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Alison McGovern MP  
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**Our ref:** PB  
**Your ref:**  
**Date:** 15 January 2026

Dear Ms McGovern,

## **EXETER'S CITY COUNCIL'S REQUEST TO POSTPONE LOCAL ELECTIONS**

Thank you for your letter dated 18 December 2025 regarding the local elections in Exeter that are scheduled to be held on 7 May 2026. We are pleased to note that the government has listened to councils regarding the constraints that they are operating in and the work that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) brings on top of existing challenges.

In response to your invitation seeking views on the postponement of local elections, I have now had an opportunity to discuss this with Members at a Council meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026. Members expressed a range of opinions at the meeting, and the minutes will be published here within the next 14 days [Agenda for Council on Tuesday 13th January 2026, 6.00 pm - Exeter City Council](#)

Those Members supporting the postponement of elections have asked that the council is given the time and space to successfully deliver LGR and that residents are given the opportunity to vote for councillors that will sit on the Shadow Council in May 2027.

Those Members against the postponement of elections have asked for the elections to go ahead to enable residents to have their say and not be denied their democratic right to vote. These Members felt that the postponement of the election may leave residents feeling alienated and disenfranchised.

In Exeter, we are committed to ensuring that any proposals to reorganise local government and devolve powers to local areas are done in service to the interests of the people and the city of Exeter and the wider area. I believe that to achieve this, the council should be dedicating it's time to LGR and electing to the new shadow councils in May 2027 and not to councils that are soon to be abolished. I am therefore requesting that the Secretary of State makes an order to postpone the local elections in Exeter for one year.

One of the key considerations in making this request is the impact on council resources and capacity in terms of both staff and costs. The cost of delivering a local election in Exeter is £265,000 and involves approximately 450 roles to preside over polling stations, issue postal votes and undertake the count. Resources are also required to undertake the logistical arrangements of running an election and the print and postage requirements.

As well as overseeing and delivering the local election, council officers would also be required to help the council prepare for LGR and the transition to the new unitary councils. This work needs to start immediately and will include:

- **Democracy and governance:** Developing the constitutions, establishing the leadership to steward the new organisations and running the elections for new councillors who will govern the new unitary councils. This also includes setting up shadow council arrangements as part of the transition.
- **Service design:** Developing the detailed future operating models that lay out how each service within each new authority will work.
- **Budgets and finance:** Apportioning the existing budgets to each new unitary in a fair and transparent way, as well as dealing with other key financial policies such as council tax harmonisation.
- **Workforce and organisational change:** Supporting the existing officer workforce with the changes and staff transfer to the new organisations. This will also entail other workforce considerations such as union engagement, staff consultation, redeployment issues, and culture and practice changes.
- **Data and technology:** Ensuring that all data we hold is accurate and complete before it is safely transferred to the correct unitary. Managing the systems which hold this data and support service delivery falls within this element.
- **Procurement and contracts:** Identifying which contracts are novated to each unitary. This may involve contract variations and negotiations with suppliers, as well as preparation for decommissioning and re-procurement.
- **Partnerships:** Ensuring that the strong working relationships with partner organisations are maintained, as well as setting up new arrangements that align with both unitary aspirations and regional goals.
- **External delivery bodies:** Councils have set up a variety of delivery vehicles (arm's length companies and joint ventures) to support strategic objectives. We will need to work through decisions around the future of these vehicles and ownership of them.

Postponing the local election in 2026 would release staff diverted to run and support the local elections process and, in particular, financial resources which could be applied to focus on the work required to prepare for the transition to new unitary councils.

In addition to the above, the local councillors who would be elected in May 2026 would only serve for two years before their role is abolished and the new authorities are created. It is my view that this is not a prudent use of resources.

Having taken all of the above into consideration, I am clear that postponing the local elections would release essential capacity for the effective delivery of LGR. I am requesting that the Secretary of State makes an order to postpone the local elections in Exeter for one year.

I look forward to receiving a response in the near future.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Phil Bialyk  
Leader, Exeter City Council