

Cllr Gavin James

Co- Leader Basingstoke & Deane

Eastrop & Grove Ward

Hampshire County Council Basingstoke South East

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Jim McMahon MP
Minister of Local Government and Devolution.
House of Commons
London
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Dear Jim McMahon MP,

I am writing to express concern about the Hampshire County Council proposals to cancel the planned 2025 local elections.

Whilst I recognise the need to reform local Government whilst maintaining critical local services, the cancellation of election is not required for the following reasons.

Firstly, recent local government reforms such as North Yorkshire, Somerset (2023), Buckinghamshire (2020) along with Cornwall, County Durham, Northumberland and Wiltshire (2009) have involved the County Council taking on the functions of district Councils and becoming the unitary Council.

Hampshire is too large for this and will split in multiple directions with the districts merging and taking over county functions. As a result, the role of the County Council is less significant. A potential change of administration would not undermine progress as re-organisation will be district led.

Secondly, the Councils of wider Hampshire have until Autumn to submit proposals. Conversations are already taking place between districts. There are no circumstances where a decision needs to be made during the purdah period.

Thirdly, we're told elections will only be delayed until 2026. When the final proposals for new council areas are submitted in Autumn 2025, the Government will want to take time to consider these, and carry out public consultation in early 2026. The argument for cancelling the district and deferred County Council elections in 2026 will be far stronger as re-organisation moves from 'considering options' to planning change.

It will be confusing for the public to end months of consultation about the new arrangements for local government in early 2026, then take part in elections for both authorities due to dissolve. Given 2027 is likely to be the elections for the new shadow authorities, the existing County Councillors will have served a 7-year term by the time the County Council ceases to exist in 2028.

Councils could continue to look at the options for the future of local government in Hampshire until March, making 2025 the final elections for the existing Councils. If needed, senior officers can review initial proposals during the election period with informal discussions with civil servants. Councillors will then have from May to September to review the viable options before submitting the final proposal(s) to Government.

In 2026 the election of the new Mayor is due to take place. The role of Mayor is an important one and that election, especially being the first one, should not be overshadowed by elections to soon to be dissolved Councils. This will leave 2027 clear for the new unitary elections to take place.

The decision to suspend normal democratic processes should never be taken lightly. Democracy should never be considered something getting in the way of politics, but the foundation stone on which our politics is built. The Government should be setting a very high test for removing peoples chance to choose their representative. I do not believe Hampshire County Council meets that test.

Yours sincerely,



Gavin James