

The Kent Recombitment

“We will take strategic decisions and deliver local public services and seek genuine devolution of powers to both county and district level to ensure we are able to respond to the needs and aspirations of local people and save taxpayers money.”

**Source: Letter from all Kent Leaders to Eric Pickles,
Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government, June 2010**

1. Purpose

The Kent Recombitment, signed by the Leaders of Kent’s County, District, Borough and City Councils, is the foundation for our work together to plan and deliver public services in Kent more effectively, more accountably, at less cost and as close to service users as possible.

2. Our Principles

- All public services delivered to Kent’s residents and the £8billion spent in the county by the public sector must be made increasingly democratically accountable.
- Existing regional and national quango powers must be devolved to the most appropriate level.
- Kent’s 13 sovereign County and District Councils, together with our rich network of Parish and Town councils, are the “building blocks” for public service planning and delivery within the county.
- We recognise the strength of fighting together for local communities on issues of both county-wide and national importance and standing up for the interests of Kent’s residents.

3. Function of the Kent Recombitment

- Through the Kent Recombitment, we will work together to help shape and influence new government policy and its delivery within the county, as we are already doing.
- We will seek genuine devolution of powers to both county and district level to ensure we are able to respond to the needs and aspirations of local people and save taxpayers money:
 - We will support Kent County Council to exercise greater strategic and spatial powers within the county, working closely with local District Leaders through a “Forum” model.
 - We will support Kent’s District Councils to exercise greater influence in delivering/commissioning and targeting services within their areas
- Together, we will identify those services which may be better delivered at district level, those services and functions which may be better exercised at county level and those that may be better co-ordinated through local, outcome-based commissioning, bringing together District, local County Council and KCC Cabinet members.
- We will support greater devolution to our Parishes, Towns and local communities and always champion the needs of local residents and business in Kent.
- In our dealings with Government, we acknowledge the strength of speaking together on shared issues in representing the interests of Kent’s businesses and residents.

4. Form – How we will work together

- We will establish the “Kent Forum” (or other agreed name) of the County and District Leaders, with relevant KCC Cabinet Members for county-wide services (see below),

as the primary forum for delivering the Kent Recommitment, respecting the sovereign decision-making powers of individual councils.

- There will be no voting arrangements until full Governance proposals have been developed and agreed, including Cabinet Member and officer attendance.
- We will invite leaders of other public bodies with full democratic accountability, at an appropriate time, to join the Kent Forum (e.g. directly elected Police Commissioner) and we will work closely with all local public service providers.
- The role of the Kent Forum will be as a Kent-wide body to co-ordinate and agree shared priorities and progress. As such, it will consider and endorse Kent-wide strategies including those produced for “21st Century Kent – Unlocking Kent’s Potential”.
- The Forum will also consider cross-cutting policy issues within the County, beginning first with the implementation of Health Service reform within Kent and the enhanced role of democratically-elected local authorities within this reform.
- Within District boundaries, we will establish District-based pilots of local District and County members and others to oversee and shape delivery of the Kent Recommitment locally and to draw together local public services for greater effectiveness and efficiency.
- We will invite Kent MPs to join all meetings of the Kent Forum to build greater understanding of decision-making and accountability for total public service spending within Kent. Once a year, the Kent Forum will meet in Westminster.
- The number of partnerships across the county will be significantly reduced, to reflect this new and streamlined way of working.
- The Kent Forum will meet in shadow form with immediate effect (replacing the Kent Leaders Group).

5. Building a Local Economic Partnership

- Reflecting the above, we will work together for the success of a Local Economic Partnership (LEP) on which all 14 Leaders will be represented, either directly or through a mandated representative agreed through the Kent Forum.
- Within the LEP, we will recognise clearly defined sub-economic groupings which will exist as delivery bodies in their own right within the framework, with specific powers and assets as appropriate.
- By organising ourselves in this way, we are united in fighting together at county level and within our specific economic areas for our strategic priorities and we will ensure strategic level support for specific areas of Kent within the LEP, including the Thames Gateway, our Coastal Communities, Growth Points and rural West Kent.
- The LEP will support co-ordination and joint working with neighbouring LEPs on issues of shared interest to provide the strongest possible support for individual priorities.

6. Finance and Savings

- We will work together to support place-based budgets at County and District levels enabling total flexibility to respond to the needs and aspirations of local residents in the context of scarce resources.
- We will press for greater devolution of powers and budgets from national and regional quangos and agencies to the family of local government in Kent.
- We will fight for existing regional programmes to be funded until they end and for continuing support, where appropriate, when this funding goes.
- Cost saving, openness and transparency will be fundamental to all that we do.