



Submission for Local Government Reorganisation

Executive summary



NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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In this submission, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council sets out the case for a model of four unitary authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, built on the existing boundaries of Staffordshire's borough and district councils and the city council. This would deliver:

- A single unitary authority for Newcastle-under-Lyme
- A unitary authority covering Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands
- A unitary authority covering Stafford, Cannock and South Staffordshire
- A unitary authority covering East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Tamworth



The political leadership of the Borough Council has been clear that the advantages of retaining the two-tier system in Staffordshire far outweigh the benefits of reorganisation. If reorganisation is mandated by Government, there is strong cross-party support for a single unitary authority on the existing boundaries of Newcastle-under-

Lyme. For the remainder of the invitation area, three sustainable unitary authorities would be created which take into account the proposals of other existing councils.

A single unitary council for Newcastle-under-Lyme responds to the genuine concerns of residents in being subsumed into a larger authority with Stoke-on-Trent and the data set out in this proposal are clear that there would be immediate and lasting impacts for residents of the borough if a North Staffordshire model including Newcastle was to be enacted, financially and in respect of service delivery. The data show that any option involving the city results in an immediate and potentially long-term challenge. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands councils have opted to merge. We respect that choice as set out in the unitary option we propose for that area, but firmly believe that Newcastle would not benefit from being part of this structure.

Newcastle-under-Lyme already benefits from well-run, locally delivered services. Both upper tier and lower-tier authorities for the geography are financially stable, the Borough Council would be able to transition to delivery of a new unitary authority in the strongest position to enable continuity of delivery.

Decisions made locally benefit our communities, and governance must start from a position that existing elected member arrangements are effective in their link to electors. We have modelled options based on guidance, but firmly ask that Government seeks to maintain higher levels of elected members across the whole of the county and city, not make governance more remote and distant from those we serve.

This structure is designed to unlock devolution, deliver strategic growth, and ensure responsive, locally focused governance aligned with the government's ambitions for regional prosperity.

An empowered Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA): the four-unitary model provides a robust foundation for a Strategic Authority. This proposal assumes a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Mayoral Strategic Authority, enabling coherent regional planning and delivery of devolved powers in transport, skills, and infrastructure. In our modelling, we have considered that Government may place Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent into a wider MSA.

Functional economic geographies: we have aligned the new council boundaries with natural economic areas allows each authority to tailor growth strategies to local strengths, unlocking targeted investment and regeneration.

Business-led growth: Staffordshire has a strong track record of encouraging, attracting and growing businesses at all sizes, bringing innovation, employment and skills to our county. Smaller, focused councils can continue foster close relationships with local businesses, enabling responsive support and development of strategic employment sites. We will work across all new authorities and with the MSA to deliver economic growth across our county. The successful We Are Staffordshire model, supported by all ten current local authorities, is a blueprint for future work.

Local Planning expertise: each unitary council will have deep understanding of its area's sensitivities, challenges, and opportunities, critical for meeting ambitious housing targets. Newcastle-under-Lyme's Local Plan, currently at the final stages of examination, enables sustainable development to commence from day one of the new authority, whilst avoiding the inappropriate development and urban sprawl which may result from a merger with the city.

Infrastructure alignment: councils will be better positioned to ensure housing growth is matched with appropriate infrastructure and services, protecting rural communities and enhancing our towns, building on the success of regeneration programmes in Newcastle and towns across the county.

Balanced finances: our independent advisors' modelling shows that the four-unitary model ensures councils are able to function in size and financial sustainability. No transition is without cost, and we believe that retention of the existing local authority arrangements present the best mitigation against increased cost pressures, removing the costs altogether. However, our proposed model is realistic and reflective of both costs and benefits.

Budget pressure mitigation: the local government sector has remained resilient in mitigating long-term budget pressures. In Newcastle, our annual efficiency boards have ensured a balanced budget, well-managed reserves and no long-term debt. Reorganisation will inevitably impact on all councils undertaking transition, but proposed longer-term savings will help guard against uncertainty from the Fair Funding Review and offset future pressures. These are likely to include rising demand in high-risk services such as adult social care, children's services, and homelessness, which are key challenges across all four unitary authority areas. We have called on Government to mitigate the pressures by committing to fully fund the costs of reorganisation.

Shared services: there is a clear opportunity while we design new unitary structures to consider what is best delivered as shared service models, and what is best provided locally, in order to deliver excellence to our residents and customers. This proposal sets out areas which would support a shared service approach.

Our proposal centres on local democracy and accountability. We have listened to our community. Our proposed unitary authority model will be closer to the communities it serves, enabling meaningful engagement and responsive service delivery.