

Councillor Jonathan Gullis, Leader

Our Ref: JG/30/10



Rt. Hon Jim McMahon OBE MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Via email: PSJimMcMahon@communities.gov.uk

30th October 2026

Dear Jim,

Local Government Reorganisation: announcement of 29 October 2026

Following your announcement, I want to leave you in no doubt about Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council's position: local government reorganisation is unnecessary, unwanted and should now be abandoned.

We support the proposed Mayoral Strategic Authority for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent announced in the Budget. We welcome clarity on its geography and will work constructively with Ministers, local MPs and council leaders to secure meaningful powers and funding for our area. The detail must match the ambition. Support for devolution does not give the Government permission to abolish our borough council. Transferring power from Westminster should strengthen local democracy. Dismantling councils against the wishes of their communities does the opposite.

Newcastle-under-Lyme is a Loyal and Ancient Borough with more than 850 years of history. Its independent local government, civic identity and democratic accountability should not be swept aside to satisfy a Whitehall restructuring exercise.

Much has changed since the reorganisation programme began in 2024, and since proposals were submitted in late 2025. National and international economic pressures continue to challenge local government. Councils should be concentrating their resources on essential services, emergency preparedness and supporting residents and businesses facing cost of living pressures.

Instead, this process requires us to divert money and officer time towards a reorganisation our residents neither requested nor support. In your letter, you recognise that "more can, and must, be done to recognise the demands being placed on council leaders and senior leadership teams". Yet the Government's own reorganisation programme is adding directly to those demands.

Nor should our residents become the financial lifeboat for other authorities in our area, particularly Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Its substantial debt and financial pressures cannot simply be folded into a new authority and treated as somebody else's problem. Newcastle-under-Lyme's taxpayers did not create those liabilities. They should not be made to shoulder them through higher council tax, reduced services or the diversion of resources from their communities. Before proceeding, Ministers must explain how those liabilities would be managed and what protection Newcastle-under-Lyme's taxpayers would receive. They must also demonstrate that proposals submitted in 2025 remain financially credible in the circumstances councils face today. Pressing ahead without addressing those questions would be indefensible.

Opposition in Newcastle-under-Lyme crosses party lines. That includes our local Labour Member of Parliament, Adam Jogee MP, whose concerns raised in the House of Commons deserve a substantive answer from his own Government. I welcome his opposition. However, if Ministers remain determined to abolish the Borough Council he represents, I hope he will decide to leave Government and oppose this move from the backbenches. A decision of this magnitude demands more than expressions of concern. It demands a willingness to stand up to the Government imposing it, even at the cost of government office.

For our part, as soon as the Government publishes its formal position for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, we will act on the wishes of our elected members and instruct our King's Counsel to assess it. That advice will address our response to any "minded-to" announcement and whether there are grounds to challenge an eventual final decision through Judicial Review. Any legal action will depend on the decision taken and the advice received.

I also repeat my request for the immediate reimbursement of the £312,000 this council has incurred because of the Government's reorganisation programme. Our taxpayers should not bear the cost of preparing for changes imposed upon them. Your letter commits to an initial payment of £450,000 per previously proposed new unitary authority, representing half of the £900,000 allocation. Please confirm how that funding will be administered following the withdrawal of the previous decisions, how each affected council can secure reimbursement of its costs, and when Newcastle-under-Lyme will receive payment.

Above all, I urge you to abandon these plans. Listen to the communities affected, consider the alternatives and pursue genuine devolution without destroying independent local government. Our borough's future should be shaped by its residents, not imposed upon them by ministerial decree.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Jonathan Gullis
Leader of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Cc: Adam Jogee MP
Leigh Ingham MP
David Williams MP