

Public
Key Decision – Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Local Government Reorganisation and Local Elections 2026

Meeting/Date: Council – 14th January 2026

Executive Portfolio: Executive Leader, Chair of the Cabinet and Executive Councillor for Place

Report by: Chief Executive Officer

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

This report addresses the implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Huntingdonshire District Council, with particular focus on the timing of local elections scheduled for May 2026.

It sets out the background to recent correspondence from the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness, which invites Councils to consider whether postponing elections may provide essential capacity for the successful delivery of LGR and provide their views. This will then inform the Minister's decision whether or not to bring forward the relevant legislation or not.

The report is intended to inform Council and makes recommendations for Council to consider and inform how the Council may wish to respond to the invitation by the Minister.

Key elements of the analysis include an assessment of the planned workstreams required to deliver LGR during the overlapping election period, as well as the necessary preparations for running a district-wide election. Consideration is given to the extent of organisational capacity and capability required to manage both processes concurrently, and the degree to which this may present challenges or risks for effective delivery.

The report provides a detailed review of organisational risks and highlights the importance of robust risk management and mitigation strategies to safeguard Council operations amid significant change. Advice is also provided from relevant Statutory Officers to support Council's decision making

Based on this comprehensive assessment, the report presents recommendations for Council on what response should be provided to the Minister and whether to request postponement of the elections. The aim is to ensure that any decision taken reflects a balanced understanding of capacity constraints, organisational

resilience, and the need to maintain democratic processes, while supporting the successful implementation of Local Government Reorganisation in Huntingdonshire.

Recommendations:

The Council is

RECOMMENDED

- a) to note the contents of the paper and hold a recorded vote in support of the proposal:
‘to recommend to Government that HDC agrees to maintain current plans to deliver District Council elections in May 2026 alongside work to progress LGR’.

or:

- b) to note the contents of the paper and hold a recorded vote in support of the proposal:
‘to recommend to Government that HDC postpones the District Council elections to be held in May 2026 to release essential capacity to deliver LGR in the area and so allow reorganisation to progress more effectively’.

Following the outcome of a) or b):

- c) to delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Leader - Chair of the Cabinet and Executive Councillor for Place (as the named recipient of the letter from the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness), to write to MHCLG to confirm the Council’s view before the deadline of midnight 15th January 2026.

AND

- d) Following confirmation from Government over its decision in respect of whether the 2026 District Council elections will proceed or not, the Council resolves to:
 - i. Work proactively with Town and Parish Councils to understand and overcome any implications of the decision; and
 - ii. In respect of resource/financial pressures, delegates to the Chief Executive (as Returning Officer) in consultation with the Corporate Director (Finance and Resources & S151 Officer) to work with Town and Parish Councils to find solutions to any specific short-term challenges they may face should they be required to deliver 2026 elections as standalone (without being combined with the District Council).

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report:

- Presents the detail of a letter from Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness, Alison McGovern MP, about the potential to postpone planned elections in May 2026 in response to the possible challenges of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- Contains an assessment of work planned to deliver LGR alongside running an election at HDC. This assessment is critical to understanding whether there are factors which would form a reasonable justification to support a postponement of the elections based on the question of capacity; and is intended to aid Members understanding of capacity considerations.
- Reviews organisational risks to ensure an appropriate level of mitigation remains in place when considering a response to Government.
- Provides information on other factors which may be of relevance to Members when considering how to respond to the Minister's invitation.
- On the basis of this, and other content within the report, the paper makes recommendations to Council on whether to recommend to the Minister that district elections in Huntingdonshire in May 2026 are postponed.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 On the 18th December the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness, Alison McGovern MP, wrote to a number of Leaders of Councils with elections in 2026.

2.2 The letter was focused on Councils where proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) have been submitted, and decisions have not yet been taken on which unitary councils are to be formed. HDC is one of these Councils.

2.3 The letter asks Councils, by Midnight on Thursday 15th January, to set out their views on the postponement of elections - *'consider if taking this step would release essential capacity to deliver LGR in the area and so allow reorganisation to progress more effectively'*.

2.4 The letter from the Minister is included in full at Appendix 1.

2.5 For clarity, any decision to postpone an election can only be taken by Government and would require a Statutory Instrument (SI) to be laid before Parliament, and approved. By way of example, the SI to postpone some local elections in 2025 was [The Local Authorities \(Changes to Years of Ordinary Elections\) \(England\) Order 2025](#). These powers exist in law.

2.6 It is important to recognise that the Council's response to the Minister's invitation must balance the potential benefits of postponement - such as

releasing vital capacity for effective delivery of LGR - with the need to ensure democratic continuity and public confidence in local governance arrangements. The Council remains committed to engaging constructively with stakeholders during this period of uncertainty, seeking pragmatic solutions to both operational and financial pressures that may arise, and ensuring that any transition is managed transparently and in the best interests of the district's residents and communities.

- 2.7 The Ministerial letter invites the Council to provide its comments, which the Minister will then take into consideration in determining whether to bring forward the legislation and subsequent postponement.
- 2.8 In relation to the Council decision-making process to enable it to make comment, as this is an election matter, there are no delegations available which would enable a response to be collated on behalf of Council, and for those comments to be returned to the Minister. Thus, the report before Members has been prepared for Council to enable the matter to be debated, and to inform what response (if any), should be provided to the Minister. (Further detail on the procedures are given later in the legal section of this report)
- 2.9 We are not an outlier by taking this approach, with other Councils following suit based on their own advice regarding governance - [Plans put forward to scrap local elections in Redditch - BBC News](#)
- 2.10 **Members will not be determining whether or not elections go ahead in May 2026 – That is a matter for the Minister.** The Council is being asked to provide its views. Regardless of the views of Council, the Minister could advise that elections must go ahead, or Government could lay and pass the legislation regarding postponement. Until such time as the Minister has reached their decision, and the relevant legislation has been passed, the Council will have to continue to prepare for 2026 elections in the usual manner.
- 2.11 In respect of timetables and elections to the new Councils to be formed post-LGR, the effect of postponement of the District Council elections in May 2026 would be:
1. Existing Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) councillors would be retained – assuming no by-election situations are called.
 2. The decision over the nature of the new unitaries will be taken by Government following a consultation period – this is likely to be seven-weeks and due to be launched in early February 2026 – with a decision to follow and with the requisite legislation subsequently passed - likely Summer/Autumn 2026
 3. Existing Councillors would be utilised to fulfil spaces on Committees/Boards to aid in the establishment of the Shadow Authority and support the transition.
 4. Elections to the Shadow Authority would take place in May 2027. **This would be year 1 of a Members 4 year term. This could create ‘twin hat’ councillors with existing HDC and**

Shadow Authority representation; or 'triple hat' councillors with the additional responsibility to Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC).

5. Those Shadow Councillors elected would then move forward from the Shadow Authority to the new Unitary on vesting day on 1st April 2028 and continue their terms – There would not be a set of elections in 2028. **Years 2,3 and 4 of term with the new Unitary. Any existing HDC councillors would then cease responsibility when HDC ceases to exist.** (this would also apply to CCC councillors).
 6. Elections beyond April 2028 would then be for the new authority. These would be on an all-out basis. This would be set out in secondary legislation but based upon the standard four-year cycle from 2027, it could reasonably be anticipated that the next election would be in 2031.
- 2.12 Based on the above, with the exception of by-elections, there would be no further elections to Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) – following LGR, because HDC would no longer exist. Postponement of the 2026 District Council election would create a 2 year gap in District/County elections between 2025 and 2027 and mean that current elected HDC councillors would continue to serve until HDC ceases to exist in April 2028.
- 2.13 The above would be further complicated for those Members who are currently also Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) members. As in a similar vein to existing HDC councillors, they too would be carried forward and continue to have CCC representation until such time as CCC ceases to exist in April 2028.
- 2.14 Strong governance arrangements will be put in place to manage these complexities, and there is established precedent.
- 2.15 Town and Parish Councils are understood to be largely unaffected by the above changes at County/District Council level; and in respect of elections, would be expected to continue as scheduled, unless otherwise advised by the Government. **Noting the comments of the letter that the Minister is minded that they go ahead as planned.**
- 2.16 Other elections such as Mayoral and Parliamentary Elections would also be unchanged/unaffected by this invitation from the Minister.
- 2.17 The scale of LGR and the level of engagement generally with it from within the Local Government sector is significant. Whilst reform has taken place in other areas, these have generally been on a more regionalised or focused basis. Whereas the Government aspiration here is much wider spread. It has been widely reported regarding the concerns and benefits of this approach, and the impacts upon the sector, places, and communities.
- 2.18 Members may wish to note that there is established precedent for postponement of elections in advance of LGR with such decisions having been taken by previous Governments. Some following an invitation from

Government, and some following a request from existing Councils. In some cases, there was an agreed consensus between the existing Councils on such requests – this has not been possible in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough at this time owing to the speed within which the Council is expected to return a response to the Ministers invitation (namely some 4 weeks involving the Christmas period).

In all cases, secondary legislation was required as per 2.5. Some examples include:

- Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) areas - Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Surrey County were postponed in 2025 –
 - For Surrey it is noted that the intention is that elections would take place in **May 2026, with those elections being to a new shadow unitary authority** - [Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)
 - The expectation is that other areas in the DPP will follow a similar pattern, following the Ministers decision post conclusion of consultation on the revised structures proposed.
 - [The Local Authorities \(Changes to Years of Ordinary Elections\) \(England\) Order 2025](#) is the relevant statutory instrument; Members will note the explanatory text confirms the move of ordinary elections from 2025 to 2026 and every 4 years thereafter; with the exception of Thurrock which is to have elections from 2030 and every 4 years thereafter. The order also makes provision relating to extension of terms for Members, and filling of vacancies by by-election.
- Cumbria (<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-23/HL13630/>)
- Buckinghamshire (<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-11-01/debates/18110124000013/LocalGovernment>)
- Somerset (<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-12-02/debates/610AAEE5-FA18-4784-89F9-BCF567BC2480/LocalGovernmentReorganisationSomerset>)
- Northamptonshire (<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-11-29/debates/d4a3b76d-230a-4482-b4ce-96271f42ee36/WrittenStatements>).

2.19 Members are able to consider these cases, and others where reorganisation has happened, and review the matters which the relevant Minister at the time took account of in reaching their decision and are able to compare those decisions to the invitation set out in Appendix 1.

3. ANALYSIS AND CAPACITY

3.1 It should be noted that the Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring there is sufficient capacity within the organisation to achieve the Council's

statutory requirements, as well as other activities and priorities as established by Council. In respect of elections, the Chief Executive (as Returning Officer) also has a statutory role to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to administer elections in a lawful and efficient way.

- 3.2 Matters pertaining to, 'capacity' within the political space, is clearly outside of the responsibility of Officers including the Chief Executive.
- 3.3 To help Council make this decision, there are a number of related components that should be viewed together. This is not an exhaustive list, but outlines key headline areas. These are understanding:
 1. The work that is planned to deliver for LGR during the election period.
 2. The work that is planned to deliver an election and any work that follows it.
 3. The degree to which these simultaneous commitments create capacity and capability challenges for the Council.
 4. The risks that are in hand, and mitigations in place to manage them.

Planned LGR work to be delivered during the election period (based on current understanding of LGR timelines)

- 3.4 The relevant LGR period that overlaps the election period covers the time frame of December 2025 – July 2026 and is the **Pre-Decision Phase**. Work is focused on collating data that HDC will need, regardless of the option chosen for LGR.
- 3.5 Using guidance from MHCLG and other research findings, Officers are working on a set of key data requirements, grouped by workstream/theme, to be delivered during this phase. The headline work areas are presented below:
 1. **IT & Data:** An overview is needed of all IT systems, their documentation, contracts, management, data centres, skills, data sharing agreements, technology standards, decision-making frameworks, and cyber resilience.
 2. **HR:** A review is required of staff terms and conditions, payroll, contracts, severance, organisational structures, critical roles, skills, union engagement, pay comparisons, LGPS arrangements, and operational risks.
 3. **Finance & Council Tax:** The focus is on compiling current fees, cleansing financial systems, defining processes, auditing skills, insurance, accounting policies, audit capacity, communications, council tax harmonisation, support schemes, discounts, outstanding audits, and debt profiles.
 4. **Commercial & Assets:** A detailed inventory is needed of all assets, procurement strategies, shared service implications, intellectual property, capital projects, operational risks, asset management, asset geography, and asset criticality.

5. **Procurement:** Centralised records are required for all contracts, expiring contracts, capital programmes, purchase orders, procurement skills, supplier engagement, information sharing, contract exit clauses, and LGR-related terms and conditions.
 6. **Legal & Democratic:** A review is needed of statutory duties, legal transfer processes, support for procurement and HR, litigation registers, constitution and code of conduct, elections capacity, regulatory registrations, and file retention policies.
 7. **Policy & Strategy:** Key statutory and service policies, policy frameworks, executive summaries of service areas, partnership mapping, and funding streams must be understood and documented.
- 3.6 These areas of work will continue to progress and be amended throughout the progression to the formation of new unitary Councils. They do not have to be completed by July 2026. Furthermore, these are not items that are 'starting from scratch'. Most of these datasets and documentation are needed in business-as-usual activities and are readily available.
- 3.7 During this period the resource will also be committed to participating in the statutory consultation response to the LGR options that MHCLG put forward for public consultation. This will focus on:
- Inform: Clearly communicate the purpose of the consultation, outline the available options, and explain the potential implications for stakeholders.
 - Engage: Promote active involvement from all sections of the community, ensuring inclusion of hard-to-reach groups.
 - Encourage feedback: Enable stakeholders to provide meaningful input that will help inform decision-making.
- 3.8 Members will note further phases of LGR will follow –
- July 2026 – May 2027: focusing on Post-Decision/Joint Committees.** These will see the establishment of joint committees and a formalised transition programme office. Work will focus on decisions that are not political – items like service design, programme plans and preparing the papers for shadow authority.
- May 2027 – 1st April 2028: Shadow Authority** will focus on delivery of 'safe and legal' activities, the closure of legacy systems and creating a new council culture and vision. The Shadow Authority will be able to make political decisions such as levels of council tax, constitution, budget, etc and will create a new workforce and recruit statutory Officers.

Whilst included for reference for Members - **all of these activities fall outside the window of the election in May 2026** but are included to provide contextual detail on work to come to deliver LGR.

Work to deliver an election

- 3.9 Delivering an election is an activity the Council delivers regularly. It is also one the Council must deliver in line with legislation and is at the bedrock of the democratic process. Put simply it must be done correctly.
- 3.10 In the five months leading up to the District Council election, the Elections Team will focus heavily on planning and compliance. This will include confirming the election timetable, ensuring adherence to statutory deadlines, and liaising with the Electoral Commission for guidance. The Team will review and update all election policies and procedures, including accessibility arrangements and contingency plans. They will also ensure venues for polling stations are in place, arranging contracts for equipment such as printed material of poll cards, ballot papers, postal votes and associated postage and confirming staffing requirements. Communication with internal departments and external partners, such as printers and IT providers, will be crucial at this stage to ensure everything is aligned.
- 3.11 The next phase will involve candidate and voter engagement. The Elections Team will prepare nomination packs, publish notices of election, and provide briefing sessions for prospective candidates and agents. They will also oversee the management of updating the electoral register, including processing applications for voter registration, postal and proxy vote applications. Public awareness campaigns will be launched to encourage voter registration and participation, and the Communications Team will also communicate about the nature and number of elections that will occur during the LGR programme. It is recognised that the communication approach will need to be handled carefully, and there is potential for a confusing conflict arising between encouraging participation in an election to an authority and communicating that the authority is due to be abolished part-way through that election cycle. This may create public confusion, but in delivery terms, can be undertaken.
- 3.12 Finally, the team will move into operational readiness and delivery. This will include printing and distributing poll cards, ballot papers, and postal vote packs, as well as training polling station staff and count teams. Risk assessments and security measures will be finalised to safeguard the integrity of the election. In the last few weeks, the Team will conduct final checks, manage postal vote openings, and prepare for the count and declaration of results. Post-election, they will handle returns, compliance reporting, and lessons learned for future improvements. The financial implications are set out in more detail later in this report.
- 3.13 Following the election there will be a series of activities to induct new members and support them in their new positions. A new councillor's induction will involve learning about the Council's governance structure, decision-making processes, and statutory responsibilities. They will be introduced to the Council's vision, priorities, and key policies, as well as the roles of Officers and fellow Councillors. Training covers the Code of

Conduct, ethical standards, and legal obligations such as planning and licensing. Practical sessions will also include how to access Council systems, manage casework, and communicate effectively with residents. Induction also provides an overview of financial management, safeguarding duties, and opportunities for ongoing development to ensure councillors can contribute confidently and effectively to local decision-making.

- 3.14 One aspect of note for Members is there may be a perception that a new administration could be able to revisit the options under consideration for LGR and in so doing create additional demands on Officers. **This is incorrect.** The Government have been clear; the options submitted to them in November 2025 will be the ones that are considered for Statutory Consultation and one of them will be basis for new unitaries. **A new administration at HDC would not be able to alter this course of events** and the expectation from Government would be that Officers and Members will work in line with legislation to deliver the new Councils.
- 3.15 A new, incoming administration will of course have its own ideas, its own manifesto, and aspirations. These will be matters on which Officers and Members will work collectively together to understand the implications of the ongoing work in relation to LGR. Additionally, a 2026 HDC administration would have a degree of influence over the early phase work in setting up the new unitary, prior to the Shadow Administration being formed in 2027. But unless those Councillors were to obtain positions in the 2027 Shadow elections, they would have limited involvement from 2027 and then cease their HDC roles when HDC ceases to exist in 2028.
- 3.16 Potential changes in political leadership of the Council is always an unknown in the context of elections, and within the context of LGR this is no different. It is the role of the Chief Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team to ensure any new administration is properly supported and it receives the appropriate guidance and support to deliver the political aspirations of that administration. As set out earlier within this section, whether there is or are implications for political capacity, is a matter for Members to decide upon.
- 3.17 Regardless of whether elections went ahead on the basis of HDC Members being elected for 2 years, or the 2026 elections were postponed by Government decision, there would be some additional capacity demands on the Council's Communications Team in messaging and explaining to the public and other stakeholders. However, these implications would be treated as part of business as usual (BAU) activity and would not constitute an excessive burden when considering the current capacity of the team.

The degree to which these commitments create capacity and capability challenges for the Council

3.18 Assessing the impact of this overlap hinges on whether this creates issues in terms of capacity (are there sufficient resources?) and capability (are the resources able to deliver?). Comments on the definition of ‘capacity’ and its scope are set out later in this report.

3.19 An assessment of these tasks shows:

Resource	LGR	Elections	Capacity/Capability Impacts
Dedicated resources	Small programme Team of project specialists, which is likely to grow as the work on LGR formalises when the nature of new unitaries is clear	Returning Officer Democratic Services – who are active across all phases of the pre/post election programme. Small dedicated team drawn from comms/One Leisure/Operations/3C ICT – meets initially biweekly then weekly as the focus on the elections tightens	Low – these resources do not overlap, each is focused on their workstream
Additional input from Officers	Leads for the LGR workstreams are senior sponsors (typically a Director or Head of Service) Data gathering and collation of responses from service areas Resources from the Communications Team will be working to maximise the opportunity for responses to the Public Consultation	Officers from across the Council used to staff polling stations, polling inspectors and to manage/conduct counting during the vote and count Effort from a number of specialist resources will be part of induction programme after an election– for example ICT, HR, Monitoring Officer and so on.	Low – whilst some individuals will fulfil roles across the demands these are for limited periods of time (a matter of days) rather than for a prolonged and impactful period.

	triggered by Government		
Additional external resource	External consultancy as required, for example the use of Local Partnerships to provide capabilities that are not maintained in a business-as-usual footing	None	Low – external resources will not overlap; they fulfil distinct and separate functions

The potential to accelerate LGR activities if the election is postponed

3.20 In considering the potential to accelerate LGR activity during the election window, it is worth noting that:

1. The paper has highlighted there are only small levels of overlap between the resources allocated to either LGR or Elections. Operationally the time saved from the dedicated Elections Team would not be allocated to LGR as the skills and resources would not make a meaningful impact. Although it could be said that the cost and resources that would applied to elections could be reasonably diverted to other activities, including LGR, if elections were to be postponed.
2. Even if resource did accelerate the LGR work, until the Secretary of State has determined the make-up of the new unitaries the nature of the LGR tasks undertaken has to be confined to preparatory steps outlined in Section 3.3 - going further into detailed delivery of change cannot progress until the future geography is clear and steps can begin to form new organisations.

There may be strategic and political actions which can be taken prior to the Government's final decision on LGR within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, such as discussions with our partners and neighbours, but for the purpose of this assessment they have been excluded.

3.21 Until point 2 above is resolved, and we know the geographies of the new unitaries, additional complexity will be created by the individual views of the respective Councils across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough; and the extent to which they wish to undertake or engage with preparatory work. It is however noted that a joint Programme Director has been recently appointed to work on behalf of the Councils across the region and ensure that LGR as a project is appropriately planned and delivered effectively. Again, political capacity within this space has been kept outside of the scope of this analysis.

What is the definition of 'capacity' in this context?

- 3.22 The letter presented does not provide any detail or fixed definition of capacity; and there is no additional Government guidance which provides further clarity. Officers have sought to work with it based on our understanding, and appreciation of operational matters, and that has informed the analysis given throughout this section. Although it is noted that Members are at liberty to consider their own definitions of 'capacity', its scope, and factors that may be of relevance; and in responding to the question from the Minister bring forward capacity considerations (and other matters) which they would encourage the Minister to consider in this matter.
- 3.23 Balancing capacity and deployment of organisational resources is a matter for Officers and specifically in law, by the Chief Executive, in her statutory officer function as Head of Paid Service, following the direction set by Members. In this context, often discussions have to be held regarding prioritisation, or balancing of objectives in light of pressures, or indeed the Council has to look to bring in short or longer term capacity. The financial considerations and resourcing considerations are expanded upon later in this report within dedicated sections.
- 3.24 The Council has adopted an agile and flexible approach in the LGR process to date and has been successful in achieving milestones to date. This has included balancing Senior Leadership capacity (both Officer and Member) to deliver other activities; and indeed the ability of Officers to deliver the ambition of Council when it comes to projects etc. Members will also note that Officers brought forward 2 detailed business cases, and comprehensive reports to enable Council to make informed judgements on the direction of LGR to date.
- 3.25 Equally, Officers are conscious that Members are also under pressure with the additional work associated with LGR. These pressures will inevitably continue to exist whether or not the 2026 elections take place. An example of such pressures (on both Members and Officers) was the recent decision to cancel Overview and Scrutiny Panels in December 2025 owing to the effect of the work around LGR in November and the impact this had on both Officer and Member capacity.
- 3.26 It may also be considered that leadership capacity (both political and officer) is relevant in terms of engagement with other Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough; the Government (specifically the LGR leads for the region) and with other stakeholders such as the CPCA. This is however something which is believed to be manageable. As set out in the background section of this report, given the timing of the request and limited timeframes for a response, it has not been possible to discuss this in detail with others; nor reach a common consensus as has happened in other areas historically.
- 3.27 In this context 'capacity' could be defined either narrowly or on a more wide reaching basis; as such there could legitimately be other factors which fall within the definition of 'capacity' which Council may wish to bring

to the attention of the Minister in any response. Additionally, whilst the letter received focuses on the question of capacity, this does not prevent the Council putting forward other matters or comments which the Council would request the Minister gives regard to before making their final decision.

Conclusion of Analysis and Capacity

3.28 Following a detailed analysis, within the timescales available, Officers would advise that:

1. There are significant tasks and activities to be undertaken to deliver LGR and the election.
2. Most of the key tasks are known, planned and have resources allocated to them.
3. The degree to which running these tasks concurrently creates challenges to capacity or capability is assessed as small. There will be some 'pinch-points' but these are forecastable and manageable for the relatively small number of Officers this would impact on.
4. Postponing the election offers only limited opportunity to accelerate LGR as the nature and impact of the released resource would not be meaningful for that task and, as there is no decision from the Secretary of State on the make-up of the final unitaries (though we understand a consultation is due to commence in February), work to deliver change is limited to data capture and planning at this stage.
5. The above analysis provides some factors which aim to assist Members in their deliberations. There may be wider comments; or matters which the Council may wish to highlight to the Secretary of State for them to have regard to in reaching their decision.
6. Regardless of the Government's decision in respect of this matter, the Council is in a good position to work with the outcome, and move forward.

3.29 Before making a final decision on this matter it is prudent to consider wider risks and other factors including the advice of relevant statutory Officers. This follows in the next sections of this report.

4. KEY RISKS

4.1 There are a number of LGR risks that have been identified and mitigations are in place. The detail of these is shown in Appendix 2.

4.2 An assessment of these LGR risks shows that:

1. Some relate directly to the challenges of running business-as-usual activities (such as an election) at the same time as delivering LGR. Mitigations are already in place for this, for example:

- Additional resource (in the form of a financial reserve, dedicated officers or when necessary external capacity),
 - Ongoing monitoring and reporting on performance to Officers and Members allowing concerns on service delivery to be forecast and responded to promptly. Performance is good, and is forecast to remain so
 - An established project team producing high-quality work, with plans being in place to actively manage risk
2. Many of the other risks listed in Appendix 2 relate to the challenges of delivering LGR. Members will note the high degree of overlap between these risks and work underway in Section 3.3 - which is, in effect, mitigation in action.

4.3 In terms of election risks there are a number of considerations including:

1. Should an election proceed there is a risk that resources will be stretched. This is mitigated by the actions and assessment in Section 4.2 and suggested elsewhere in this report.
2. Should the election not occur there is a risk that some Members may choose to resign and trigger by-elections.
 - If this occurred, the Council would have to run by-elections for those wards and resources would be allocated accordingly. It is reasonable to assume the number of by-elections would be smaller than running a whole Council election of 26 wards simultaneously but may result in increased costs of standalone by-elections.

4.4 As stated earlier in this report relating to capacity, it could be said that holding an election could result in changes to the administration of the Council which would have implications on the stability of strategic direction, and the ability to achieve the Council's agreed direction and priorities – both within and outside of an LGR context. A contra view of this could also be taken; and moreover, there is no way to predict the outcome of an election process. The make-up and membership of the Council, and its leadership/administration always has the potential to flux as a result of by-elections or other political changes etc. As such, whilst this is a risk; it is a known risk within Local Government, and there are measures in place to mitigate and manage any impacts arising. LGR does not change this risk to any significant degree, and it is recognised that elections and local democracy is part of the bedrock of Local Government as recognised within the legal framework and legal section of this report. Officers are used to working within this context, whilst maintaining and delivering strategic projects and actions, both short and long-term.

4.5 Finally, some may consider there is a risk that LGR will not progress, and this would have an impact on resources. The letter in Appendix 1 is clear; the Government is committed to the plans and timescales for LGR – so the likelihood of LGR stopping is considered very unlikely and Councils across the country will continue to work to the schedule.

- 4.6 In terms of an overall assessment of whether delivering or postponing an election at the same time of working towards LGR, there are no significant escalations in risk from either outcome. Risks, such as the impacts on business-as-usual have been identified for some time, mitigations are in place, and these steps are being delivered and monitored.
- 4.7 Members may consider that there may be reputational risks for the Council associated with being seen to support the postponement of elections; or in the contra, being seen to offer support for moving forward with elections in the knowledge that those elected will only be representatives for a short (less than 2 years) period and there will be further elections to the shadow authority in 2027 – namely the question around best use of public money. How these are weighted in decision making are matters for Members; but should be done in the context that it is the Government's decision as to whether elections go-ahead or not. Regardless of this being a Government decision, there are reputational risks for the Council at a local level, and the Council must continue to act lawfully in making its response to the Minister in order to prevent risk of legal challenge at a local level and maintain local confidence and reputation.

5. TIMETABLE - TO DATE AND FOR FURTHER ACTIONS

- 5.1 In reaching this stage a number of actions have been taken:
1. Letter received from Government 18th December
 2. Chief Executives call with MHCLG 18th December for a briefing from the Minister and an opportunity for a short Q&A session
 3. Paper drafted and developed by Officers during the Christmas period
 4. Monitoring Officer and s151 Officer considered any statutory implications of the letter from Government seeking, where necessary, any external input to aid their advice
 5. Publication of final report and recommendations on 6th January 2026
 6. Council debate and decision making on 14th January 2026
- 5.2 Following the Council meeting further actions will be taken depending on the outcome. Key to these will be responding to the letter issued by MHCLG with the Council's position on the elections and taking subsequent actions forward – whether that is to deliver the work on LGR and elections; or not progressing the election and focusing on LGR and other business-as-usual tasks.
- 5.3 Should the Minister conclude that an election be postponed, the Government will progress, as it has when other elections have been postponed, with the passing of appropriate legal orders, from which Councils will then act (as indicated earlier in this report).

6. **LINK TO HUNTINGDONSHIRE FUTURES, THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**
([See Corporate Plan](#))([See Huntingdonshire Futures](#))

- 6.1 The matters within this paper are most closely aligned with priority 3 from the Corporate Plan:



7. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 In formulating this section, the views of both the Chief Executive (in her capacity as Returning Officer and Head of Paid Service) and the Monitoring Officer have been included.
- 7.2 Noting the scope of the letter received, and some contra-indications being given by MHCLG representatives in subsequent briefings, the Council has also sought external advice from leading King's Counsel in order to inform Members and ensure that HDC decision-making on this matter is correct.
- 7.3 The bringing the above together, this confirms in summary (**emphasis added in bold**):
1. The starting legislation of relevance is the Representation of the People Act 1983 and Local Government Act 2000. The LGA 2000 grants to the Secretary of State the power to change the years in which the ordinary elections for councillors of specified local authorities are held.
 2. Secondary legislation is required from Government to postpone or cancel an election. **This is not a matter the Council can determine.**
 3. The Coronavirus Act 2020 confirms this principle, as elections were postponed for 1 year.
 4. The Local Authorities (Changes to Years of Ordinary Elections) (England) Order 2025, SI 2025/137, required elections in eight councils, seven of which were county councils, to be held in 2026 rather than 2025. **Noting these are those DPP areas identified in section 2 of this report.** This Order was made using the power in section 87 of the 2000 Act and secondary legislation.

5. The letter received, whilst written to the Leader invites the views of HDC as the Council, and to request postponement of the elections if holding of the elections would impact on capacity to deliver LGR.
6. **Election matters are a function of Council not the Executive** - Part D of Schedule 1 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) (Regulations) 2000, SI 2000/2853.
7. Simply because the letter was sent to the Leader, that does not make it a matter for the Leader to take. **The Leader could write in a personal capacity, but would not have the lawful remit of Council.**
8. Similarly, just because the letter pertains to Local Government Reorganisation, it could not be argued it does not relate to elections. This is the same as the virus that led to the Coronavirus Act had nothing to do with elections, but was a matter of public health. However it impacted on elections, and secondary legislation relating to elections was required.
9. Accordingly, **any decision that the Council may make pertaining to the May 2026 elections is for Council**, this includes a decision on how to respond to the invitation by the Minister.

Turning to matters of “capacity”:

10. Elections are mandated to happen; they are well known and understood and are required to happen regardless of an authority’s finances. Capacity may impact on support for a newly elected Council, but no court would tolerate ‘elections are expensive, therefore we will (seek to) put them off’. **Financial implications should there be given little or no weight.**
11. There are no existing delegations to the Returning Officer which allows her to request postponement or cancellation of elections.
12. The letter refers to capacity to deliver transition to new councils along side running resource intensive elections. The meaning of capacity would appear to reference those steps necessary to be taken as part of local government reorganisation.
13. It is considered that **there are no “best value” considerations triggered by the need for elections, with shadow elections planned for 2027.** The Council is not compelled to request postponement based on statutory ‘best value’ and use of public funds aspects. This is on the basis that elections are mandated, and necessary for elected bodies to play a part in local administration.

That some weight to be given to the Electoral Commission observations:

14. These may be considered, but the Commission does not themselves run elections and generally, have no responsibility for local government.

Likely risks of challenge:

15. The Council is not the decision-maker in respect of postponement, this exists and sits with the Secretary of State.
16. It is suggested that if the Council chooses to respond, it should make it plain that any decision, assuming there is a lawful basis for it, is a matter for the Secretary of State; and that any response is provided expressly on this basis. Thus any challenge would not be against the Council. **It is recommended that the mandated requirement for elections should be emphasized.**

- 7.4 The Electoral Commission has issued a response to the letter that has been sent to Councils. This was issued on 19th December and can be found here: [Electoral Commission responds to potential election postponements | Electoral Commission](#).
- 7.5 The above seeks to reinforce a view that capacity constraints are not a legitimate reason for delaying planned elections; and that this has risks relating to public confidence.
- 7.6 Noting the above, there are clearly some areas where Members of Council may wish to incorporate certain factors within their decision making and afford weight to them. Those are matters for each member to take individually and weigh up; but this should be done in the context of the advice above, as well as that provided elsewhere within this report, noting of course the main issues as the basis for the request in relation to 'capacity'.
- 7.7 What is clear from the above, is that as a matter of starting principle, elections are mandated to happen. Thus, financial implications (i.e. we can't afford them); capacity to deliver other activities alongside elections (i.e. we don't have capacity, let's just postpone them); and best value (i.e. it does not make financial sense/best-value to have elections 2 years running) should be afforded minimal to no weight.
- 7.8 Further, the matter of public opinion over whether or not elections should happen in light of Shadow elections likely to take place in 2027, is a matter which the Secretary of State / Government will have to grapple with as the end decision maker. Whether that forms part of a Member's decision-making at this juncture is a matter for each member, but it is suggested this should carry minimal weight.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council is a financially stable authority and has created a financial reserve to support the implementation of LGR. This reserve is also being looked at proactively within future budget setting.

- 8.2 The Council has also sought to reinforce its staffing capacity in light of LGR, and to date has delivered 2 business cases, 1 of which has been taken forward. This is alongside every day (BAU activity) and continued delivery of the Councils other objectives and projects.
- 8.3 Elections are part and parcel of the Councils activity, whether that is planned elections based on the established cycle, or responding to unplanned events such as 'snap' parliamentary elections, or by-elections. In all cases, the Council actively delivers these in an efficient and effective manner and is able to recoup the necessary costs.
- 8.4 Holding elections is unlikely to delay or impact financially on the implementation of LGR as the costs are in the region of £350k for HDC (this is after shared costs with Town and Parish Councils). Town and Parish Councils can ensure that any costs are covered by virtue of the precept they set and receive. Equally the financial costs are already budgeted for as part of the Councils required activities. It could be said however that not having to spend this money or use these resources on electoral activities would enable that resource to be redeployed to other activities. If elections were to be postponed at this stage, there would be some expenditure which would be unavoidable – for example print costs c£35k, and potentially bookings of venues etc.
- 8.5 This paper has been based upon the letter received, which only pertains to District Council elections. It is noted that the Secretary of State is not minded to cancel Town or Parish Council elections; and it is expected that any parliamentary election, Mayoral election, or by-election requirements will be expected to be handled in the usual fashion.
- 8.6 In short summary, there are no financial show-stoppers which would form a resource basis for the Council to need to request consideration of postponement. This is reinforced by the comments within the legal section – namely that 'we cannot afford them' would not be a sufficient basis if challenged.
- 8.7 The costs associated with Shadow elections have been incorporated into the relevant business cases submitted to Government in respect of LGR, as have proposed electoral arrangements moving forward. These are captured within both transition costs and long-term savings/costs.

Expected 2026 costs (HDC element as will be shared with Town and Parish Councils)	Circa £350k*
Expected 2026 cost to Town and Councils of standalone elections (based on all 71 being contested – not shared with District)	Circa £475k*
Indicative 2027 Shadow elections cost (unitary council only)	Circa £380k* for HDC dependent upon number of divisions/wards

*The above are broad estimates based on historic knowledge and current budgeting. There are many variables which can impact on those figures, including the number of areas being contested and numbers of candidates. It is highly unlikely that all areas would be contested at the same time.

In the event of a single elections (i.e. standalone Town / Parish) those areas contested would have to accommodate the full costs including poll card printing and postage, polling station hire, staffing etc – with some base costs (e.g. printing, venue hire etc) being applicable to all Town/Parishes even if they are not contested.

- 8.8 Members, particularly those who are also Town / Parish councillors, may have concerns regarding the impact of the cost of 2026 Town/Parish Council elections having to be covered solely by them (i.e. not shared with the District) and loss of the economies of scale that exist from the established shared arrangements. This is noted and is a matter for Members to grapple with. The letter is clear that the Minister is minded that Town / Parish Council elections should still go ahead. It is suggested that this should be afforded only minimal weight in the Councils response to the invitation. Members may wish to request that the Minister give due regard to retaining alignment between Town/Parish Council elections in reaching their decision, within the Council's response. Such comments can be captured within the scope of delegations arising from recommendation c).
- 8.9 Whilst this will ultimately be a matter for Town / Parishes to respond to, in the same way that the Council will have to respond to the outcome of any decision (and legislation) made by Government. However, given the Councils financial position, it is considered that there are likely to be ways that the Council can work with affected Town / Parish Councils to ensure that the elections can be undertaken, and any financial gaps in-year worked through where necessary. These will vary depending on the financial position of each Town/Parish Council; but in short, the Council is in a position to work with them on this, to address any short term deficits pending future precepting. A recommendation d) is included to cover this eventuality and embed the principle of the District Council working with Towns / Parishes in response to whatever decision Government makes in respect of the 2026 elections.

9. OTHER IMPLICATIONS / CONSIDERATIONS

Town and Parish Council elections

- 9.1 At the same time as local District Council elections for all 52 seats there are scheduled elections for all 71 Town and Parish Councils in the District, a total of 652 seats. The letter from the Minister is clear, they are not minded to include postponement of Town and Parish Council elections within any Order, and thus these must progress and Officers are continuing

to plan for this occurrence. For ease of reference, the paragraph from the Minister is included below:

For areas where there are also scheduled town or parish council elections, the Secretary of State is minded to make no provision in the Order so these elections continue as scheduled, given town and parish councils are outside of local government reorganisation.

- 9.2 The Minister could change their view on this once they have received feedback from all areas in response to the invitation, but based on the wording and advice to date, it is unlikely that this position will change.
- 9.3 Officers recognise the obvious benefits of having Town and Parish Council elections aligned, these include financial, but also in respect of other matters such as deliverability, public engagement etc. This may be a matter which Council wishes to bring to the attention of the Minister.
- 9.4 Members may have concerns regarding the financial impact on Town and Parish Councils having to undergo elections without the ability to share costs with the District Council. This matter has been considered within section 8 above. Whilst this may play in to Members judgement as a material matter, Officers would advise that it should only be given minimal weight. This is on the basis that the exam question being asked by the Minister pertains to capacity to deliver LGR as per the analysis at section 3.
- 9.5 Ultimately in respect of Town and Parish Councils, they will have to also undertake their own activities to respond to whatever decision is reached by Government, this is no different to the District Council.
- 9.6 There would be some merit in requesting that the Minister considers alignment of Town and Parish Council elections in reaching their conclusion, as it is considered that this would allow for the continued efficiency benefits (e.g. shared costs) and simpler messaging for the public as per the system which currently exists and is being planned for in May 2026.

Other public sector reform and changes (known and unknown)

- 9.6 Members will be aware of other planned changes within the public sector system, for example changes in health system delivery; as well as potential changes in education and social care. Planning reform is forthcoming, as are suggested changes in Licensing. All of this is within an unstable economic context, and wider national and international geopolitical environments. In short there are a wide range of variables at play currently, some which are known and some which are not. These have the potential to impact on the Councils general capacity for delivery, as well

as future direction towards LGR. The precise impacts will vary and may require decisions relating to deployment of resources and capacity over the coming years, alongside the developing landscape relating to LGR. These are matters which will have to be considered and factored into risk management and mitigation. Members may consider that these considerations carry weight, and they may form the basis of wider comments to Government, but in respect of the specific invitation before us, are not considered to be so significant as to undermine the ability of the Council to deliver elections in 2026.

Do nothing option

- 9.7 There is a 'do nothing' option, which is that Council determines not to respond to the invitation. In this context, the Secretary of State would remain the decision-maker, and the Council would have to respond to whatever outcome is reached. This option removes the ability to inform or influence that decision of the Secretary of State and bring to their attention any relevant matters.
- 9.8 It is possible for the Council to include relevant information and factors, beyond those pertaining solely to 'capacity' for the Minister to consider. Or indeed provide some form of alternative response. This is within the gift of Council, however, there is no ability to predict how such a response will be received given the absence of guidance and definition as set out earlier in this report.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 10.1 In determining what response (if any) is provided to the Secretary of State in response to their invitation regarding whether to progress with elections in May 2026, or not, the report has highlighted:
1. An assessment of the activities that need to be delivered, matched these against the resources required and has completed an analysis of the capacity and capability of the organisation to deliver them at the same time. The analysis concluded that delivering these two elements at the same time is achievable.
 2. Risks have been revisited in light of the potential opportunity to postpone elections and that existing mitigation measures in place to maintain business-as-usual are robust. There is no impactful change to the risk profile in place at the Council if the election was postponed.
 3. The decision to postpone an election is a matter for the Secretary of State as decision-maker. It is for Council to advise on how it wishes to respond to the invitation only.
 4. Elections are a mandated part of Council activity, and the financial cost of delivering them is unlikely to be a sufficient justification. There are also no "best value" considerations in respect of elections.

5. Input from the s151 Officer has also been added to the paper and indicates there are no substantive financial matters that would form a basis for requesting a postponement.
6. The Council is in a good position to respond to whatever decision is made by the Government in respect of elections in May 2026; and in the event they are postponed, is positioned to be able to support Town and Parish Councils should they be required to proceed.
7. Based on current timescales; if elections are postponed for HDC in 2026; Members terms would be extended until 2028 when HDC ceases to exist; Shadow elections would occur in 2027.

10.2 Members have a copy of the letter from the Minister attached at Appendix 1.

10.3 Members are requested to note the requirements of the letter, and the content of this report, and advise Officers how Council wishes to respond and provide any relevant comments or matters for inclusion within that response. A request for relevant delegations is made to enable the Council to respond to the invitation within the identified timescales.

11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

11.1 Appendix 1 - The letter from the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness

Appendix 2 - LGR risks & mitigations.

CONTACT OFFICER

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**Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government**

Alison McGovern MP
*Minister of State for Local Government
and Homelessness*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

To: Leaders of councils with elections
in May 2026 where proposals for
reorganisation have been submitted
and decisions not yet taken

18 December 2025

Dear Leader,

I am writing to you regarding the elections your council is scheduled to hold on 7 May 2026.

This Government is determined to streamline local government by replacing the current two-tier system with new single-tier unitary councils, ending the wasteful two-tier premium. We are progressing this landmark reform quickly, which will be vital in delivering our vision: stronger local councils equipped to drive economic growth, improve local public services, and empower their communities. I am fully committed to ensuring councils can deliver new, sustainable structures within this Parliament.

We have now received proposals from all 20 remaining invitation areas, demonstrating strong collaboration between local partners. A consultation is open on 17 of those proposals from six invitation areas. I expect to launch a consultation in early February on proposals from the remaining 14 areas that seek to meet the terms of the 5 February statutory invitation. That consultation would be for seven weeks.

I remain committed to the indicative timetable that was published in July, that sees elections to new councils in May 2027 and those councils going live in April 2028. This is a complex process, and we will take decisions based on the evidence provided.

We have listened to councils telling us about the constraints they are operating within, and the work that reorganisation introduces on top of existing challenges. Now that we have received all proposals, it is only right that we listen to councils who are expressing concerns about their capacity to deliver a smooth and safe transition to new councils, alongside running resource-intensive elections to councils who may be shortly abolished. We have also received representations from councils concerned about the cost to taxpayers of holding elections to councils that are proposed to shortly be abolished.

Previous governments have postponed local elections in areas contemplating and undergoing local government reorganisation to allow councils to focus their time and energy on the process. We have now received requests from multiple councils to postpone their local elections in May 2026.

The Secretary of State recognises that capacity will vary between councils and that is why he has reached the position that, in his view, councils are in the best position to

judge the impact of potential postponements on your area and in the spirit of devolution and trusting local leaders, this Government will listen to you.

I am therefore inviting you, by midnight on Thursday 15 January, to set out your views on the postponement of your local election and if you consider this could release essential capacity to deliver local government reorganisation in your area and so allow reorganisation to progress effectively. For those who have already made their views known, we will be taking these into account. Views should be sent by email to LGRElections@communities.gov.uk.

The Secretary of State has adopted a locally-led approach. He is clear that should a council say they have no reason for postponement, then we will listen. But if you voice genuine concerns about your capacity, then we will take these concerns seriously. To that end, the Secretary of State is only minded to make an Order to postpone elections for one year for those councils who raise capacity concerns. A list of the relevant elections is annexed.

For areas where there are also scheduled town or parish council elections, the Secretary of State is minded to make no provision in the Order so these elections continue as scheduled, given town and parish councils are outside of local government reorganisation.

I appreciate that preparations for elections may have started, and you will be keen to have certainty, which we will deliver as soon as possible.

I am copying this letter to your Chief Executives, the other Leaders and Chief Executives of councils in the local government reorganisation programme, and to local MPs, Combined/Combined County Authority Mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners and Best Value Commissioners in local government reorganisation areas.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alison', with a stylized flourish at the end.

ALISON MCGOVERN MP

Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness

Appendix 2

Key LGR risks and the mitigations in place

Risk Ref	Risk Title / Description	Inherent Priority	Residual Priority	Target Priority	Main Controls / Mitigations	Risk Owner
LGR0001	LGR disrupting BAU (Business as Usual)	Very High (15)	Medium (6)	Medium (6)	Oversight by Performance & Growth Committee, experienced leadership, LGR team, peer challenge, regular meetings, external support	Michelle Sacks
LGR0002	Legal & Compliance Issues	Very High (16)	High (12)	High (12)	Statutory officer oversight, Monitoring Officer, legal advice, horizon scanning, governance frameworks	John Taylor
LGR0003	Contractual Issues	Very High (16)	High (12)	High (12)	Contracts register, procurement board, designated leads, contract novation	Lydia Morrison
LGR0004	Planning & Growth Ambition	High (12)	High (8)	High (8)	Local Plan adoption, stakeholder engagement, S106/CIL arrangements	Mike Gildersleeves
LGR0005	ICT Systems / Issues	Very High (16)	High (12)	High (12)	ICT systems register, contract novation, procurement frameworks, regular comms	John Taylor

LGR0006	External Interference	Very High (25)	Very High (20)	Very High (20)	Policy & Research Officer, senior leadership, stakeholder engagement, external consultants, horizon scanning	Michelle Sacks
LGR0007	Ineffective Engagement	Very High (16)	High (12)	High (12)	Engagement & comms strategy, horizon scanning, external consultation, sign-off process	John Taylor
LGR0008	Staff / Workforce Issues	Very High (20)	High (10)	High (10)	Internal comms, workforce strategy, union meetings, HR workstream	Michelle Sacks
LGR0009	Financial Sustainability	Very High (20)	High (8)	High (8)	Medium Term Financial Plan, horizon scanning, asset register, MoUs, regular liaison with partners	Lydia Morrison
LGR0010	Service / Structure Redesign	High (12)	High (9)	High (9)	Service development plans, benchmarking, transformation plan, horizon scanning	John Taylor
LGR0011	Partnership Issues	Very High (16)	High (12)	High (12)	Regular comms with partners, project controls, MoUs, partnership arrangements	Mike Gildersleeves
LGR0012	Member Decision Making	Very High (20)	High (8)	High (8)	Codes of conduct, statutory officer review, member briefings, external analysis, CEO engagement	Michelle Sacks

