



Alison McGovern MP  
Minister of State for Local Government & Homelessness  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

17 January 2026

Dear Alison McGovern

**Serious concerns regarding the Response from Oxford City Council  
on the potential postponement of May 2026 local elections**

We write as elected members of Oxford City Council following the Full Council meeting of 14 January, specially convened specifically to consider whether the local elections scheduled for May 2026 should proceed or be postponed.

After full and extensive debate, a **clear majority of councillors were unequivocally of the view that the May 2026 elections must take place as scheduled**. In fact, 80% of councillors who expressed a view at that meeting (24 out of 30) felt strongly that the elections should go ahead. This was not a marginal or reluctant conclusion, but a strongly held position grounded in democratic principle and accountability to the electorate.

While councillors acknowledged that preparations for Local Government Reorganisation place additional demands on officer time and organisational capacity, they were reassured by the report from the Chief Executive which expressed confidence that (i) “sufficient resources are available to enable the elections to be delivered securely and successfully” and (ii) “should the elections proceed as planned, sufficient resource and leadership capacity would be in place to ensure officer’s ability to deliver LGR successfully in our area”. While the report flagged that “this may impact on officer’s capacity to deliver other areas of the Council’s work” it did not provide any evidence or quantify that risk. Having taken note of the report, the **overwhelming view of councillors at the meeting was that such pressures do not justify suspending the democratic process**.

In addition, several councillors questioned whether the marginal capacity gained by postponing the elections would be significant at all.

Members were clear that the right of Oxford's residents to choose their representatives at the expected time is fundamental to local democracy. Cancelling or postponing elections for reasons of administrative convenience was widely regarded as unacceptable. Many councillors expressed concern that postponement would further erode public trust in the democratic process.

Councillors also noted the uncertainty surrounding the timing and implementation of any future unitary authority elections. While the Government's indicative timetable, published in July, sees elections to new (shadow) councils in May 2027, and those councils going live in April 2028, LGR is a complex process and there are no guarantees that this timetable will be achieved.

In that context, postponing the 2026 elections would create a democratic gap with no firm or guaranteed endpoint - a position that the majority of members of the Council were not prepared to endorse.

In summary, the council's majority position is clear:

- **The May 2026 elections should proceed**
- **Democratic legitimacy and accountability must take precedence over administrative expediency**
- **Postponement would run directly counter to the expressed will of elected members and the reasonable expectations of Oxford's residents (several of whom were in the public gallery)**

So, we were dismayed to read the Leader's formal response to your letter of 18 December, which does not accurately represent the Council view. The letter quite clearly under-plays the strength of feeling and omits to mention the size of the majority view expressed by members of the council, while over-emphasising concerns about capacity issues.

Perhaps this is not surprising as the special meeting to discuss this was only convened after opposition councillors demanded it, and, when the agenda came out, there was no motion listed on the agenda, and no plans for a vote. Many councillors at the meeting expressed their disappointment and frustration that they were not being allowed a vote on this important decision (as to how to reply to the Government's question on potential postponement), in spite of having requested specifically, earlier in the day, that a vote be taken. Sadly, the fact that this point was made many times is not fully reflected in the minutes.

With regard to capacity issues, a number of points made in Cllr Brown's letter are questionable:

- Reference to the relatively larger burden on this council in preparing its proposal for a three-unitary authority model, as opposed to the burden on the councils proposing the other two models, is irrelevant. This task is completed.
- Reference to the load of over 200 existing town and parish council elections due to take place across Oxfordshire in May 2027 is misleading, as this load will be shared with South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire District Councils, as it is now.

- The argument that the complexity and scale of work required to prepare for elections in 2027 means that it would be preferable for that work to start now, rather than post-May, is surely illogical, as this work cannot begin until the chosen unitary model is known. Only then can relevant boundary changes be determined.

In summary:

- the process of arriving at a decision was, in itself, not properly democratic, with the leader assuming undue authority in framing the response
- stated concerns about capacity are questionable and were not discussed by the full council
- the strength and size of the majority view was not fully reported in the letter

**In light of these issues, we urge the Government to give decisive weight to this democratically expressed view when reaching its decision on May elections in Oxford, and to resist any approach that would normalise the cancellation of elections in circumstances where they remain entirely practicable.**

Yours sincerely,

Independent Oxford Alliance Members of Oxford City Council

Cllr David Henwood, Leader of the IOA group

Cllr Judith Harley

Cllr Anne Stares

Cllr Ian Yeatman