



Minutes of online meeting of the Canterbury Forum on Tuesday 4 November 2025 at 7.00-9.00 pm.

Present: Cllrs Jean Butcher (Chair), Alan Baldock, Keith Bothwell, Connie Nolan and 20 members of the public

Apologies: Cllr Mel Dawkins, Cllr Pat Edwards, Cllr Pip Hazelton, Cllr Alex Ricketts, Lisa Carlson, Janet Morgan

1. Minutes of previous meeting 26 June 2025

The Minutes were approved

2. Local Government Reorganisation

Update from Cllr Alan Baldock

Cllr Baldock said that the existing councils were now putting together the business cases for the various different options for the boundaries of the new unitary authorities, which would then go to the Secretary of State, who would decide on one of the options. There would then be elections for the shadow unitary authorities in 2027, and after vesting day in 2028 the unitary authorities would be responsible for all the functions currently split between district councils and the county council. It was hoped that the eventual outcome would be the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority for the whole of Kent, with the funding benefits which would come with it.

The different options for the boundaries of the unitary authorities, with the business case for each, would be posted on the CCC website in the next few days, as agenda papers for the meeting of full Council and the special meeting of Cabinet on Thursday 20 November, at which CCC would decide on its preferred option.

<https://democracy.canterbury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=138&MIId=13987>

There were likely to be five options:

- (i) a single unitary authority for the whole of the county (proposed by KCC) with 118 councillors
- (ii) 3 unitary authorities, with Canterbury district combining with Thanet, Dover, Ashford, and Folkestone and Hythe districts and having 95 councillors
- (iii) 4 unitary authorities, with East Kent being composed of Canterbury, Dover and Thanet districts and having 66 councillors,
- (iv) 4 unitary authorities, with East Kent consisting of Canterbury, Dover and Thanet districts plus Faversham and Folkestone detached from their current districts, and having 85 councillors.
- (v) 5 unitary authorities, with Canterbury combining with Faversham and Thanet

The number of electors represented by each councillor would vary between the different options. In a single unitary with 118 councillors, each would represent about 7000 electors. In the 3 unitaries model, each councillor would represent about 5000 electors. In either of the 4 unitaries models, the ratio of councillors to electors would be a bit under 5000. This compared with the ratio of about 3000 in the existing district.

The divisions for the election of councillors for the shadow unitary authorities in 2027 will be based on the current KCC divisions. There are likely to be 2 councillors per division, with a small number of existing 2-member divisions split. The divisions will in due course be reviewed by the Boundary Commission, probably in 2030, before elections in 2031 or 2032.

The business cases recognised the financial savings which were likely to result from the reorganisation. The costs of social care, for instance, were increased by the division of responsibilities between two tiers, which made early intervention more difficult. Having the same authority responsible for both housing and social care would be more efficient. The historical evidence indicated that unitary authorities were able to reduce costs compared with a two-tier system. There would be initial costs involved in making the changes, but savings would be the eventual outcome, and all the business cases anticipated savings within a period of six or seven years.

Discussion

Asked about the Charter Trustees who would be able to ensure the continuation of civic roles and ceremonies until new arrangements were in place, Cllr Baldock said that they could function for perhaps five years if need be. They would be unitary authority councillors, would be appointed by the unitary authority, and would have an annual general meeting. The costs of this arrangement would be not more than about £10,000 per annum and would be covered by a small precept. It would be a transitional arrangement, not a long-term one, and could be put in place as part of the Structural Changes Order governing the transition as a whole, whose timetable would be set out in an Implementation Order.

Cllr Baldock was asked what provision was being made for CCC staff, who would be affected by the changes. He emphasised that putting in place the new arrangements for staff would not be a cost-cutting exercise. The same work would still need to be done, and low- or middle-ranking roles would be less affected than those at higher levels. Individual conversations were taking place with staff, and there would be opportunities for staff to enhance their skill levels.

3. Park and Ride provision

Janet Morgan had submitted the following question, but was unable to attend the meeting as a result of the date being changed.

I would like to know what research is being done to find out how to make the Sturry Road Park and Ride more popular/usable.

This was closed due to under use, reopened and then apparently not paying its way. In the meantime, the Local Plan is proposing an additional Park and Ride on Littlebourne Road, about 2.2 miles from the bus station. Unless we understand where people want to go from their approach to the city, the services may not be effective. If Sturry Road is under-utilised, perhaps people do not want to go to the bus station. Maybe most cars are through traffic? Or maybe there are also other reasons? Unless desired destination points and disincentives to P&R are well understood, the plans come to nought.

This is not a new issue given the history of Sturry Road. What intelligence has been gained and how will it be used to improve uptake of Park and Ride? This is also a basic requirement to have evidence for whether an additional P&R will have any effect on traffic load on A257.

The question had been passed to Cllr Alex Ricketts as Cabinet member for Transport. He was unable to attend but had said that he would be happy to attend a future meeting and have a more wide-ranging discussion on transport issues.

Cllr Baldock said that whereas the previous administration had not really favoured Park and Ride provision and had seen it as something which had to pay for itself, the current administration saw it as one of the tools for reducing the number of cars coming into the city centre and reducing congestion and pollution. The new facility proposed for Littlebourne Road would be a 'Park and Bus' facility encouraging people coming into Canterbury to leave their cars and use a fast and frequent regular bus service which would also serve local residents. Other measures helping to reduce city centre congestion including zoning for car park charges and this had reduced the numbers driving to car parks in the city centre. After the post-Covid drop in Park and Ride use, numbers had been steadily rising again, including for Sturry Road. Stagecoach had been able to make smaller buses available and this had helped. The overall costs for Park and Ride services were about £1.37m and about £1.2m was recouped with the deficit being made up from other car park charges.

Peter Styles suggested that a bus-first strategy was not by itself enough to reduce city centre congestion, and CCC need to move forward faster on transport sustainability. Park and Ride services only catered for people who used their cars to get to them. They did not help to reduce, for instance, commercial traffic crossing the city, or school runs, or driving to the hospital or the University of Kent. He and others would like to see the use of other 'economic nudges' such as a congestion charge, a low emissions zone, or a workplace parking levy. Cllr Baldock said that CCC was adopting an incremental approach in order to take people with it. He anticipated that a Mayoral Strategic Authority would be in a position to take other measures, for instance by having more control over bus services and over a larger area.

Jennifer Holland said that people using the Park and Ride did not all want to go to the city centre, and more information should be provided about what the intermediate stops were. The Sturry Road Park and Ride buses did not at present stop at Canterbury Riverside but this would be a suitable place for them to do so. Cllr Baldock said that the route had previously the Military Road CCC offices but as this was no longer necessary he would look into the suggestion.

Bill Burnett suggested that, taking the point that Park and Ride services should not be assessed simply on the basis of costs, they should also serve the interests of the business and commercial community in the centre. Cllr Baldock said that the disadvantage of having free or cheap parking in the centre was that it encouraged people to stay for a length of time, thereby making it more difficult for other people to make quick trips into the centre. Encouraging more people to park outside the centre had left overall numbers unchanged.

Mike Walling said that it would be good to have further discussion of these and other transport related issue, and Cllr Butcher said that a date would be found for the next meeting which would enable Cllr Ricketts to attend.

4. Any other business

Guy Mayhew drew attention to the campaign to preserve the heritage Biggleston lampposts which KCC wanted to remove. He said that to preserve them CCC would need to issue an emergency Article 4 Direction, and he asked what had been done about this. Cllr Baldock and Cllr Nolan said that this was being addressed.

5. Date of next meeting

Cllr Butcher said that this would be a date early in the new year, probably in February. Cllr Baldock pointed out that the final version of the Local Plan for the Regulation 19 stage would be on the agenda of the special meetings of Council and Cabinet on 20 March, that prior to that it would be considered by the Overview Committee on 6 March, when members of the public could ask to speak, and that this timing could be kept in mind.