

The Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities & Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities
& Local Government
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Councillor Emily Smith
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Dear Secretary of State,

I hope that you have had a good start to the new year.

As you know, local and Police and Crime Commissioner elections are due to take place this coming May. I am sure you are aware, preparations at a local level commence many months in advance of any election, and at my council are well underway.

I am writing to ask for clarity as to whether elections will go ahead in May 2021.

If they are, what steps are being taken nationally to ensure public trust in the process and prioritise public health? If they are not going ahead, I implore you to make a decisive and timely decision to avoid any further cost to the public and local authorities.

These range from securing suitable venues for polling places and counts, booking printers and delivery slots into Royal Mail for postal ballots, as well as recruiting and training polling and count staff. Candidates will also need to plan to collect signatures, and nomination papers well ahead of the election, which requires physical engagement.

Local authorities, including the Vale of White Horse District Council, have been stretched incredibly thin over the course of the pandemic. At the same time, as a sector, we are also working through the logistics of mass vaccinations. Local authorities are now gearing up to run elections amidst that context.

The decision to postpone the elections in 2020 was, understandably, made when preparations were at an advanced stage. While the Treasury recompensed local authorities for the direct costs, the time and organisational work to prepare was not

factored in. Please can you confirm that any resources used organising the 2021 elections will be recompensated if you decide to delay them?

With the other pressures councils are facing during the pandemic, it will be difficult, but there is still time for our election officers to identify and secure safe polling stations and count venues, prepare registers, prepare for polling stations, and train election staff. However, without urgent clarity this planning could cost the public millions of pounds needlessly and potentially undermine local democracy.

I personally feel strongly that the public should have the opportunity to vote for their representatives in May, especially in the many council seats where voters have already had to wait a year. That said, efficacy and efficiency of our elections is paramount. Avoiding confusion and concerns about our electoral process, akin to that being widely reported in the United States for example, must be a priority for us all.

If, as the Prime Minister said recently, you are giving consideration to a delay in the elections scheduled for May 2021, even by a few weeks, I urge you to make that decision and communicate that to councils as early as possible. Residents need to feel safe and confident in exercising their democratic right and local authorities, councillors and candidates need and deserve clarity on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Emily Smith
Leader of the Council