



Private & Confidential

Alison McGovern MP

Our Ref AA/gk/AMGMP140126

Your ref

By email: LGRElections@communities.gov.uk

Date

14 January 2026

Dear Alison,

LGR and the postponement of Burnley's 2026 Local Elections

A meeting of our Executive which is made up of Greens, Liberal Democrats and Independents took place yesterday to discuss your letter of 18th December 2025. Put simply we support the postponement of Burnley's 2026 local elections to release essential capacity to deliver local government reorganisation in our area so that reorganisation can progress effectively. The resolution at our meeting was unanimous and I set out below our formal response.

We believe unequivocally that elections are one of the key cornerstones of our democracy. The bar for postponing them must be set exceptionally high. Any deviation from the electoral cycle must be justified by compelling, cogent and transparent reasons, and must never be politically motivated.

The government's approach to LGR has been, in our view, deeply flawed. The programme has lacked coherence, clarity, and adequate consultation. It has been driven more by political expediency than by a genuine commitment to local empowerment or service improvement. Consideration should have been given to establishing a Royal Commission to depoliticise and properly structure this process, an approach that would have brought rigour, consensus, and long-term vision to the future of local governance. It would have also provided much needed "capacity" that the government believes is currently lacking to deliver LGR.

It is self-evident that LGR has significant capacity implications for councils that compete with the day to day demands of local government. That is as simple as night follows day. Every area that has undergone reorganisation in recent years has highlighted the strain placed on officer capacity, governance, and service continuity during this period. Burnley Borough Council, already one of the most financially constrained authorities in the country, is being asked to absorb yet another layer of complexity. Since 2011, we have been among the top three most affected councils in terms of funding cuts. Earlier this year, we moved from 9th to 4th in the national index of deprivation. The recent local government finance settlement has done little to alleviate these pressures. It has added more responsibility with less overall funding made available for Burnley council.

Cont...

At a Full Council Meeting on 20th November 2025, Lancashire County council resolved that their Chief Executive, Mark Wynn separately writes to the Secretary of State to request that shadow elections for the new Lancashire unitaries do not take place before May 2028, to ensure stabilisation and improvements to key services i.e. adult social care and SEND are secured which shows the challenges facing local government in Lancashire.

This year's funding settlement was not strong nor equitable, despite repeated assurances that deprived areas would be prioritised. Nevertheless, we have learned to cut our cloth accordingly. After more than a decade of sustained government cuts, Burnley has developed a culture of resilience and pragmatism, but there is a limit to what can be absorbed without compromising core services.

Councils should never be put in a position where they are forced to balance the delivery of critical day-to-day services with the demands of structural reorganisation. While some limited capacity funding has been made available to support the preparation of LGR bids, no equivalent funding has been provided for the substantial day-to-day work involved in preparing for reorganisation or delivering it. This is a glaring omission. Local government is already chronically underfunded, and the expectation that councils can absorb these additional pressures without support is both unrealistic and unsustainable. If the government is prepared to postpone elections on the grounds of capacity for the majority of Lancashire councils, that in itself is a clear admission of the scale of the challenge, and a further indication that the system is being asked to do too much with too little.

The government's approach to the potential postponement of elections has come late in the process, leaving councils with little time to plan or respond meaningfully. Four out of the seven Lancashire districts affected by LGR have already requested a postponement on reasons of "capacity" pre-empting the Minister's announcement. Pendle council has now followed suit. If the Secretary of State is prepared to grant postponements on the grounds of insufficient capacity for the majority of Lancashire councils that have local elections in May 2026 (namely Blackburn with Darwen, Chorley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Preston), then Burnley's elections should also be postponed to ensure consistency of approach across the region. To do otherwise would be to ignore the very real and shared pressures we are all facing and the LGR journey we are on together.

However, I must stress that this is not an endorsement of postponement as a principle. Rather, it is a pragmatic response to the circumstances created by central government and the decisions already made in principle for Blackburn with Darwen, Chorley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Preston to postpone 2026 local elections. Whether those decisions are politically motivated is a matter that only the Secretary of State can answer. The real solution is not to force councils to choose between democratic accountability and structural reform, but to consistently properly fund local government so that we can deliver both in parallel. With adequate resources, councils like Burnley could manage the demands of reorganisation while maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

Cont...

We also remain deeply disappointed by the lack of progress on devolution in Lancashire. The former Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner, publicly committed to delivering a directly elected mayor for Lancashire together with meaningful devolution by 2026. It is now clear that this will not be realised until at least 2028 (if at all). This delay undermines confidence in the government's commitment to genuine devolution. As former Minister Jim McMahon rightly observed, local government fulfilled its side of the bargain, yet Westminster appears to have failed.

The Government appears to be reneging on its manifesto commitment of devolution and has prioritised reorganisation which was not a manifesto commitment. Devolution is the prize, not reorganisation. Lancashire now remains significantly behind areas like North Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside on devolution funding and this gap is increasing.

We also expect the government to fully fund the costs associated with reorganisation. Anything less would be a dereliction of duty and an unacceptable burden on local taxpayers.

In response to the invitation to set out whether postponing our local elections would release essential capacity to support local government reorganisation: **yes**, postponement would provide relief to stretched officer capacity and allow us to focus more effectively on the complex and resource-intensive demands of LGR. For example our quarter two monitoring reports had to be delayed by a couple of months at the end of last year due to the intense work our senior officers were undertaking on the preparation of the bids. These challenges are only going to heighten over the coming months whilst officers are undertaking the preparatory work in anticipation of the Minister's decision.

Given the timing of requesting "views" from Leaders, it is clear that local leaders have been placed in a reactive position on a matter which is ultimately the Minister's call. Why this has been raised at this late juncture is baffling. With the majority of affected Lancashire districts having already submitted requests for postponement (which the Minister has more or less confirmed in her letter that she would be minded to support), it would be both pragmatic and coherent for Burnley and the other remaining district (West Lancashire) to be treated in the same manner. It would appear irrational to postpone 2026 local elections for Blackburn, Chorley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Preston citing grounds of "insufficient capacity" and proceed with local elections in Burnley where deprivation and funding cuts are (and have consistently been) more acute. A consistent and coordinated approach across Lancashire is essential if this process is to retain operational clarity. A patchwork quilt approach in Lancashire or the country would not be sensible.

We support the postponement of Burnley's 2026 local election. Ultimately, however, the decision on whether to postpone elections is the Secretary of State's to make.

It is evident that there are capacity challenges in local government arising from decades of underfunding which are heightened by LGR. However, the Government must also own the decision with the public where there is a strong feeling that elections have been and are being postponed for political convenience.

One sincerely hopes the decision made on this matter will be taken in good faith, with the interests of local democracy and public service at its heart not political gain.

We would be happy to provide any further information to support your deliberations on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Afrasiab Anwar MBE
Leader of Burnley Borough Council

Ps The horse has bolted on LGR. Officers are working tirelessly on top of the day job to ensure that we have a smooth and steady transition. Clearly there are capacity challenges, and it is important that we release as much capacity to ensure that the newly created authorities can operate in a safe and legal manner from day one. As you have stated previously there is a precedent for postponing elections and this should be adopted in this instance.

cc christian.denison@communities.gov.uk
lpatel@burnley.gov.uk
cjackson@burnley.gov.uk
rdobson@burnley.gov.uk