

Dear Duncan

I have just come out of a meeting with senior people at County Hall where there was a discussion of the timing of the County Council elections.

I was alarmed to hear it reported that the view in Whitehall was that it was 'ok to go ahead with the elections because they have held elections elsewhere in Europe during the Pandemic.' Such thinking really misses the point that elections – especially local elections - are about so much more than health security on polling day.

It is a fundamental part of the democratic process that candidates are able to campaign for votes and that voters are able to look candidates in the eye and weigh up whether they want to vote for them. Local politics is highly personalised as you know. Simply copying across experiences from general elections in other European countries most of which use national lists of candidates is not even close to comparing like with like. With the Prime Minister today suggesting we will only start to ease out of the restrictions in March it is really hard to see how candidates can engage properly with voters for elections being held at the start of May.

I would be grateful if you could raise this with the minister responsible (I am not sure if it is the Cabinet Office or DCLG). I hope the government will postpone the elections due in May until the autumn in order to enable a properly democratic process. And I hope they will not leave it til the very last minute to make the decision and the announcement.

With thanks and best wishes

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