



Secretary of State

Leader of the County Council

Councillor Julian Brazil

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2026

**Re: Proposal to Cancel the May 2026 Elections due to Local Government
Reorganisation Preparations**

Dear Secretary of State,

I write as Leader of Devon County Council to express serious concern regarding the proposal to cancel the May 2026 local elections on the grounds of ongoing preparation for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

In our view, cancelling scheduled elections for this reason would be a mistaken course of action and would carry significant democratic, legal and practical risks.

Local elections are a fundamental expression of democratic accountability. The electorate has a legitimate expectation that elections will take place as scheduled, and postponement or cancellation, unless in truly exceptional circumstances, risks undermining public confidence in local democratic institutions. Administrative complexity or transitional pressures should not, in themselves, override this core democratic principle.

Local government has historically demonstrated its ability to deliver elections successfully alongside periods of significant structural change. While we recognise that preparation for LGR is complex and resource-intensive, it does not make running elections unworkable. On the contrary, holding elections during a period of reform can provide renewed democratic legitimacy at a time when major decisions are being taken.

I understand that Exeter City Council have debated this matter and concluded that they are requesting a postponement of the May 2026 elections on the basis of a lack of capacity. We have offered to the Leader at the City Council a commitment to provide resources and capacity from our Democratic Services to support the elections to go ahead, and understand that similar offers of support and capacity from Devon District Councils may be forthcoming too. We make this offer in light of the City Council's decision

and following the serious and significant concerns raised at our own Council debate over the postponement of the elections. We are confident that we can assist and remove this burden and support the Leader of the City Council hold to his original intent that elections should proceed in 2026.

The County Council debated the postponement at our Council on 9 January 2026. Members from all political groups unanimously expressed the view that the May 2026 elections should proceed as planned. Whilst Devon County Council do not have any elections planned for May 2026 there are elections scheduled for both Exeter and Plymouth. The relevant minutes and resolution can be found here: [Minutes Template](#).

The key reasons advanced during the debate included:

- The importance of maintaining democratic accountability during a period of significant change
- The risk of public disengagement and loss of trust if scheduled elections are cancelled
- The undesirability of extending terms of office without a fresh electoral mandate
- The value of newly elected members contributing to, and overseeing, the transition to new governance arrangements

Members were clear that proceeding with the elections would strengthen, rather than hinder, the success of reorganisation.

There was also strong recognition of the substantial burden LGR places on local councils in terms of capacity, governance, workforce planning and financial resilience. For these reasons, Members agreed that if the current LGR timetable proves challenging, the more appropriate and proportionate response would be to extend the transitional timeline towards a single-council structure, rather than removing or delaying elections. This would allow reform to proceed in a managed and sustainable way while preserving democratic legitimacy throughout the process.

Furthermore, Members emphasised that any reorganisation should be accompanied by meaningful devolution. Aligning LGR with a clear and ambitious devolution offer would provide stronger incentives for reform and clearer benefits for residents and businesses, rather than focusing narrowly on structural change.

Devon County Council continues to work constructively with MHCLG officials and local partners. We await the Government's decision on the submitted business cases and will continue to support residents, businesses and staff through this significant period of change.

For all these reasons, we strongly believe that the May 2026 elections should proceed as planned. Doing so would reinforce democratic legitimacy, maintain public trust and demonstrate confidence in local government at a time of transformation.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss these issues further and to explore how the Government and local authorities can work together to deliver reorganisation in a way that is democratic, sustainable and focused on improving outcomes for communities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Brazil".

Councillor Julian Brazil
Leader of the County Council