



9 January 2026

Dear Oxford City Councillors

On Wednesday, you have your first opportunity to discuss a hugely important decision: whether or not to go ahead with the planned City Council elections in May this year.

Please do not underestimate the significance of this decision. Your conclusion will speak volumes about your commitment, or otherwise, to democracy.

By its very definition, local democracy allows the people a voice in charting the course of their future. In our representative democracy, the people get to choose who represents them on the council. Citizen participation is the foundation that makes democracy strong. So, to deny citizens the opportunity to vote is to undermine the very premise of our democratic system.

Looking at the specifics of the decision before you, we need to consider what would be the consequence of not holding the elections in May 2026. This would be a cancellation, not a 'postponement' as framed by the Labour Government, because the next elections (in May 2027 at the earliest) would be only to a shadow council, leaving the existing City Council authority in place until at least May 2028. (There is, of course, a risk of slippage in the timeframe, so these dates represent the most optimistic scenario.)

This means that the existing make-up of the City Council (as constituted since the last election in 2024) will remain in place for at least 4 years, effectively denying the public their right to influence the direction of travel.

There is of course the question of cost – and this will no doubt be used by some to argue for a cancellation of elections in May. However, other Oxfordshire councils (West Oxfordshire and Cherwell, both led by a minority Lib Dem administration) have already indicated that they will go ahead with the planned elections in May 2026, with Cllr Andy Graham, leader of WODC, saying "Local government reorganisation will require an enormous amount of work, however, that is well in hand with our partnership authorities who are working closely with us. As such, there is no practical reason to postpone the election."

Why would this be any different for Oxford City Council?

Could the answer be linked to it being led by a Labour administration? The Local Government Chronicle reports that, as of today, 31 of the 63 affected councils have confirmed they plan to proceed with their elections, while the media are reporting that only four Labour-led councils have done so.

The Electoral Commission has raised concerns about the prospect of delays to council elections. Vijay Rangarajan, the watchdog's chief executive, said there was "a clear conflict of interest in asking existing councils to decide how long it will be before they are answerable to voters".

**Every City Councillor has a say in this decision. Please use this opportunity to ensure that democracy is observed. Elections must go ahead in May 2026.**

Yours sincerely,

*Anne Gwinnett*

Dr Anne Gwinnett  
Party Chair