



Ms Caroline Green, Chief Executive & Ms Emma Jackman, Monitoring Officer
Oxford City Council
Town Hall, St Aldate's, OX1 1BX

12 January 2026

Dear Ms Green and Ms Jackman

Procedural concerns regarding the Special Meeting of the Council on Wed 14 January, at 5pm

In the letter from the Government, dated 18 December 2025, Alison McGovern MP, Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness, invited views from Councils on whether or not the forthcoming local elections in May 2026 should be postponed. The letter says quite clearly that the Secretary of State's view is that '**councils** are in the best position to judge the impact of potential postponements' on their area. Furthermore, it says: 'He is clear that **should a council say** they have no reason for postponement, then we will listen. But if you voice genuine concerns about your capacity, then we will take these concerns seriously.' Taking these two sentences together, the 'you' in this case clearly means the council, not the Leader of the City Council as an individual.

In other words, although the letter was directed and addressed to 'Dear Leader', the text clearly implies that any response from Cllr Susan Brown in her capacity as Leader of the City Council should be given on behalf of the Council as a whole and based on a council decision.

The IOA therefore notes with concern that (i) in the briefing paper for the above Special Meeting, paragraph 4 states 'The content of the letter to the Secretary of State is a matter for the Leader to determine', (ii) that the word 'No' is entered against 'Key Decision' (how can this be anything but a key decision?) and (iii) that the agenda for the meeting itself does not include a motion on which Council members can vote in respect of this issue.

Despite the fact that paragraph 5 of the briefing paper says 'All members of the Council have the opportunity to express a view about the government's invitation', it is at least arguable, based on how the briefing paper and agenda for the meeting are put together, that Cllr Brown is planning to make the decision herself on the view to be conveyed to the Secretary of State.

The IOA contends that such a course of action, if taken, would not be legitimate, either morally or procedurally.

Morally, a decision of such significance for the electorate would necessarily require consideration and decision by the full Council. Procedurally, were the Leader of the Council to assume this level of authority, this would be in clear contravention of the City Council's own constitution in at least the following two respects:

- One of the five areas of Council responsibility (as opposed to Executive responsibility) identified in paragraph 3.2 of the Constitution is 'elections and electoral registration';
- paragraph 5.16.26 makes it clear that the 'powers to do with holding elections' sit with the Returning Officer, who is appointed by the Council (5.16.22) – and who is, therefore, answerable to the Council.

The IOA hereby seeks reassurance in writing that there is no intent, by this briefing paper or otherwise, for the Leader of the Council to assume sole responsibility for a decision relating to the postponement, or not, of the May 2026 elections.

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In so doing, we note that opposition councillors have expressed a clear opinion that these elections should go ahead, and, given that Labour is a minority administration, the Labour group cannot take it upon themselves to make the decision either. The decision on what view to report to the Secretary of State must be taken on the basis of a vote in the chamber following a comprehensive debate, for which time at the meeting must be allowed, by the full Council.

Only then will the Secretary of State receive a legitimate and valid response.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Gwinnett

Dr Anne Gwinnett
Party Chair