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Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council Cabinet
Panel for Local Government Reorganisation

30 March 2026

Submission from Adam Jogee MP, Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme

A member of my family had surgery earlier this month, and as Parliament is now in recess for the Holy days of Easter; it's my turn to help with the associated caring responsibilities. As such, it is a matter of regret that I am not able to attend the panel tonight in person.

I am sorry that I wasn't consulted by the District Borough Council about the date of the panel because if I had, I would have been able to make alternative suggestions that would have facilitated my full and active participation. That decision, I'm afraid, lies with others.

Throughout this process, I've made clear to Ministers – including on the floor of the House – that I have concerns both about how this process has been conducted and what it is trying to achieve.

The decision-making process is shaped by the party-political considerations of those leading it in each local authority and therefore considerations are set to the agenda of those people and not with the interests of the community in mind.

That doesn't take away from the fact that the current situation doesn't serve the best interests of my constituents. From the gritting of our roads to the cleaning of the verges along the A500 and from sorting ASB on the A34 into estates in Waterhayes to making our streets safe and secure, it's a constant back and forth and local people pay the price.

I have heard from many local people in Newcastle-under-Lyme who have written to me and shared their views on the current democratic structures that serve us, and the options for change, over the last 12 months or so. I've also encouraged people to feed their thoughts through an online survey on my website.

My approach throughout this process has been, as I told the current Leader of the District Borough Council in September 2025 and again in November 2025, focused on ensuring that the people of Newcastle-under-Lyme have a strong and distinct voice in shaping our future and seizing the opportunities before us, as we learn the lessons of the past.

This community has a unique identity, deep-rooted communities, and a local economy with real potential to grow and develop not least because of where we are located within our United Kingdom. It is vital that decisions about our area are shaped by local people, by those who understand our priorities and share our commitment to fairness, inclusion, and opportunity for all. Local government reorganisation, and any final proposals that may or may not be taken forward, must be about improving accountability, strengthening local democracy and real delivery of the services that local people deserve.

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My default view is to support a stand-alone Unitary Authority for Newcastle-under-Lyme, it's what my Labour colleagues on the Council called for at a special meeting of Newcastle-under-Lyme District Borough Council in March 2025, and it's what I indicated in my letter of November 2025. I just want the proposals to be realistic, robust and effective.

I would strongly urge, whatever course of action is followed, that the new unitary Council boundaries that cover Newcastle-under-Lyme are headquartered in Newcastle-under-Lyme, whatever the situation. This applies to a stand-alone authority or any other option before us and would help challenge some of the narrative 'articulated' by some political leaders who should know better that this is about 'taking power away from people'. Taking the power away from County Hall in Stafford and bringing it up the A34 is to be welcomed.

I am very concerned by the inadequate and, frankly, incompetent way in which the proposals for such an option have been 'developed' by the current leadership of the District Borough Council. At no stage has the discussion on the future of local government ever been about 'how do get the best deal for local people?' How do we fix our broken transport network? How can we make sure that we engage with the process properly and maturely; How do we attach the investment?

My concerns were exacerbated by a senior member of the Conservative Party in Staffordshire telling me that the proposals from Newcastle-under-Lyme District Borough Council were and I quote:

"a political thing. Not serious"

I hope that's not true because it would be a failure of political leadership and would be taking people for fools.

In September 2025, I asked for a briefing from the District Borough Council about the work that had gone into shaping the District Borough Council's position and proposals, as well as the discussions they had had with neighbouring authorities and strategic partners.

This request was made after a number of residents expressed their concern at the failures of proper and inclusive leadership from the District Borough Council over local government reorganisation and the very confusing and – at times overtly partisan – messaging.

Several long weeks after that request, I joined a call with my two parliamentary neighbours, the Member of Parliament for Stafford and the Member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent North and the Leader and Chief Executive of Newcastle-under-Lyme District Borough Council. They presented their proposals, which I believe at the time, cost the taxpayer about £200,000 or so to put together.

Getting this right is important. Let's take Walleys Quarry landfill site – a disgraceful example of profit over people that was allowed to happen for years under a Conservative Party-led District Borough Council, a Conservative Party-led Staffordshire County Council and a Conservative Government in Westminster.

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My constituents were left suffering with those in power seemingly paralysed by inaction and passing of the buck at every stage. There were more photo opportunities and press releases than many people have had hot dinners. Thankfully after the last General Election things got better and we got the site closed down and chased the operators out of town. A single unitary would have forced those elected to it to do their job properly and not get away with the *'It wasn't my responsibility, it was theirs'* narrative.

Let's take the current structures now and what that means for service delivery for local people. As a Member of Parliament, most of my inbox and casework is related to housing and the local housing provider – Aspire – or it's the work of the District Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council. When I have tried to raise issues in Waterhayes about ASB and how paths down from the A34 could be redesigned to design the ASB out, I get told by the District that they own a third of the path and so it's not their responsibility and so I go to the County and they say they own two thirds of the path and so it's not their responsibility.

It's a nightmare and means those elected to serve as Councillors are more often than not missing in action and its local people who pay the price.

For a moment, let's park my view that a Newcastle only model should be the preference, I was very concerned to listen to the hollow and unimaginative explanations from the Chief Executive and Council Leader in the briefing that took place with my two parliamentary colleagues and me. I asked about how we would make sure older people get the support that they need through our adult social care commitments and what would a single unitary would mean for supporting children with additional needs, as just two examples.

I was told that it would be a case of 'buying in' those services from the neighbouring unitary authorities and thus totally undermining the points about 'local democracy' that has featured in virtually press release or partisan attack on social media.

If we want to make a Newcastle-under-Lyme unitary work, we need to get our act together and put together proposals that are bi-partisan, objective, realistic and honest.

I should like to make a few comments on the proposals as submitted by each of the local authorities in the area and note that most aim to replace the current two-tier system with larger, more effective, unitary authorities with an approximate population of 500,000 or so people.

As with all things in life, each model has its strengths and weaknesses.

Two-unitary "North / South" model

This model could be viewed as offering the most clarity and clearest geographical balance. It would replace 10 councils with 2, reducing both duplication and governance layers. In my community, rightly, there would be a very strong feeling of concern about any potential dominance by the City of Stoke-on-Trent in a 'North/South' approach and raise some legitimate concerns from some residents about the loss of our local identity.

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A number of people have been in touch with me about their concerns with what happens to local authorities who bring years of debts and accounts in the red to any possible new structures. It's a very fair point and must be addressed by my colleagues in Government at the earliest opportunity and in the strongest terms. If this option was considered, my constituents should not be paying someone else's bill.

There are opportunities, including the integration of health, housing, and social care services as well as real potential for cost savings and a more streamlined approach to service delivery. This model may provide a platform for a future mayoral combined authority should this have support from the people of North Staffordshire.

I am mindful that there is public resistance to "mega councils" and what can be best described as centralisation.

Four-unitary / single-district options

This option provides for maximum local control and the preservation of local identities. That is important because with this model there remains strong democratic accountability at a local level and would prove to be a pilot for hyper-local governance models. I have always said – all politics is local.

However, we must be mindful of the risks advancing this cause in the current process, it doesn't meet the approximately 500k population and it could be argued that there is limited financial resilience and service capacity. These issues could be ironed out, but I have serious concerns that the current leadership at the District Borough Council just hasn't done the work or the engagement required.

Two-unitary "East / West" model

It could be argued that this model balances urban and rural areas differently, potentially reduces the domination of any local authority over another and builds on existing county-wide service integration. However, I consider this to have major issues around transport connectivity and community cohesion.

There is also a risk of artificial boundaries reducing any potential improvements in service delivery and, again, leading to more public confusion over what would be an unfamiliar – uncharted – structure.

"Enhanced North" (parish-splitting) model

We could argue that this proposal meets the population thresholds more accurately whilst reducing any concerns that the City of Stoke-on-Trent would dominate the future of local government in our area.

However, on balance, this would lead to highly complex boundaries, it would be administratively difficult when it comes to reorganising services across many different communities.

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It would likely lead to public confusion over who, how and what when it comes to the delivery of services nor would it address the concerns about identity. I am also concerned about the legal and operational impacts of splitting communities.

Three-unitary model

There is a valid argument that this offers better local representation than 2-unitary models and reflects distinct southern sub-regions (SW vs SE Staffordshire) whilst still achieving the efficiency gains that have been set out compared to the current system. It may also provide for more a more tailored approach to economic development.

On a reflection point, I regret that the model of developing a local government structure that is more effective and more responsive to the needs of local people has been done this way. In our case, here in Newcastle-under-Lyme, there has been little effort to engage in a serious, respectful conversation about the future and how we ensure that our people get the services and representation that they deserve.

As I have set out to my colleagues, I support a Newcastle-under-Lyme first approach and stand ready to engage with anyone who wants to make it actually work.

Best wishes,

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