

Mr Andrew Lewin MP
WelTech Business Centre,
Welwyn Garden City
AL7 2AA
12/01/2026

Dear Mr Lewin,

The Welwyn Hatfield Liberal Democrats are deeply disappointed by the Labour Government's position allowing local councils to potentially cancel local elections due to take place in 2026. We consider this move to be totally undemocratic.

As you will recall, the letter from Minister McGovern of Dec 18th sets out that the 63 areas which are affected by Local Government Reorganisation and are also due to have local elections in 2026 can request that the government consider cancelling those elections in order to free up capacity to deal with the reorganisation. The power to request this has been put in the hands of individual Council Leaders, thereby distancing the government itself from the decision.

The Electoral Commission who are usually considered to be a neutral voice in election matters, have made the following comments: "We are disappointed by both the timing and substance of the statement. Scheduled elections should as a rule go ahead as planned, and only be postponed in exceptional circumstances" and "As a matter of principle, we do not think that capacity constraints are a legitimate reason for delaying long planned elections. Extending existing mandates risks affecting the legitimacy of local decision making and damaging public confidence. There is a clear conflict of interest in asking existing Councils to decide how long it will be before they are answerable to voters."

The Labour Government's plan for Local Government reorganisation has put enormous pressure on Local Councils. However, the idea that this will be meaningfully reduced by cancelling elections is not credible. Annual local elections cost Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council £140,000 whereas the council is budgeting £2.5m over the next two years to cope with reorganisation. If the government really wanted to help, it would provide more assistance.

We maintain that Borough elections in 2026, are fundamental to our local democracy and should still go ahead. If not, Councillors who would be up for re-election, will remain in post for at least six years rather than four. As MP for Welwyn Hatfield, we hope you would agree that the principles of democracy should be upheld for your constituents.

We therefore ask you to use your influence in Government to stand up for democracy and write to Minister McGovern requesting that these elections still go ahead.

Yours sincerely

Frank Marsh
Chair - Welwyn Hatfield Liberal Democrats