will always be some for whom they create difficulties, as happened with the introduction of the green recycling bags. Be assured that the Council will always seek to address and mitigate any inconvenience.