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Date: 28th January 2025

Rt. Hon Angela Rayner MP
Deputy Prime Minister & Secretary of State for Housing, Communities
& Local Government
Rt Jim McMahon OBE MP, Minister for Local Government
& English Devolution
2 Marsham Street
London
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Dear Angela Rayner MP & Jim McMahon MP

English Devolution White Paper: Newcastle-under-Lyme

I am writing further to the resolutions of Newcastle-under-Lyme's Cabinet in response to the release of the English Devolution White Paper just before the Christmas holidays.

As you will be aware, the Loyal and Ancient Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme has a long, distinguished and proud identity, dating back to its first Royal Charter of 1173, when Henry II had granted a charter to the town and gave strong support to the early borough over the next decade. Further royal charters have been granted to the borough by Kings Henry III, Edward I, Edward II, and Richard II, Queen Elizabeth I, Kings Charles II, James II and Queen Victoria. The late Queen Elizabeth II granted a charter following the 800th anniversary of the borough, a moment recorded by the statue of the late Queen which now stands at the heart of the town.

In 1995, North Staffordshire governance arrangements were changed with the creation of the unitary authority of Stoke on Trent. Through this change, Newcastle-Under-Lyme retained its borough status. The city subsequently trialled an elected mayoral model of governance, later abolished. There was significant strength of feeling that Newcastle-under-Lyme should remain outside a North Staffordshire model, and I firmly believe this remains the case.

In my reports to Cabinet and our full Council, I set out the recent achievements and issues within the borough that we as a Borough Council have been able to focus on in a way I believe would not be the case in a larger, more remote authority. I have enclosed a copy of this report, including our vital work on the odour blight at Walleys Quarry Landfill, our town centre regeneration in Newcastle and Kidsgrove, investment in our culture and leisure, including a community-owned facility (genuine devolution) and moving ahead innovatively and at pace on our net zero plans. In 2023, we celebrated our 850th anniversary as a borough.

In September 2024, Ministers asked that regions prepare devolution plans. As a Staffordshire Leaders Board (made up of the eight district and borough Councils working with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council), we set out a devolution approach which embedded partnership working, the priorities for Staffordshire and applied these to the Government's missions. To date, unfortunately, we have received no feedback and I understand that we may not now have any response to this work. That is concerning as local authorities are being asked to again provide information on short timescales in what appears to be a rapidly changing landscape.

The Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, in a response to questions raised by MPs from our areas, dismissed concerns as local disputes. To be clear, I have said that we work well with our neighbours in Stoke-on-Trent – this is not about that neighbour relationship and to say so fundamentally misunderstands concerns. Newcastle-under-Lyme does not wish, however, to be subsumed into a city-led council which moves focus away from its residents and businesses. To be clear, this is the core of our concerns – we would be happy to engage with your officials on plans for the wider strategic authority at a 1.5 million level but cannot accept a merger and loss of the borough.

I would like to invite you to visit Newcastle-under-Lyme to see first hand our loyal and ancient borough and discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr. Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council

Cc: Adam Jogee MP, Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme
Gordon Mole, Chief Executive, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

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