

Councillor Jonathan Gullis, Leader

Our ref:

Your ref: PO2026/20423

Date: 9th September 2026



Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister for Local Government, Devolution & Regional Growth
By e-mail only

Castle House
Barracks Road
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Dear Jim

Thank you for your letter updating councils on the Government's review of the Local Government Reorganisation programme and, importantly, for the clear instruction that authorities should cease implementation work arising from the decisions announced in July while that review takes place.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council welcomes the decision to halt implementation. We have consistently challenged both the rationale for, and the process surrounding, the proposed forced reorganisation of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

My correspondence with your predecessors, the current Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, has been unequivocal. The proposed North Staffordshire unitary authority does not command the support of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council or the communities we represent, and it should now be permanently taken off the table.

A pause of uncertain duration is not sufficient. Nor is a review without published terms of reference, a clear timetable or an explanation of the criteria against which the previous decisions will now be reconsidered. Councils, staff, residents and businesses require certainty. The Government should therefore make clear, at the earliest possible opportunity, that the proposed North Staffordshire unitary will not proceed and that Local Government Reorganisation is no longer the Government's preferred solution for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The very fact that implementation has now been halted demonstrates why Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council was right to challenge the assumption that the July decision was irreversible or should simply be accepted without further scrutiny.

It is right that Government has listened to the serious and legitimate concerns raised by councils and communities across the country, including those repeatedly raised by Newcastle-under-Lyme.

We have consistently argued that changes of this magnitude must command local confidence, properly reflect the circumstances and identity of individual areas, and demonstrate beyond doubt that they will improve services, accountability and value for taxpayers.

Those principles were reaffirmed at the special meeting of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council on 2 September, when councillors from across the political spectrum made clear their determination to challenge the decision taken by the outgoing Secretary of State. That democratic position should be respected.

Our position is therefore straightforward: work on Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent should be brought to a permanent end. Government and local authorities should instead concentrate their collective efforts on securing a meaningful devolution settlement for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Devolution offers a far more constructive route to strengthening local decision-making, improving economic growth, attracting investment and giving our area a stronger voice, without abolishing councils and local identities against their wishes.

I also need to raise the significant financial consequences of the Government's reorganisation programme. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has incurred approximately £312,000 of expenditure responding to the process and preparing for implementation of the Government's July decision. The Government has now instructed councils to stop that work.

It cannot be right that the taxpayers of Newcastle-under-Lyme are left to pick up the bill for expenditure incurred as a direct consequence of a Government-led process which has subsequently been suspended and may now be abandoned. I therefore formally request that the Government reimburses Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council in full for the £312,000 of costs incurred. These costs were not incurred at the Council's discretion. They arose because Government required councils to participate in, prepare for and respond to the reorganisation process. If that process is no longer proceeding, the financial consequences should rest with Government rather than local taxpayers.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these matters directly. I am happy to do so on behalf of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council or collectively alongside Leaders from other authorities across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The Government now has an opportunity to bring this unnecessary uncertainty to an end. I urge it to do so.

I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,



Jonathan Gullis
Leader of the Council

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