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15th January 2026

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

Dear Minister,

Subject: Request for Postponement of 2026 Local Government Elections in Stevenage Due to Local Government Reorganisation

Thank you for your letter of 18 December 2025 inviting councils in reorganisation areas to set out their views on the potential postponement of local elections scheduled for May 2026.

In November 2025, Councils in Hertfordshire provided our joint submission for Local Government Reorganisation, working together intensively and collaboratively to respond to the English Devolution White Paper. Within this submission, Stevenage Borough Council indicated its preference for the creation for four unitary authorities within Hertfordshire. All Hertfordshire Councils also reiterated our shared ambitions for Devolution and set out the case for a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Hertfordshire.

Stevenage Borough Council wishes to provide you a clear and timely response. At a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday 14 January 2025, this matter was considered at length. Having carefully considered our capacity, the scale and pace of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Hertfordshire and the impact on service continuity, the Council's Cabinet formally requests that the May 2026 local elections in Stevenage be postponed by one year.

The Cabinet noted that there is clear precedent for government to postpone local elections to enable stable transition to new unitary authorities, rather than this being an exception. Between 2019-2022, the previous Government postponed elections in Buckinghamshire, Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire, Somerset, and Weymouth and Portland as part of the Local Government Reorganisation process.

Given this precedent, we are concerned that proceeding with elections under the current ambitious timetable will present several challenges to the smooth transition of critical services to new local authorities.

Our Assessment

Government has set an ambitious timetable for Local Government Reorganisation, with new unitary Councils to be in place in April 2028. Government anticipates confirming the footprints of new unitary authorities before summer recess, very shortly after the potential May 2026 local election dates. The LGR timeline also indicates that new shadow authorities – replacing current local councils – will be elected in just over a year, in May 2027.

Specifically, we wish to highlight the following concerns:

- **Scale of change:** We have engaged with colleagues in unitary authorities who have been through LGR, and we recognise that this is the most extensive and complex set of changes since 1974. We take this responsibility seriously and our draft General Fund budget allocates an initial £1m funding to commence critical planning, preparation and transition activities, and to ensure Member and Officer capacity is in place to support this process. The transition of all 11 Councils in Hertfordshire to new unitary councils and a new Mayoral Strategic Authority is estimated to have a multi-million-pound transition cost, reflecting how complex this change is.
- **Risk of disruption and additional pressure to the Council:** LGR presents an ambitious and stretching timeline that will require our full attention while also continuing to implement the 'Making Stevenage Even Better' Corporate Plan (2024 – 2027). This includes major programmes in delivery, including work to build 1,000 new council homes, deliver a new sport and leisure centre, continue the work to regenerate the town centre and the renewal of the Station Gateway. It also includes a major refurbishment programme for Council homes, creating more local jobs, and ongoing work to deliver a broad range of government reforms such as changes to waste and recycling and tackling homelessness. Concentrating capacity on Local Government Reorganisation preparation 2026 will help sustain momentum on these commitments while ensuring an orderly transition.
- **Transition risks for critical services:** Stevenage delivers vital statutory and frontline services, often to vulnerable residents. Minimising disruption during LGR transition is essential to protect public confidence and support vulnerable residents. Should local elections proceed, the Council would direct significant administrative capacity to run these elections, presenting challenges when also managing the complex demands of reorganisation and potentially diverting resources from essential services or crucial projects.
- **Impact on transition to the new shadow authority:** A stable transition to the new shadow authority requires stability, focus and capacity to be directed to this priority. Continuing with elections to councils that will soon be superseded will complicate the process and risks delaying progress.
- **Local electoral context:** Stevenage held all out elections in May 2024 following the electoral review and new ward boundaries. May 2026 is the first cycle of elections by thirds since those all-out elections, meaning Councillors due for election in May 2026 will have only served a two-year term rather than the usual four-year period.

Please treat this letter as Stevenage Borough Council's request for postponement of the May 2026 local elections by one year

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Richard Henry - Leader of the Council