

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S
REPORT TO CABINET

13th January 2026

Report Title: Local Government Elections 2026

Submitted by: Chief Executive

Portfolios: One Council, People and Partnerships

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

<u>Purpose of the Report</u>	<u>Key Decision</u>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
To update Cabinet on correspondence from the Minister for Local Government & Homelessness received by Councils on 18 th December 2025, and to set out Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council's response.			
<u>Recommendation</u>			
<p>That Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes the receipt of a letter from the Minister for Local Government & Homelessness in respect of the invitation for Councils to seek postponement of local authority elections in May 2026; • Agrees that elections to Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council will proceed as planned in May 2026; • Notes that the Leader and Chief Executive will confirm to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government by 15th January 2026 that there is no change to the planned elections for May 2026. 			
<u>Reasons</u>			
<p>This report notes the invitation from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) to Councils to postpone planned elections in May 2026 if authorities consider this could release essential capacity to deliver local government reorganisation.</p>			

1. **Background**

1.1 Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council holds elections on an all-out basis for all 44 Council seats every four years. The last election was held in 2022, with the next elections being held on 7th May 2026. The Council is one of three borough and district councils in England to hold elections on this cycle. Cannock Chase and Tamworth borough councils are also scheduled to hold elections in thirds in May 2026.

- 1.2 Planning for the 7th May 2026 elections is well-advanced. On the same day, the Council will also administer elections for parish and town council seats, any Staffordshire County Council by-elections as may arise in Newcastle divisions, and a Neighbourhood Planning Referendum for the Keele parish council area.
- 1.3 With the announcement of Local Government Reorganisation in December 2024, Council officers have sought clarification from MHCLF officials that elections will proceed as planned. This assurance has been provided by officials over the last 12 month period. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government further confirmed the elections would proceed on 16th December 2025.
- 1.4 On 18th December 2025, Minister for Local Government, Alison McGovern MP, wrote to Leaders of 63 councils which are due to hold elections in May 2026, advising that some councils had requested a delay to planned elections and inviting all authorities scheduled to hold ballots to request a postponement of one year where this could release capacity for local government reorganisation (LGR).
- 1.5 Where councils wish to seek a postponement, they must do so by 15th January 2026, setting out reasons for such a delay. It is likely, on current LGR timetables, that elections would be further deferred in 2027 as this coincides with the introduction of elections to shadow unitary councils.
- 1.6 Any delay would therefore mean an extension of the current term of administration of up to two years without an election, meaning the term would be extended to six years.
- 1.7 On 19th December 2025, the Electoral Commission published a statement in relation to the letter to councils from MHLG, which is set out in Appendix 2 to this report, indicating its disappointment with the approach set out in the letter.

2. Council Position

- 2.1 The Council notes the invitation from the Minister for Local Government & Homelessness to postpone its all-out election to at least May 2027. The Leader of the Council responded publicly to the invitation, stating that the Council intended to proceed with elections.
- 2.2 The Council has already both budgeted for and commenced spend on the 2026 elections. HM Government has confirmed that any expenditure to date on elections would not be reimbursed if elections are cancelled.
- 2.3 The Council will proceed with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council elections to be held on 7th May 2026, together with elections to parish and town council seats within the borough, and any other relevant local elections and ballots.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - Notes the receipt of a letter from the Minister for Local Government & Homelessness in respect of the invitation for Councils to seek postponement of local authority elections in May 2026;
 - Agrees that elections to Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council will proceed as planned in May 2026;

- Notes that the Leader and Chief Executive will confirm to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government by 15th January 2026 that there is no change to the planned elections for May 2026.

4. Financial and Resource Implications

4.1 The Council bears the full cost of holding all-out elections every four years. These costs are managed through the incremental provision of ringfenced reserves in each of the four financial years proceeding the election.

4.2 A total sum of £200,000 is set aside as above for the provision of a full Council election.

5. Major Risks & Mitigation

5.1 There is a risk that the postponement of elections for at least one year may result in some elected members standing down in any event, resulting in by-elections being held in place of the economies of managing an all-out election.

5.2 The Electoral Commission has cautioned against postponement of elections as set out in paragraph 1.7, above, unless there is a strong and credible case for delay. The holding of elections as planned is in line with the Commission's guidance.

6. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)



7. One Council

8.1 Please confirm that consideration has been given to the following programmes of work:

One Commercial Council

We will make investment to diversify our income and think entrepreneurially.

There are no direct implications for commercial opportunities arising from this report. The Council achieves economies of scale in undertaking a number of local elections concurrently.

One Digital Council

We will develop and implement a digital approach which makes it easy for all residents and businesses to engage with the Council, with our customers at the heart of every interaction.

The use of digital and paper processes for elections are dictated by legislation. There may be future opportunities to use differing digital election methods.

One Sustainable Council

We will deliver on our commitments to a net zero future and make all decisions with sustainability as a driving principle

There are no direct implications for sustainability arising from this report.

8. Key Decision Information

8.1 This is a key decision as elections affect votes and political representation in all wards.

9. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

9.1 None

10. List of Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1 – Letter from MHCLG to councils with planned elections in 2026.

11. Background Papers

11.1 [English Devolution White Paper](#), December 2024, HMSO.

Appendix 2: Electoral Commission statement regarding MHCLG letter, published on 19th December 2025.

“We note the Government statement in Parliament on 18 December inviting Councils to raise capacity concerns and seek to postpone elections in May 2026..

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. We are concerned by the possibility of some council elections in May being postponed, and even more by any further postponement to those which already had been deferred from 2025..

Decisions on any postponements will not be taken until mid-January, less than three months before the scheduled May 2026 elections are due to begin. This uncertainty is unprecedented and will not help campaigners and administrators who need time to prepare for their important roles. We very much recognise the pressures on local government, but these late changes do not help administrators. Parties and candidates have already been preparing for some time, and will be understandably concerned.

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.

Voters must have a say on those that represent them at local government. We will work with the UK Government on these plans so that we can support voters, campaigners, parties and administrators who have been preparing for these elections.”