

Councillor Jonathan Gullis, Leader

Our ref:

Your ref:

Date: 22nd July 2026



The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government

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Dear Secretary of State,

Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

May I begin by congratulating you on your reappointment as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and welcoming you back to the role.

Your return to the Department provides an immediate opportunity to take a fresh look at the decision announced on 16 July concerning Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

As Leader of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, I am writing to reaffirm our unequivocal opposition to the forced abolition of our Borough and its incorporation into a new North Staffordshire authority with Stoke-on-Trent.

This decision was announced only four days before the appointment of a new Prime Minister and a new Secretary of State. It is therefore entirely reasonable to ask that you stop this immediately.

Both the current and previous administrations of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council have raised serious concerns about these proposals. On 8 July 2026, the Council passed a motion reaffirming its opposition to Local Government Reorganisation and its commitment to maintaining Newcastle-under-Lyme as a standalone authority.

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 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 abolishing Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council would improve the services on which local people rely.

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

I ask you to provide an unequivocal guarantee that Newcastle-under-Lyme residents will not be made financially responsible for Stoke-on-Trent City Council's historic debts and liabilities.

The claimed savings from reorganisation are also unconvincing. Well-run councils such as ours are already securing efficiencies through productivity improvements, 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 financial and IT systems, redistributing assets and liabilities, and designing an entirely new authority.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council supports meaningful devolution. We have supported, and will continue to support, the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority covering Staffordshire and Shropshire.

Such an authority could provide stronger strategic leadership on transport, infrastructure, skills, investment and economic development while allowing existing councils to remain accountable to the communities they serve.

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

A Staffordshire and Shropshire Mayoral Strategic Authority does not require the abolition of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council. Nor does it require our residents to absorb the debts and liabilities of Stoke-on-Trent.

I appreciate that you will have many urgent matters requiring your attention as you return to the Department. However, this decision threatens the future of a Borough that has existed for more than eight centuries and affects the democratic representation, public services and financial interests of more than 120,000 residents.

Your return to office provides an opportunity to listen and reconsider before a historic and irreversible mistake is made. I urge you to take that opportunity.

Yours faithfully,



Jonathan Gullis
Leader of the Council