

Rt. Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP, Prime Minister
Rt. Hon Steve Reed OBE MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government

Sent by email

Dear Prime Minister and Secretary of State,

Local Government Reorganisation in England

We write, as members of the County Councils Network (CCN) Management Committee and Leaders of affected member councils across England, to express our concern on the implications of recent decisions on local government reorganisation and, critically, the significant risks this programme of reform now poses to the delivery of essential services to our residents and most vulnerable communities.

County councils engaged in this process in good faith. We were asked to develop proposals rooted in scale, sustainability and service resilience, while avoiding unnecessary fragmentation and complex boundary changes. We did so on the understanding that evidence would be robustly and consistently assessed against the Government's own criteria.

Instead, the decisions on March 25th 2026 to create 15 new unitary councils across four areas have set in train an *experimental* approach to reorganisation that bears all the hallmarks of a set of short-term political choices, not a coherent or consistent application of the government's own framework.

The departure from the statutory criteria without clear, transparent reasoning and published supporting evidence is deeply troubling and raises serious doubts over the robustness of the decisions taken. Credibility and trust in the process is further eroded by the imposition of a top-down proposal in Sussex, previously rejected by local authorities.

Despite requests, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government is unwilling to disclose departmental analysis to justify how ministers reached the conclusion that they were 'satisfied' proposals can be delivered on a sustainable financial basis. Given the unprecedented degree of disaggregation and fundamentally untested nature of boundary change, we strongly question whether ministers have fully and sufficiently evaluated proposals against the public service criterion.

Moreover, the scale of fragmentation, combined with complex boundary changes and an enormously ambitious timetable for delivery are causing serious concerns from our senior staff about the capacity of the system to deliver safe and legal services to the timetable proposed.

With new administrations elected in councils across the Devolution Priority Programme areas, the government must immediately disclose the evidence and departmental analysis relating to decisions already taken. It is unreasonable to expect these administrations to respond to the decisions without having the departmental analysis which led to their selection. They, and the wider sector, should have access to this information and evidence necessary to assess the integrity of decisions and the feasibility of implementation.

For the remaining areas awaiting decisions, if this pattern of large-scale fragmentation and complex boundary change, at odds with the government criteria, is repeated, this will create a pattern of reform that is more costly, less stable and less effective than the current two-tier system.

The creation of more undersized, fragmented unitary authorities will weaken economies of scale, increase administrative overheads, and place additional strain at a time when councils already face severe financial challenges and competing service pressures. It will jeopardise the integrity of essential services, particularly adult and children's social care. Critically, it will render implementation timescales wholly unachievable and require hundreds of millions of central government funding to support transition.

These are not abstract concerns. They represent a direct threat to vulnerable residents, to the sustainability of new councils, and to the deliverability of the government's welcome reforms to children's services and special educational needs and disabilities in large swathes of the country.

County councils stand ready to deliver reform that strengthens services and supports communities. But that reform must be credible, consistent, transparent and rooted in the principles set out at the beginning of the process.

The nature of the decisions taken, potential legal challenges, and considerable questions surrounding the future direction and stability of the government itself seriously undermine whether this can be achieved in the current circumstances. Having diverted so far from the original aims and underpinning statutory criteria, uncertainty is deepening, confidence is eroding, and the implementation of reorganisation is becoming even more complex, more contested, and more costly.

Within this context, the government must now seriously engage the sector on the integrity of the decision-making process, alongside the feasibility of delivery within the government's self-imposed timescales. Proceeding with further decisions at pace, and on the basis of an approach that is increasingly perceived as inconsistent and politically driven, risks embedding significant long-term consequences.

At a time of a highly uncertain political environment nationally, decisions of this scale and permanence require even greater transparency, consistency and evidence. With ministerial decisions due before the summer recess, structural reform cannot be shaped around short-political considerations nor assumptions that future governments, ministers or administrations will necessarily continue in the same direction. The implications of these reforms extend well beyond the current political cycle and the hiatus over the future leadership of government only strengthens the case for decisions to be demonstrably impartial, consistent and rooted in long-term public value.

We would welcome urgent engagement on this to ensure that certainty can be provided to the sector and confidence in this process can be restored before any further decisions are taken.

Yours sincerely,

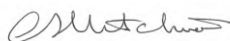
Cllr Matthew Hicks
Chair, CCN
Management
Committee



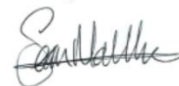
Cllr Steve Broadbent
Vice-Chair, CCN
Management
Committee



Cllr David Hitchiner
Vice-Chair, CCN
Management Committee



Cllr Sean Matthews
Vice-Chair, CCN
Management Committee
& Leader, Lincolnshire
County Council



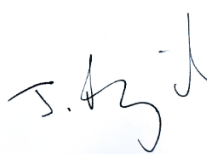
Cllr Lucy Nethsingha
Vice-Chair, CCN
Management
Committee & Leader,
Cambridgeshire
County Council



Cllr Alan Graves
Leader, Derbyshire
County Council



Cllr Julian Brazil
Leader, Devon
County Council



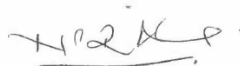
Cllr Andy Woolley
Leader, East Sussex
County Council



Cllr Peter Harris
Leader, Essex
County Council



Cllr Nick Adams-King
Leader, Hampshire
County Council



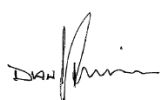
Cllr Linden Kemkaran
Leader, Kent
County Council



Cllr Stephen Atkinson
Leader, Lancashire
County Council



Cllr Dan Harrison
Leader, Leicestershire
County Council



**Cllr Robin Hunter-
Clarke**
Deputy Leader &
Cabinet Member for
LGR, Norfolk County
Council



Cllr Rob Waltham,
Leader, North
Lincolnshire Council



Cllr Mick Barton,
Leader, Nottinghamshire
County Council



Cllr Martin Murray,
Leader, Staffordshire
County Council



Cllr Michael Hadwen,
Leader, Suffolk County
Council



Cllr George Finch,
Leader, Warwickshire
County Council

