



Jim McMahon OBE MP  
Minister for Local Government and  
Devolution  
Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local  
Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

Roger Gough  
Leader of the Council  
Sessions House  
County Hall, Maidstone  
Kent ME14 1XQ  
Email: [roger.gough@kent.gov.uk](mailto:roger.gough@kent.gov.uk)

10 January 2025

**By email:** [EnglishDevolutionLGenquiries@communities.gov.uk](mailto:EnglishDevolutionLGenquiries@communities.gov.uk)

Dear Jim,

### **Request for postponement of KCC election**

Following your letter of the 16 December 2024 and further to the joint letter sent earlier today by Vince Maple, Leader of Medway Council, and me requesting that Kent and Medway are included in the Devolution Priority Programme, I further write to request that you consider postponement of the planned elections to Kent County Council in May 2025.

I wish to assure you that I do not make this request lightly, and only do so after full consideration, deliberation and engagement with a range of colleagues from across the political spectrum in Kent and within Kent County Council. This included a debate yesterday at a full County Council meeting, and a follow-up Urgent Decision taken by the KCC Cabinet yesterday afternoon in support of this request.

Postponement of the County Council elections is inherently counter intuitive to the instincts of all elected members, especially when KCC, as a politically led organisation derives its legitimacy from an electoral mandate. Any postponement of democratic elections should only take place in exceptional circumstances.

However, I believe that the opportunities presented from being included in the Devolution Priority Programme for the 1.6m residents of Kent are an exceptional opportunity that merit an election postponement decision being considered by Ministers. I recognise that the considerable work and pace required to deliver both this and an accelerated programme of local government reorganisation, against the backdrop of existing sector operating and budget challenges put your priority timescales at risk if the election is contested this May.

Kent County Council is committed to delivering the benefits of devolution to our residents and businesses. We have long called for the benefits of devolution to be made available to more county areas, particularly in the South-East, and for the opportunities under devolution settlements being offered to city-regions to also be available to those areas, such as Kent and

Medway, with similarly sized populations, economies and growth potential. As such, the opportunities offered through the Devolution Priority Programme to begin to deliver these benefits from May 2026, and to start the clock on a Kent and Medway Mayoral Strategic Authority achieving 'Established' status align with our own strategic objectives as a council. There is a strong and enthusiastic commitment to devolution within this authority.

The short-term intense activity required to support the Government consultation on the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority, and to take the necessary and considerable steps to legally create and then develop the organisational structure of the MSA is inherently challenging. Most of this planning work must occur in the first half of 2025 so as to be ready for elections in May 2026. To do this concurrently, whilst we are also responding to the timeframe set out by yourself and your officials for the submission of proposals for the local government reorganisation, will require all of KCC's strategic capacity and capability, as well as organisational focus, at both the senior officer and political level.

Whilst the election period is technically only six weeks ahead of election day, in practice, the pre-election period and necessary induction period for the new council after election day, will mean normal business and decision-making (including potentially decisions necessary in support of DPP delivery) will be interrupted for at least four months. This is four months in the first half of 2025 that we can ill afford to lose against an exceptionally tight delivery schedule. Should the county council elections proceed, it is inevitable that they will compete for the attention of senior staff and political leadership.

I am sure you will be aware that there are many differing views on the election question in Kent, I have myself wrestled with them in the three weeks since your letter. Many of these contrary views, whilst legitimate, are often made with the freedom of not holding the burden of responsibility for delivering what is in the best long-term interests of the 1.6m residents of Kent.

I have concluded that on careful balance, when weighed against the opportunity to deliver the transformative opportunity that devolution offers Kent and Medway residents and businesses, and the wider benefits that can be brought from local government reorganisation, then a postponement of elections by one year will allow the necessary work to be done to meet the timetable you have set out to access the benefits of devolution quicker than will otherwise be the case. As you will be aware there is existing precedent for the postponement of elections in other areas who have undergone local government reorganisation, including Somerset, North Yorkshire, Cumbria, Dorset, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire.

I am aware that you have received a separate representation from Vince Maple as Leader of Medway Council, our partner in our joint submission to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme, setting out his concerns that any postponement of elections leading to a potential seven-year term of office for any councillor (should local government reorganisation not be implemented until April 2028) is an affront to the democratic norms and customs in England where four-year terms of office are the accepted norm. I wholly agree with Vince's point. I do not support the circumstances in which a postponement of the May 2025 election leads to a potential seven-year term for Kent County Councillors. However, this is not the inevitable or foregone conclusion of any decision to postpone the KCC elections for a 12-month period from May 2025.

Firstly, the seven-year term scenario only materialises should local government reorganisation not be completed until April 2028.

No final decision has been made yet on the vesting date for new unitary councils in Kent, and whilst there are strong arguments in an area as large and complex as Kent for not vesting new councils until 2028, there are equally powerful arguments in aiming for 2027. The earlier date would give the necessary certainty to our residents, businesses, partners and staff of our strategic intent, limit the period of transition and disruption to front line services, and provide the new Mayoral Strategic Authority its long-term constituent authorities sooner rather than later. This last point is a particularly attractive for some of our District and Borough Councils in Kent.

Alternatively, if it is agreed that local government reorganisation is not completed in Kent and Medway until 2028, then it is wholly possible for elections to KCC to take place in May 2026, alongside elections for the new Kent and Medway Mayor, giving elected KCC councillors elected in 2026 a two-year term of office.

Whichever approach is taken, and I am open to both possibilities, there are options available to address the legitimate concerns about extended terms of office should you choose to postpone the May 2025 elections, **and we will have delivered** a new Mayoral Strategic Authority, held the first Mayoral elections in May 2026 and have made significant progress on Local Government Reorganisation. I am confident that the Mayoral vote will galvanize the Kent and Medway electorate in such a way as to ensure that their democratic voice is heard loudly and very clearly.

I therefore request that, in accordance with the criteria set out in your letter of 16 December, you take the decision to postpone the Kent County Council elections scheduled for May 2025 for one year. This is to secure the successful delivery of the Devolution Priority Programme and local government reorganisation. While the question of elections is a separate matter relating solely to Kent County Council, I would like to reiterate that our application to join the Devolution Priority Programme reflects the shared enthusiasm and strong partnership between Kent County Council and Medway Council.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Gough', written in a cursive style.

**Roger Gough**  
**Leader, Kent County Council**