

KENT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Tonbridge and Malling Area Committee

MINUTES

Meeting on Thursday 23rd July at 7.30pm
Ditton Community Centre

Present:

Sarah Barker (Chair) - Kings Hill Town Council, Sue Butterfill (Vice Chair) - Borough Green Town Council, Sarah Huseyin (Secretary) Ightham and Shipbourne Parish Councils, Patricia Garrett and Anne Adams – Addington Parish Council, Tom Shelley - Aylesford Parish Council, Tim Shaw, Borough Green Town Council, S. Sangha - Burham Parish Council, Tim Bishop - East Malling & Larkfield Parish Council, Ed Bright – Hadlow Parish Council, Cathy Wynne - Hildenborough Parish Council, Kirsty Mitchem – Ightham Parish Council, Howard Clark – Platt Parish Council, Dan Beynon – Plaxtol Parish Council, Sandy Oram – Shipbourne Parish Council, Sue Bell – Snodland Town Council, Yvonne Tisson – Stansted Parish Council, Gwyneth Barkham – West Malling Parish Council, Harry Rayner – Wrotham Parish Council & KCC.

Guest Speakers: Damian Roberts, Chief Exec T&MBC, Angel Gomes – Vice Chair IAG T&M District, Charmaine Keatley, CEO KALC.

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1. **Apologies for absence:** David Thornewell – East Malling & Larkfield, Jacquie Westwood – Birling, Mike Taylor – Borough Green, Wendy Palmer - Platt, Nigel Newman – Ditton, West Peckham.
 2. **Introductions and Announcements:** Chair introduced Damian Roberts, CEO T&M Borough Council, Angel Gomes IAG T&M District, Charmaine Keatley – Chief Executive KALC.
 3. **Introduction to T & M IAG** (Kent Police Independent Advisory Group) - Angel Gomes, Vice Chair IAG T & M District introduced herself and said that the first meeting of the IAG would be in September and encouraged councillors to email her if they wanted to attend. The meeting will be held at TMBC Council Chamber, Gibson Drive. Secretary to provide a list of parish clerks to Angel.
 4. **Updates from TMBC on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)** - Damian Roberts

The decision on LGR was announced on 16th July 2026. They selected option 4B, it wasn't TMBC's preferred option, however, the West Kent Unitary will include the same councils; Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge & Malling, Sevenoaks, and Maidstone. No parish boundaries have been crossed, and existing parish councils will stay the same. The only council to be disaggregated is KCC; children's and adult services will be broken up into 4 unitaries. There is concern that some staff may leave and move to London due to job insecurity.

The warding will be the same in the new unitaries and there will be the following number of councillors per unitary:

North Kent: 81; **West Kent: 84**; Mid Kent: 60 and East Kent: 66

The government chose 4B because they wanted smaller councils to deliver housing, support economic growth and respect public sector boundaries.

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West Kent is a big unitary but not the biggest in the country. There will be a strategic partner to help us make the transition, and a single budget for implementation. Kent and Medway is complex and will be challenging.

Amanda Beer has been appointed Single Responsible Officer (SRO) Kent-wide and is also the Chief Executive of KCC. Tim Woolmer – Programme Director Leads the Kent-wide Programme Management Office (PMO)

Next Steps:

TMBC have until mid-August to submit new warding arrangements and there are 2 areas that need sorting. The Government is working on the Structural Changes Order, the legal means of getting there.

There will be elections in Spring 2027 for the shadow authority who will shape the budget and basic structure of the new unitaries, they will identify the infrastructure information. The strategic partner will be in place in August. There will be a Single Responsible Officer and Place Head for each area, this decision will be taken in the coming weeks. Now we know geography, a decision can be taken on how planning will be organised.

The new structure will take effect from 1st April 2028, “Vesting Day”, and the aim is for a seamless transfer ie, no-one will notice any differences in services. This is a big challenge.

In Kent and Medway, the town and parish elections will be aligned with unitary elections.

The Government will place financial controls on the unitaries, effective in the year before it goes live.

In summary:

Overall 4B is a good outcome and we are in a good place. There is good commitment and collaboration and expertise. The new structure will create opportunities for local government which will work in a more integrated way.

Questions from Members:

Is the objective to save money by reducing the number of councillors? Currently there are approx. 200 this will be reduced to 84.

Damian Roberts: Each councillor will be responsible for a larger area, not sure that money saving is an objective but allowances should be increased as it will be a tough job.

Taking into account Borough Councillors the current number is more like 230. The number of support staff will need to increase to help councillors, especially in adult services, education, and SEN when the case load is very high.

Where will the centre be?

Damian Roberts: Each council will probably remain where they are for now. The new administration will need modern buildings, the old council buildings are not ideal. Those elected to the new authority will make a decision.

East Kent has relatively low numbers and is potentially unsustainable. Income from a poor population with low property value is low and debt is high compared to other councils. It is possible that it will be in special measures within a short space of time.

Already some senior staff are leaving KCC as they are concerned about the disaggregation. There has been an increase in agency staff which is much more expensive. Disaggregation

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of KCC services ie adult services represents 70% revenue budget. (£1.65 billion) The service will have to continue with seamless arrangements which will be very challenging.

How will the changes affect staff?

Damian Roberts: There will be an impact on members and officers. All Chief Executives and Directors met on 23rd July to discuss how to support staff. There is a lot of uncertainty. The team in Kent and Medway are committed to making this happen seamlessly by keeping staff informed and ensuring staff are valued. The challenge is that there is an aging workforce, 40% will be retired in a few years. We need to highlight the benefits of the change.

Each unitary will have their own Directors and Chief Executives so at a senior level, staff numbers are likely to be increased rather than diminished.

Chair gave thanks to Damien and asked to send any further questions via email so that they can be passed to Damian.

5. Updates from KALC - Charmaine Keatley CEO KALC

LGR: KALC are working on asset transfers and on 24th August, Roger Taylor will be doing an online session on asset transfers. This is a free online event [Details](#) . The Structural Change Order will take effect by mid-March 2027, thereafter it will no longer be possible to acquire assets. This workshop will explain the process and attendance is strongly recommended.

The Government is expecting everything to be in place for 2028, there is concern that there may be inequality in between parished and unparished areas.

KALC are prioritising communities keeping assets.

There is a document on KALC website that explains what we want from the reorganisation.

Future of Area Committees: We would like to get other organisations within the unitary together. Do we continue with 13 area communities? Yes, but there will be a new strategic layer representing the new unitaries. It can be structured how members see fit.

Elections- A point was made about Parish elections and alignment to the unitary elections; If elections are held in 2027, the shadow council will serve for 1 year then after vesting day they will serve for a further 4 years. How are parishes supported through this as it will mean a 5 year term?

Chair said it is very important to look at the KALC website, ask your clerk or Laura Dyer for log in details if you haven't already got one as there is a lot of information there.

Chair will put out a questionnaire about the area committee.

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Questions:

Is consideration going to be given as to whether KALC constitutes as a county organisation or along authority lines?

Charmaine Keatley: The precedent is that they stay how they are; the area committees will change but it will be for the Chief Executives to determine.

Harry Rayner said there are active arrangements to bring about new town councils as they can generate more income than parishes.

General Questions:

A number of parishes have asked about the local plan, what is happening?

Damian Roberts: TMBC are still on track for bringing the local plan to councils. There is difficulty with South East water. Members will decide whether they have confidence in the plan.

Questions were raised about lack of water and low water pressure in various divisions within T&M and concerns about how the plan can progress without a guaranteed supply.

Damian Roberts: water is a shared concern. Matt Boughton has been good at updating on the water situation with his social media.

6. **Elections for Year 2026 - 2027:** Members proposed and seconded candidates who were duly elected:

- Chair: Sarah Barker
- Vice-Chair: Sue Butterfill
- Committee Secretary: Sarah Huseyin
- Learning & Development Officer: Sarah Barker

7. **Nominations for Representatives on outside Bodies for Year 2026-27**

- KALC Executive Committee 2 Members and a substitute

Sarah Barker, Tim Shaw and Sue Butterfill as substitute

- T&M Joint Transportation Board - Up to 3 Members

Sarah Barker, Tim Shaw and Sue Butterfill - it was suggested current members stay until we know what's happening as some JTB's have been disbanded. Harry Rayner thought JTB would continue until Spring 2027

8. **Approval of Minutes from AGM held on 9th October 2025** - Agreed
9. **Matters Arising & Actions Arising from these minutes** - None

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10. **Approval of the Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 23rd April 2026**
- Agreed
11. **Matters arising from the Minutes not otherwise on the agenda** - None
12. **TMBC Climate Change Forum** - An update (**circulated**)

Secretary circulated minutes from the last meeting and an initiative for a poster competition at schools on using less plastic and becoming a climate champion.

Reports from Meetings

- KALC Executive Committee Meetings 2026 - There was a meeting held on Thursday 4th June in person at County Hall. Minutes will be available on the KALC website
- Next KALC Executive meetings are Saturday 8th August via Zoom and in person on Saturday 10th October

T & M PPP held on 28th May 2026 Report from Cllr Sue Butterfill (Minutes circulated)

Sue Butterfill is Vice Chair of PPP. The next meeting is on 27th August, online or in person. There will be an update on LGR which is a standing agenda item.

13. **Training & Development**

Training Course and events are advertised on KALC and NALC Websites.

14. **Updates from TMBC and KCC Councillors present at the meeting**

Sue Bell reported that Matt Boughton had written to the Government about South East Water and the issue of a lack of GP's. Tonbridge and Malling has set in motion to form Tonbridge Town Council from May 2027. Planning permission has been given for the new Angel Centre.

Chair reported that there is now only 1 planning committee for TMBC; the meetings are overrunning, so there will need to be more frequent meetings.

15. **Proposed Topics for PPP to be held on 27th August 2026**

Local Government Reorganisation West Kent - A briefing from Cllr Matt Boughton and Damian Roberts.

Gwynneth Barkham raised the question of recycling blister packs and solar panels on car parks – Harry Raynber suggested writing to Robin Betts. Chair requested that questions are sent to Sarah Huseyin to forward.

Yvonne Tisson asked whether we could lobby for 30mph limits collectively on rural roads? Charmaine suggested this should be a question on the highways survey. Chair asked Yvonne to email her with the question.

Tim Shaw asked about Speedwatch and J5 slips - Chair suggested Tim does an A4 flyer for J5 Slips to bring it back on the agenda and asked Charmaine to put Speedwatch on the agenda of 6 monthly meeting with PCC and Kent Police

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Harry Rayner suggested lobbying the unitary candidates with any important issues.

Future Dates for PPP - 19th November 2026 and 4th February 2027

16. **Future Meetings of T & M Area Committee**

- Dates to be agreed for October 2026 and January 2027

We will circulate suggestions. October will be in person and January online.

17. **Points for Information.**

Information circulated prior to the meeting.

18. **AOB**

Kirsty Mitchem asked about litter clearing on verges; TMBC have £1 million budget and has been trying to get the schedule from TMBC. The Chair will ask for it to go on the PPP and request Waste Services to attend the meeting to give an explanation of how money is spent.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

Signed.....Dated.....