

Why we believe our two organisations should unite for stronger community care and what this means for you – **our patients, staff and our communities**



**Stronger
together**

A new chapter for community health in Kent and Medway

Helping people in Kent and Medway to lead their best and healthiest lives is at the heart of everything we do.

It's this shared purpose — and the shared challenges we face — that have led Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT) and Medway Community Healthcare (MCH), to explore becoming one organisation.

Our communities are changing. People are living longer, often with more complex health needs. Yet access to care can vary depending on where you live, and long waits for some services persist. At the same time, we face growing pressures from financial constraints and workforce shortages.

Rather than face these challenges alone, KCHFT and MCH, which is a community interest company (CIC), are choosing to unite — not as a takeover, but as a partnership of equals. Together, we believe we can build a stronger, more resilient organisation that delivers better care, closer to home.



What does this mean for you?

For patients and communities:



- **better access** to care, especially in areas with limited access to services
- **more consistent services** across Kent and Medway
- **stronger neighbourhood teams** delivering care closer to home.
- **improved health outcomes** through better use of data and joined-up care.

For staff:



- **more career opportunities** and training
- **fairer pay and conditions**, especially for MCH staff, who would have the stability and funding of an NHS trust, which isn't always guaranteed as part of a CIC
- **stronger support** for wellbeing and inclusion
- **a shared culture** that values both NHS and CIC strengths.

For all:



- **more efficient use of resources**
- **a stronger voice** for community services in system planning
- **better digital systems** and estates planning
- **improved financial sustainability.**

We're still in the early stages of discussion and are committed to working with our staff, patients, communities and partners to explore all options. Our preferred approach is for MCH to join KCHFT as part of the NHS family, through a transfer of services and staff.

Together — in whatever form we take — we will continue working with our health and care partners to deliver the best possible services for our communities.

Let's build something better and stronger for our communities together.



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About this document

This document sets out why we believe Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust and Medway Community Healthcare should come together as one organisation.

It's a summary version of a larger technical strategic outline case, which sets out why we think we need to do things differently and what we think the benefits are.

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**Let us know
what you think**

**Your voice
matters**

Whether you're a member of staff, a patient, or one of our valued partners — we want to hear from you. Your feedback will help shape how services are delivered and how we work together. Find out how on page 11.

Who are we?

Both organisations are deeply rooted in their communities and share a commitment to high-quality, compassionate care.

Category	Medway Community Healthcare (MCH)	Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT)
Organisation type	Community interest company (CIC) 99% of staff are shareholders in the organisation and an elected members forum ensures that the voices of staff and shareholders are heard at meetings of the Board and its committees.	NHS trust All staff are members of the Foundation Trust with elected public and staff governors acting as ambassadors for the organisation and providing a public and staff voice.
Established	2011	2011
Mission	Lead the way in excellent healthcare	Empower adults and children to live well, be the best employer, and work with our partners as one
Values	Caring and compassionate, deliver quality and value, work in partnership	Compassionate, aspirational, responsive, excellence
Funding	£80million	£325 million
Workforce (WTE)	1,500 staff	5,300 staff
CQC Rating	Good	Outstanding
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliver care closer to home - Provide flexible, efficient services - Respect dignity and privacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Putting communities first - Better patient experience - Great place to work - Sustainable care
Services	More than 40 community services in Medway and surrounding areas	More than 70 services in Kent, Medway, East Sussex, London
Governance	Independent Board with CIC accountability	NHS Trust Board with public accountability

Why do we need to do things differently?

Like many parts of the NHS, we are under pressure:

More people need care

The population is growing and ageing. By 2040, the number of people aged 65+ in Kent and Medway is expected to rise by more than 40 per cent.



Workforce pressures

Recruiting and retaining staff is increasingly difficult, especially in community nursing.



Services are fragmented

Different providers, systems and standards can lead to delays, duplication, and confusion for patients.

Health inequalities are widening

People in deprived areas live more than a decade less in good health than those in more affluent areas.



Financial constraints

Both organisations are operating at breakeven, but face ongoing savings targets of 3 to 6 per cent of turnover.

The NHS nationally is also shifting towards neighbourhood-based care, where services are more local, joined-up, and focused on prevention. This merger supports that direction.

We believe this merger will help make care more joined-up, easier to access and better suited to the needs of local people.

Our two organisations believe uniting will make us stronger to face these challenges and build services fit for the future.

What are the benefits?

This merger is about building a stronger, more joined-up community health service for everyone in Kent and Medway. It will bring real benefits for patients, staff, and the wider health and care system.

For patients and communities:



We know that where you live can affect the care you receive. Our goal is to change that — so everyone can access high-quality care, no matter their postcode.

Here's what the merger will help us deliver:

Better access to care:

Especially in underserved areas like coastal and rural communities, where health needs are often greatest.

More consistent services:

We'll reduce variation in how services are delivered across Kent and Medway, so patients get the same high standard of care wherever they live.

Stronger neighbourhood teams:

Services will be more local, more joined-up, and better tailored to the needs of each community.

Improved health outcomes:

By using data more effectively, we can target support where it's needed most and help people stay well for longer.

Less repetition:

Patients won't have to repeat their story multiple times — services will be better connected and easier to navigate.

Focus on prevention:

We'll invest more in keeping people well, not just treating illness.

We'll still deliver care in the same places, with the same dedicated teams — but over time, services will become more integrated and responsive.



For staff:



We know change can bring uncertainty, especially for those in corporate or support roles. But this merger is also a chance to create a better, more supportive working environment for everyone.

Here's what it means for you:

More career opportunities:

A larger organisation means more roles, more training, and more chances to grow.

Fairer pay and conditions:

Especially for MCH staff, who would have the stability and funding of an NHS trust, which isn't always guaranteed as part of a CIC. TUPE protections apply — your terms and conditions will be honoured.

Stronger support for wellbeing and inclusion:

You'll be part of a wider network with more resources and a shared commitment to staff wellbeing.

A shared culture:

We're bringing together the best of both organisations — the innovation and agility of a CIC, and the stability and scale of the NHS. Together, we'll build a shared culture that captures the best of both organisations.

More resilient teams:

By pooling resources, we can reduce pressure on individuals and improve work-life balance.

We're committed to open communication, early clarity on roles, and involving you in shaping the future.



For the wider system:



This merger supports the ambitions of the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System and national NHS priorities.

It will help us:

Use resources more efficiently:

Reducing duplication and making every penny of public money count.

Plan better:

With a single organisation, we can take a more strategic approach to estates, digital systems, and workforce planning.

Strengthen our voice:

A unified community provider will have more influence in system-wide decisions and planning.

Improve financial sustainability:

By streamlining services and sharing infrastructure, we can deliver better care within our means.



What will change?

Patients will still see the same teams in the same places — but behind the scenes, we'll be working more closely together. Over time, services will become more joined-up, with early focus on:

- integrated frailty pathways and urgent community response
- children's therapies
- virtual wards and discharge-to-assess

- rehabilitation, end-of-life care, and long-term condition management.

We'll also invest in digital tools and automation to improve patient experience and free up staff time for care.



What have we heard so far about our plans?

We know that any change of this scale must be shaped by the people it affects most — our patients, staff, partners, and local communities. That's why we've made listening a priority from the very beginning.

How are we engaging?

We want to make sure voices are heard and feedback is acted on. So far, this has included:

- staff webinars and briefings
- stakeholder letters to local authorities, MPs, NHS partners, and voluntary organisations
- media statements and updates on our websites and social media
- meetings with councillors and scrutiny committees
- drop-in sessions and FAQs for staff.

This is just the start — and we'll continue to listen and involve people throughout the process.

What people are telling us

Our commissioner for adult and children's community services, NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board, has expressed strong support for the merger. They highlighted the importance of: Equitable access to care, simplified governance and a more resilient and capable community provider.

Our partners have been supportive, recognising the potential benefits for local people. However, they've been clear that local services and funding must be protected.

Transparency and accountability are essential. We've committed to maintaining a strong local presence and continuing to report to local scrutiny bodies.

Feedback from staff has been generally positive, with many seeing the merger as a natural next step.

- MCH staff welcomed the opportunity for greater career stability, access to NHS benefits.
- KCHFT staff valued the potential for improved patient experience, shared learning, and stronger collaboration.

At the same time, we've heard concerns — particularly around:

- job security, especially in corporate and support roles
- cultural integration between an NHS trust and a community interest company.

In response, we've created a dedicated people and culture workstream and tailored engagement plans to support staff through the transition.



"It makes complete sense that as Medway is in Kent, we have one organisation serving the whole of the region."

- **MCH staff member**

"From a patient's perspective this would be good news for the sharing of good practice and resource."

- **KCHFT staff member**

"It makes sense to join the communities — we have such close borders and yet are subject to a 'postcode lottery' by remaining separated."

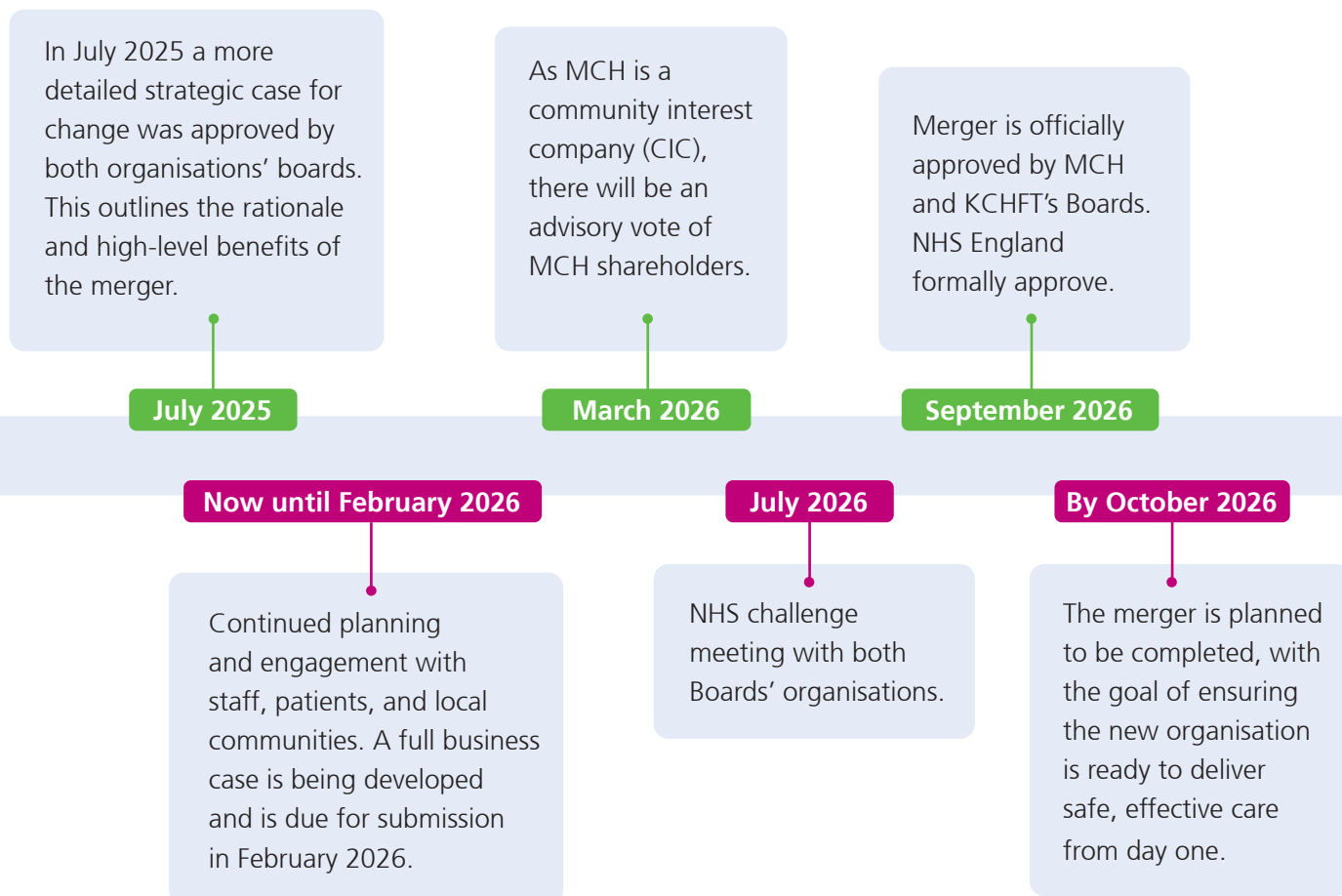
- **KCHFT staff member**

"It would be much more seamless and less confusing for our patients. Being joined up would allow ideas and ways of working to be better shared."

- **MCH staff member**



So, what next?



Your voice matters

Our communities and colleagues will be involved throughout this process. Your feedback will help shape how services are delivered. There will be opportunities to ask questions, share concerns and help make the new organisation work for everyone.

How you can give your views:

There are many ways in which you can give us your views. You can:



find out more information on our website

www.kmstrongertogether.nhs.uk



give your views through a survey

<https://surveys.kentcht.nhs.uk/s/HXRKK7>



email us at

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write to us at

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Frequently asked questions

What other options were considered?

We didn't jump straight to a merger. A full options appraisal was carried out, including:

- a strategic partnership
- integration of corporate and support services
- a full merger (the preferred option)
- a merger with local acute trusts.

Each option was assessed for its impact on patients, staff, and financial sustainability. The full merger scored highest across all areas — offering the greatest benefits with manageable risks.

How will it affect my care?

You should see very little change to your care. You'll continue to see the same professionals in your community or at home. Over time, we hope you'll benefit from:

- even better-quality care
- more advanced technology
- shorter waits and more support between appointments.

Will it reduce waiting times?

Yes, that's the aim. Currently, waiting times vary across Kent and Medway due to different local contracts.

As part of the new community services contract and merger, we're reviewing care pathways to:

- standardise services
- learn from teams who've successfully reduced waits
- improve access and consistency across the county.

Is this a merger or a takeover?

While MCH staff and services will transfer to KCHFT, this is not a takeover. We're merging as partners — combining the best of both organisations to tackle shared challenges and improve care.

Who decided on this change?

The choice to work together has been made independently by the two Boards at KCHFT and MCH.

This decision is supported by our commissioning partners and local authorities and will need to be agreed by NHS England.

Is this just to save money?

No. While financial sustainability is important, the primary driver is improving care.

This merger will:

- strengthen services
- make us more resilient
- help us deliver better care for patients.

What will a single, larger organisation offer that the existing separate trusts cannot?

A larger organisation brings:

- greater buying power
- easier recruitment and retention
- more efficient service delivery
- a stronger voice for community services
- faster learning and innovation across teams.

What happens to my data?

Your data remains secure and confidential. Initially, both organisations will keep separate systems, but over time we'll bring them together.

Will this merger mean I will have to reapply for my job if I am a Medway member of staff?

TUPE protections apply and we will be transferring colleagues to KCHFT on their current terms and conditions. There is no blanket requirement to reapply for roles.

I am worried our culture and identity will be lost when we merge

Preserving the strengths of both organisations is a priority. We'll be looking at the best of both cultures to shape a new identity for our colleagues. The transformation required to deliver sustainable services for our communities means change is inevitable and we must adapt and shape our organisation together so it is fit for purpose.

What would happen if the two organisations stayed as they are?

We'd miss the opportunity to combine resources, strengthen services and avoid future financial challenges.

For MCH, remaining a small organisation would make it harder to meet rising demand and financial pressures without affecting services. This merger is a proactive step to protect and grow community care.

Will all the policies, procedures and digital systems change overnight?

No. We'll continue using current systems and policies. Any changes will be carefully planned and only made where they benefit staff and patients.

Will there be a disruption to care?

Maintaining high-quality care is our top priority. The merger work will happen behind the scenes while services continue as usual.



Alternative formats

If you need communication support or would like this in an alternative format, please contact the KCHFT Communications and Engagement Team.



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Email:

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www.kentcht.nhs.uk



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