

January 19th 2026

Dear Jessica Toale MP,

I am writing to ask for your assistance in raising serious concerns with the Government regarding the planned town and parish council elections scheduled for May 2026 within the BCP area.

BCP Council has stated that it is facing extreme financial pressure, has applied for a 7.4% council tax increase (above the 4.99% threshold) and has indicated that it is at risk of effective financial failure. At the same time, the Council is proceeding with arrangements for the creation and election of multiple new town and parish councils, with estimated costs in the region of £1 million to the local taxpayer.

This raises a fundamental concern about financial prudence, value for money and the duty on councils to mitigate expenditure in the interests of residents, particularly during a period of acute fiscal stress.

As you know, local authorities are under a clear statutory obligation to:

- set balanced budgets,
- manage public funds responsibly, and
- avoid unnecessary or disproportionate expenditure that would further burden residents.

In this context, it is difficult to reconcile the Council's claims of financial distress with its decision to incur significant one off and ongoing costs associated with new town and parish council elections and administration. Residents are rightly questioning why they are being asked to pay higher council tax while additional governance structures, with attendant election and operating costs, are being introduced at this time.

I recognise that the timing of elections is governed by statute and that postponement powers are limited. However, it is also clear that:

- the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has, in defined circumstances, powers to alter the year of elections through statutory instruments; and
- Parliament has, in the past, legislated to defer elections where exceptional circumstances justified intervention.

While financial difficulty alone may not automatically trigger these powers, the combination of exceptional financial pressure, a request for council tax flexibility, and avoidable discretionary expenditure surely warrants ministerial scrutiny and, at the very least, clarification of the Government's position.

I would therefore be grateful if you would consider:

1. Raising this matter directly with the Minister for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, asking:

- whether the Government considers it appropriate for a financially distressed unitary authority to proceed with costly town and parish council elections;
- whether any flexibility exists, or could be considered, to defer the May 2026 town and parish council elections in circumstances where doing so would materially reduce pressure on local taxpayers; and
- what guidance, if any, the Department provides to councils on balancing democratic processes with financial sustainability in such cases.

2. Seeking a formal written response from the Department, so that residents can understand clearly:

- whether the Council's approach aligns with Government expectations; and
- whether residents are being unnecessarily exposed to additional financial burden.

This is not an argument against local democracy but a question of timing, proportionality and fiscal responsibility. Proceeding with avoidable expenditure of this scale, while simultaneously increasing council tax and warning of insolvency, risks undermining public confidence in both local and national governance.

I would be grateful for your consideration of this issue and for any action you are able to take in raising it with Ministers. I would also welcome the opportunity to provide further local detail if that would assist your discussions with the Department.

Yours sincerely,

Jo

Jo Keeling