

Councillor Jonathan Gullis, Leader



Rt. Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 0AA

Via email: Andy.Burnham.MP@parliament.uk
LGRorganisation@communities.gov.uk

22nd July 2026

Dear Prime Minister,

Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

May I begin by congratulating you on your appointment as Prime Minister. Whatever our political differences, becoming Prime Minister is an extraordinary honour and responsibility, and I wish you success in serving our country.

Your appointment also provides an immediate opportunity for the Government to reconsider the decision announced on 16 July concerning Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

That announcement was made just four days before you took office. Now that you are Prime Minister and responsible for the policy and decisions of the Government, I must ask:

- Were you consulted before the decision was made?
- Did you agree with the decision to create a new North Staffordshire authority?
- Will your Government proceed with forcing Newcastle-under-Lyme into an authority with Stoke-on-Trent?

These are straightforward questions to which the residents of Newcastle-under-Lyme deserve straightforward answers.

Both the current and previous administrations of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council have consistently raised serious concerns about these proposals. On 8 July 2026, the Council passed a motion reaffirming its opposition to forced Local Government Reorganisation and calling for the process to be halted.

That motion specifically requested that the Leader and Chief Executive write to you again once you had formally taken office as Prime Minister. I am therefore writing in accordance with the clear and democratically expressed resolution of the Council.

The motion recognised that:

- More than 11,000 people have signed a petition opposing forced Local Government Reorganisation;

- There is strong and widespread local opposition to merging Newcastle-under-Lyme with Stoke-on-Trent;
- The proposals would weaken local democracy, reduce accountability and move decision-making further away from residents;
- No clear evidence has been presented that this upheaval would improve local services; and
- Newcastle-under-Lyme has existed as a Borough for more than 850 years, with a proud identity and a strong record of delivering for its residents.

A copy of the motion, as amended and agreed by the Council, is appended to this letter.

The announcement made by the Secretary of State on 16 July failed to engage meaningfully with any of these concerns. It ignored the voices of thousands of residents and offered no credible explanation of how this reorganisation would improve the services on which local people rely.

Most seriously, the Government has still not explained what will happen to Stoke-on-Trent City Council's estimated £600 million to £700 million debt burden. The people of Newcastle-under-Lyme did not create that debt. They should not be expected to inherit it, underwrite it or repay it through higher taxation and poorer public services.

Will you give an unequivocal guarantee that the residents of Newcastle-under-Lyme will not be made financially responsible for Stoke-on-Trent City Council's historic debts and liabilities?

Without such a guarantee, this proposal risks becoming little more than a mechanism for transferring another authority's financial problems onto the taxpayers of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

The claimed savings from reorganisation are equally unconvincing. Councils such as ours are already securing efficiencies through improved productivity, commercial delivery and responsible financial management, without abolishing historic local authorities or removing democratic accountability.

Local Government Reorganisation will itself be a costly and disruptive undertaking. It will consume vast amounts of officer time and public money at precisely the wrong moment.

Our officers should be concentrating on the services that matter most to residents: emptying bins, maintaining parks and playgrounds, tackling homelessness, supporting vulnerable families, regenerating town centres, and keeping our communities clean and safe.

Instead, they are being required to divert their attention towards restructuring councils, transferring staff, reconciling IT and financial systems, redistributing assets and liabilities, and designing an entirely new authority.

For this, the Government is offering just over £1 million per new authority, including a wholly inadequate £150,000 towards the costs of reorganising children's and adult services. The Government must know that the true cost of this work will be many times greater.

This upheaval is being imposed at a time when councils are already under intense pressure to protect frontline services and when residents continue to contend with significant cost-of-living pressures.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has consistently supported meaningful devolution. We have supported, and will continue to support, the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority covering Staffordshire and Shropshire, bringing investment and strategic decision-making closer to our communities.

However, devolution and Local Government Reorganisation are not the same thing.

A strategic mayoral authority could improve transport, infrastructure, investment and economic leadership without abolishing well-run district and borough councils or forcing Newcastle-under-Lyme to absorb the debts and liabilities of Stoke-on-Trent.

Your predecessor's Government paused progress on the genuine devolution that councils across our region support while pressing ahead with an expensive, disruptive and unwanted restructuring exercise. I urge you to reverse those priorities.

I welcome the unequivocal opposition expressed by Adam Jogee MP in the House of Commons on 16 July. Speaking on behalf of his constituents, he described the proposals as "*completely unacceptable*" and stated: "*I reject them in the strongest terms.*"

He also rightly condemned the decision to make such a momentous announcement on the final sitting day before the parliamentary recess and only four days before a new Prime Minister took office.

It remains deeply disappointing that, while Adam Jogee MP spoke clearly and forcefully in defence of Newcastle-under-Lyme, the Borough's other Members of Parliament, Leigh Ingham MP and David Williams MP, have not opposed the abolition of our historic Borough.

I therefore ask you, as Prime Minister, to immediately reverse the Government's decision. It threatens the future of a Borough that has governed itself for more than eight centuries and affects the democratic representation, public services and financial interests of more than 120,000 residents.

As Prime Minister, you now have the opportunity to listen, reconsider and prevent a historic mistake. It is not too late to pause the process and think again.

I urge you to take that opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr. Jonathan Gullis
Leader of the Council

Newcastle-Under-Lyme Borough Council
Castle House, Barracks Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5 1BL