

# THE FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT <sup>5</sup>

## Members' Meeting, 17 January, 1994

JACK WOOLFORD

Our second meeting on this subject, addressed by the same three speakers, was even better attended than the first.

Mike Burchall (of KCC)'s nutshell message was: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!". He queried the need for the review, defended the status quo and described the collapse of consensus on the details of possible mergers of district councils, precisely on the option of no change. If this was unacceptable, the sensible alternative despite its strategic weakness and the loss of specialised services was three areas, East, West and North Kent, rather than seven.

Crispin Davies, of the Kent Association of Parish Councils, also queried the need for review and the prospect for savings and stressed the need for strategic overviews. He added that any rearrangement of Kent into unitary areas, from three to seven, would be no less remote from Dover which would have fewer councillors to represent local views. He listed the existing limited powers of parish councils and advocated increased local control.

Lesley Cumberland of Dover District Council said that the County Council's wish for the status quo was unlikely to be acceptable. The Association of District Councils had agreed on 7 unitary areas but Ashford had reneged. Dover's best option was union with Canterbury and Thanet which had interests in common: a large town with a regional shopping centre and hospital, a university, and arts facilities. History, tourism and seaboard interests were also shared.

David Shaw, the Member for Dover, said that Maidstone was too remote. Although Dover District Council was well managed it was too small to stand alone and would have to merge with Canterbury or Thanet or both. The headquarters of the new East Kent Authority should be in the new office development of Dover Port, looking towards Europe. The town council option was not realistic.

Our submission to the Local Government Commission is based on the responses to questions by the five discussion groups chaired by Terry Sutton, Mike McFarnell, Leo Wright, Lawrence Gage and Marjory Wright.